# THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

songs of love and thanksgiving

**Beethoven** Heiliger Dankgesang

**Wagner** Wesendonck Lieder

**Bridge** An Irish Melody

**Richard Meale** Cantilena Pacifica

**Alban Berg** Andante Amoroso

Camille Merčep, soprano

David Angell, conductor

**2.30 pm, Sunday 30 January 2022**

**St. George's Hall, Newtown**

After the disaster that was 2021, we are overjoyed to welcome our audience to the first Bourbaki Ensemble concert for 2022. Although we must count ourselves fortunate in being able to give even one concert last year (in February, before the "delta lockdown"), we are still very much looking forward to presenting a full programme of three performances this year. For our second concert on 26 June, see the back cover of this programme; repertoire is still in the planning stage for the third, scheduled for 6 November.

Our present concert has been in abeyance since late 2019. Beethoven's *Heiliger Dankgesang* ("Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity") was programmed solely because it is a wonderful piece of music: but it has most assuredly taken on a new significance in the two–year interim. It may still be premature to speak of "convalescence" at this stage, but Beethoven's evocation of gratitude, serenity and strength remains a timeless masterpiece. The rest of the programme also consists of songs, in one form or another. We welcome Camille Merčep to sing Wagner's glorious settings of poems by Mathilde Wesendonck (in a new arrangement by David Angell); there is a *Cantilena* by Richard Meale, a *Lyric Suite* excerpt from the pen of Alban Berg, and an engaging *Irish Melody* by English composer Frank Bridge.

For the rest of 2022, we are eagerly anticipating not only forthcoming concerts, but also forthcoming intervals! It's always a delight to have a coffee and a chat with our audience in the middle of a concert: but we are confident that no–one will take it amiss if we suggest that it is not yet the right time for this. We are boundlessly grateful to the Newtown High School of the Performing Arts and principal Sharon Roberts for allowing us to present concerts in St. George's Hall, and we look forward to the association continuing into the future.

# PROGRAMME

**Frank Bridge** An Irish Melody

**Richard Meale** Cantilena Pacifica

**Richard Wagner** Fünf Gedichte für eine Frauenstimme, "Wesendonck–Lieder", piano accompaniment arranged for strings by David Angell

Camille Merčep, soprano

I Der Engel
II Stehe still!
III Im Treibhaus
IV Schmerzen
V Träume

**INTERVAL** — 15 minutes

**Alban Berg** Andante amoroso, from the *Lyric Suite* for string orchestra

**Ludwig van Beethoven** *Molto adagio*, from String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132: Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart

**Frank Bridge** (1879–1941) was born in Brighton, began to learn violin at the age of six, and soon became an active performer in local chamber and theatre ensembles. Later, studying at the Royal College of Music, he turned to the viola, and spent the rest of his professional life as a member of various string quartets. A large part of his compositional output consists of chamber music for strings, doubtless influenced by his experience as a performer. Bridge was also a noted teacher of composition. His star pupil, Benjamin Britten, seems in later life to have retained little esteem for any other teacher, acknowledging his debt in one of his earliest successes, the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* for string orchestra.

The *Irish Melody* was originally composed for string quartet, most likely as an encore or novelty piece for Bridge's own performances: it gives an unusually prominent role to the viola, a role which the composer, no doubt, delighted to take on himself. What seems at its first appearance to be a very well–known and recognisable theme lasts for no more than four notes before diverging into a multitude of inventive variants. Only near the very end is the expected theme given in full; after which the piece closes with a quiet coda.

Many works by **Richard Meale** (1932–2009) demonstrate not only an intellectual interest in the European *avant–garde*, but also an emotional fascination with the continent. From the early *Homage to García Lorca* and *Incredible Floridas*, inspired by the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, to the later *Three Miró Pieces*, Meale's music frequently evokes the sensuous lyricism of the Mediterranean region. This being the case, the composer's much–discussed "return to tonality", beginning in the late 1970s with the orchestral *Viridian*, the opera *Voss* and the second string quartet, should perhaps have caused less surprise than was often expressed by commentators.

The final movement of the quartet, *Cantilena Pacifica*, was later adapted for string orchestra, a bass part being added by Julie Simonds. Although it commemorates the death of a close friend, Meale has chosen in his memorial to stress themes of peace and acceptance rather than of grief. Structurally, as befits its inspiration, the piece is extremely simple, consisting of a gently rhapsodic violin melody floated over a sustained cushion in the lower instruments, the relationship between the two gently animated by the clash of duple and triple rhythms. Harmonically, the movement is an extension rather than a repudiation of traditional procedures. The chord heard in the first bar functions as a (not quite textbook) "tonic", while at various points the harmonic motion can almost be heard as a plagal ("amen") cadence. Eventually even the mildest dissonance is abandoned, and the work ends in a serene and unclouded E major.

