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

David Angell, conductor

Adrian Keating, guest concertmaster

2.30 pm, Sunday 26 June 2022

St. George's Hall, Newtown

Welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's programme of "classics and classics". And neoclassics, come to think of it – for more on this, see the note on Stravinsky's *Apollo* later in this booklet. The "classical music" to be presented comes from Mozart, his uncompromising *Adagio and Fugue* inspired by his study of baroque counterpoint, and from J.S. Bach's third son Carl Philipp Emanuel, whose musical originality, eccentricity, call it what you will, has been recoginised from his own time down to the present day. The "other classics" are works inspired by classical Greece. Robert Constable's *Medea* is based on music written for Euripides' play, and our concert will conclude with Stravinsky's ballet score on the subject of Apollo and the Muses.

We are delighted to welcome distinguished Sydney violinist Adrian Keating to the role of concertmaster for this concert, and are immensely grateful to him for stepping in at very short notice to fill a serious gap caused by a positive Covid test.

Those who have been attending Bourbaki concerts for some time will no doubt join us in fondly remembering pre–pandemic intervals, when we would enjoy sharing coffee, tea, edibles and conversation with our audiences. For obvious reasons these have not happened for a couple of years, but we feel that the present situation is such that we can – with caution – resume the tradition. We look forward to meeting old friends and new today.

This is the second Bourbaki concert this year, and we hope it will not be the last! (Though these days, you can never be sure.) We intend to give a third and final concert for 2022 on Sunday afternoon 6 November, once again in St. George's Hall, by kind permission of Newtown High School of the Performing Arts. The programme is not yet finalised, but we expect to include a major work by leading Australian composer Nigel Butterley, who passed away in February this year. We hope that you will be able to join us!

PROGRAMME

C.P.E. Bach Symphony No. 4 in A major, Wq 182/4

I Allegro, ma non troppo –
II Largo ed innocentemente –
III Allegro assai

Robert Constable Medea, for string orchestra with violin and cello soloists

Adrian Keating, violin
John Napier, violoncello

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Adagio and Fugue in C minor, K 546

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

Igor Stravinsky Apollon Musagète, ballet in two scenes

I Naissance d'Apollon
II Variation d'Apollon – Pas d'action – Variation de Calliope – Variation de Polymnie – Variation de Terpsichore – Variation d'Apollon – Pas de deux – Coda – Apothéose

Among the early composers of the classical era in music were a number of the sons of Johann Sebastian Bach. His third son **Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach** (1714–1788) studied law at Leipzig, but upon graduation immediately and exclusively began to devote his energies to music. In 1740 he obtained a post as court musician to Frederick the Great, where a large part of his duties was to accompany the king's flute playing. Bach seems to have been somewhat frustrated by