In 1857, providing an idyllic interlude in his turbulent life of polemic, revolution, debt and exile, **Richard Wagner** (1813–1883) was installed in a summer house adjoining the villa of Otto Wesendonck, a wealthy merchant, and his wife Mathilde in Zürich. The Wesendoncks had first met Wagner in 1852 at a performance of *Tannhäuser*, and had joined with others in supporting the composer financially. Wagner nursed a lengthy but unfulfilled infatuation for Mathilde, his muse inspiring the composition of the opera *Tristan und Isolde* and the song set with piano accompaniment now known as the *Wesendonck Lieder*.

The five songs set poems by Mathilde which concentrate upon themes of romantic longing and desire – though it does not appear that Mathilde entertained any such feelings for Wagner.

*. . . continued after song texts. . .*

**I. Der Engel**

In der Kindheit frühen Tagen
Hört ich oft von Engeln sagen,
Die des Himmels hehre Wonne
Tauschen mit der Erdensonne,

Daß, wo bang ein Herz in Sorgen
Schmachtet vor der Welt verborgen,
Daß, wo still es will verbluten,
Und vergehn in Tränenfluten,

Daß, wo brünstig sein Gebet
Einzig um Erlösung fleht,
Da der Engel niederschwebt,
Und es sanft gen Himmel hebt.

Ja, es stieg auch mir ein Engel nieder,
Und auf leuchtendem Gefieder
Führt er, ferne jedem Schmerz,
Meinen Geist nun himmelwärts!

**II. Stehe still!**

Sausendes, brausendes Rad der Zeit,
Messer du der Ewigkeit;
Leuchtende Sphären im weiten All,
Die ihr umringt den Weltenball;
Urewige Schöpfung, halte doch ein,
Genug des Werdens, laß mich sein!

Halte an dich, zeugende Kraft,
Urgedanke, der ewig schafft!
Hemmet den Atem, stillet den Drang,
Schweiget nur eine Sekunde lang!
Schwellende Pulse, fesselt den Schlag;
Ende, des Wollens ew'ger Tag!
Daß in selig süßem Vergessen
Ich mög alle Wonnen ermessen!

Wenn Aug' in Auge wonnig trinken,
Seele ganz in Seele versinken;
Wesen in Wesen sich wiederfindet,
Und alles Hoffens Ende sich kündet,
Die Lippe verstummt in staunendem Schweigen,
Keinen Wunsch mehr will das Innre zeugen:
Erkennt der Mensch des Ew'gen Spur,
Und löst dein Rätsel, heil'ge Natur!

**I. The Angel**

In my early childhood days
I would often hear of angels
Who would leave the bliss of heaven
For the sun of lowly earth.

So that, where a heart in anguish,
Hides itself from earthly sorrows,
Where, in distress, it seeks alone
To die in blood and flooding tears,

Where its fervent supplication
Asks for naught but deliverance:
There will an angel gently float
To earth, and raise it to the sky.

Yes: to me too has an angel
Fallen; far from every pain
Secured me; and on wings of light
He leads my spirit heavenwards!

**II. Be still!**

Whizzing, roaring wheel of time,
Marking out eternity;
Bright spheres in the broad universe,
You surround the globe of earth;
Ancient creation, hold your peace:
Enough of becoming, let me be!

Stay your thought, creative force,
Your primal thought, forever fecund!
Still your urges, calm your breath,
Hold your silence but one second!
Swelling pulses, slow your heartbeat;
Cease, endless day of the Will!
That in joyful sweet oblivion
I may know the height of bliss!

When eye from eye in rapture drinks,
Soul sinks utterly into soul;
One nature is mirrored in another,
And every desire is fulfilled.
The tongue in astonishment falls into silence,
And the heart knows no more yearning.
Mankind sees the everlasting way
And solves your riddle, holy nature!

**III. Im Treibhaus**

Hochgewölbte Blätterkronen,
Baldachine von Smaragd,
Kinder ihr aus fernen Zonen,
Saget mir, warum ihr klagt?

Schweigend neiget ihr die Zweige,
Malet Zeichen in die Luft,
Und der Leiden stummer Zeuge
Steiget aufwärts, süßer Duft.

Weit in sehnendem Verlangen
Breitet ihr die Arme aus,
Und umschlinget wahnbefangen
Öder Leere nicht'gen Graus.

Wohl, ich weiß es, arme Pflanze;
Ein Geschicke teilen wir,
Ob umstrahlt von Licht und Glanze,
Unsre Heimat ist nicht hier!

Und wie froh die Sonne scheidet
Von des Tages leerem Schein,
Hüllet der, der wahrhaft leidet,
Sich in Schweigens Dunkel ein.

Stille wird's, ein säuselnd Weben
Füllet bang den dunklen Raum:
Schwere Tropfen seh ich schweben
An der Blätter grünem Saum.

**IV. Schmerzen**

Sonne, weinest jeden Abend
Dir die schönen Augen rot,
Wenn im Meeresspiegel badend
Dich erreicht der frühe Tod;

Doch erstehst in alter Pracht,
Glorie der düstren Welt,
Du am Morgen neu erwacht,
Wie ein stolzer Siegesheld!

Ach, wie sollte ich da klagen,
Wie, mein Herz, so schwer dich sehn,
Muß die Sonne selbst verzagen,
Muß die Sonne untergehn?

Und gebieret Tod nur Leben,
Geben Schmerzen Wonne nur:
O wie dank ich, da gegeben
Solche Schmerzen mir Natur!

**III. In the Greenhouse**

Highly–arching crowns of leaves,
Canopies of emerald,
Children brought from distant lands,
Tell me, tell me why you weep.

Silently you bend your branches,
Tracing figures in the air,
And your fragrance, silent witness
Of passion, rises upwards.

Far in longing desire
You spread your arms
And embrace in delusion
The horror of utter emptiness.

I too know this, unhappy plant;
One common fate we share:
Though it radiate light and glory,
Our true homeland is not here!

And, though joyously the sunlight
Quits the daylight's empty promise,
Any one who truly suffers
Shrouded is in silent darkness.

Silence: as a whispering weaving
Fills with fear the darkling chamber,
Heavy drops I see suspended
From the green fringes of leaves.

**IV. Sorrows**

Every evening, sun, your weeping
Does your eyes incarnadine,
When in ocean's mirror bathing
You feel the grasp of early death.

But you rise in ancient splendour,
Glory of this gloomy world,
And you wake anew each morning,
A hero proud in victory.

Why then should I so lament you?
Why the sight so grieve my heart?
Must the sun descend despairing?
Must the sun in death depart?

But if death begets only life,
And if sorrows give only bliss:
Oh how thankful I am to Nature
For her gift of such sorrows!

| **V. Träume** | **V. Dreams** |
| --- | --- |
| Sag, welch wunderbare Träume<br>Halten meinen Sinn umfangen,<br>Daß sie nicht wie leere Schäume<br>Sind in ödes Nichts vergangen? | Say, what are these dreams so wondrous<br>Which enfold my sleeping senses?<br>Are they not but empty trifles,<br>Dreary, outworn, insubstantial? |
| Träume, die in jeder Stunde,<br>Jedem Tage schöner blühn,<br>Und mit ihrer Himmelskunde<br>Selig durchs Gemüte ziehn! | Dreams which every passing hour,<br>Every day more beauteous bloom,<br>And with blessed heaven–tidings<br>Fill with joy my weary spirit. |
| Träume, die wie hehre Strahlen<br>In die Seele sich versenken,<br>Dort ein ewig Bild zu malen:<br>Allvergessen, Eingedenken! | Dreams which with sublime radiance<br>Immerse themselves into my soul<br>To paint there an eternal picture<br>Forgetting all, remembering only One! |
| Träume, wie wenn Frühlingssonne<br>Aus dem Schnee die Blüten küßt,<br>Daß zu nie geahnter Wonne<br>Sie der neue Tag begrüßt, | Dreams like snow-reflected sunbeams<br>Kissing springtime's newborn flowers,<br>That in unimagined rapture<br>Greet they each returning day, |
| Daß sie wachsen, daß sie blühen,<br>Träumend spenden ihren Duft,<br>Sanft an deiner Brust verglühen,<br>Und dann sinken in die Gruft. | That they flourish, that they bloom,<br>Offering in dreams their fragrance:<br>Dreams which on your breast dissolve<br>To ash, and sink into the tomb. |
| *Mathilde Wesendonck* | *Translation: Google/David Angell* |

Both the third and the fifth are subtitled "Study for *Tristan and Isolde*", and form the musical basis for episodes in that opera, which Wagner began to compose at the Wesendonck cottage and which was premiered in 1865. The piano accompaniment has been arranged for orchestral or chamber forces by various hands; today we give the premiere of David Angell's arrangement for string orchestra.

Although **Alban Berg** (1885–1935) is usually categorised as a follower of the "twelve–tone method" of Arnold Schönberg, he never sought to repudiate the heritage of late nineteenth–century romanticism. Instead of listening to Berg as the colleague of Schönberg and Webern, one may with equal validity hear him as the successor of Gustav Mahler, his best works enriching traditional tonality with poignantly chromatic harmonies which augment the emotional impact of the music.

Berg's *Andante amoroso* is the first movement of his *Lyric Suite for string orchestra*, which was inspired by the composer's love affair with Hanna Fuchs–Robettin. Although the texture is often complex, the careful listener will hear two brief themes enunciated by the first violins near the beginning, which are repeated throughout the six–minute movement, as well as a "parody waltz" which surely displays Mahler's influence.

In mid–1825, **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770–1827) was recovering from a lengthy illness which had confined him to bed for a month. At the time, he was working more or less simultaneously on three string quartets, and one of the musical outcomes of his recovery was the slow movement of the A minor quartet. Entitled *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit* ("Holy Song of Thanksgiving of a Convalescent to the Deity"), the movement consists of three hymn–like *molto adagio* sections, separated by slightly faster *andante* episodes bearing the superscription *Neue Kraft fühlend*, "feeling new strength".

The first *adagio* is based upon a quiet but intensely focused chorale, its five lines preluded and separated by brief passages of more gently flowing material stated by each voice in turn. In the second, the chorale is given to first violins alone, with an accompaniment based on the flowing material. The third *adagio* is marked *mit innigster Empfindung*, "with the innermost feeling", an instruction which Beethoven used only for his most deeply felt music. Here the chorale and the flowing passages are integrated on terms of total equality in an extended section which, combining strength and serenity, brings to an end one of the great slow movements of the entire musical literature.

**Camille Merčep,** soprano

Passionate about music and the voice, Camille Merčep is well known both as a performer, voice teacher and a regular presenter for 2MBS FineMusic Sydney.

As a performer, her experience encompasses the operatic stage and international concert platform, plays, cabaret and music theatre. Her voice type is known as a *Zwischenfach*, suited to particular roles in both the soprano and mezzo–soprano repertoire. Among her numerous operatic roles are the title roles in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and Bizet's *Carmen*.

Camille has performed with Opera Australia, Opera Mode, Rockdale Opera, and NZ Opera. Internationally she has performed in concert in Switzerland, Italy, the UK and China. She continues to perform in recital and concerts in Australia and New Zealand, and particularly enjoys exploring the repertoire for chamber ensemble and voice.

**David Angell,** conductor

As a violist and chorister, David has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Richard Bonynge. Since taking noindent up conducting in 1998, he has directed a number of musical societies and orchestras, most frequently the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143; other recent engagements include two programmes with the Woollahra Philharmonic (one in a replica pirate costume). A highlight was the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, in which he conducted all the symphonies of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a series of five concerts spread over a single weekend. David has also directed two concerts with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (Thame, UK), presenting programmes featuring works by Mahler, Vaughan Williams and Australian composers. He has studied conducting with Richard Gill.

General **Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki** (1816–1897) was a leading figure in the French military during the Franco–Prussian war, as well as being an amateur violinist of more than average ability. As a student of the Paris Conservatoire, and later as a junior officer, he was a member of the circle of progressive musicians which collected around the young Hector Berlioz: it was no doubt this association which led to Bourbaki's enthusiasm for the music of Beethoven. The musical public in Paris at the time was overwhelmingly devoted to the more florid varieties of opera, and although Beethoven's symphonies were championed by the *Société des Concerts du Conservatoire*, formed under François–Antoine Habeneck in 1828, little attention was at first given to his chamber music; it fell to the *Quatuor Bourbaki* to give early performances of the late quartets. A critic invited to their first concert found the C♯ minor quartet "meaningless, absurd", and would neither write the promised article nor attend future concerts in the series. Documentary evidence of the project is therefore entirely lacking, and only oral tradition remains.

**Violins** Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Warwick Pulley, Joanna Buggy, Clare Fulton, Stephanie Fulton, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Deborah McGowan, Jenny Mee, Rob Newnham, Richard Willgoss, Victor Wu.

**Violas** Kathryn Ramsay, Rob Nijs, Daniel Murphy.

**Violoncellos** John Napier, Darsha Kumar, Ian Macourt, Catherine Willis.

**Bass** Sasha Cotis.

# THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

classics and classics

**Stravinsky** Apollon Musagète
**Robert Constable** Medea
**Mozart** Adagio and Fugue
**C. P. E. Bach** String Symphony in A major

**2.30 pm, Sunday 26 June 2022**
**St.George's Hall, Newtown**

The "classical period" in general cultural parlance is frequently taken as a reference to Ancient Greece, while in music it normally refers to the late eighteenth century. In this programme we combine the two! Works by Stravinsky and Australian composer Robert Constable are based upon Greek myth; both have their origins in music for the stage. Our "classical music" will come from the pen of Mozart, and from that of "the eighteenth century's most inspired eccentric" Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a chamber string orchestra based in Newtown. Our performances include major string repertoire by composers such as Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Richard Strauss and Elgar, as well as fascinating music by present–day composers including Pēteris Vasks and Julia Wolfe. Every Bourbaki concert features at least one work by an Australian composer, most recently Christine Draeger, Andrew Howes and Graeme Koehne.

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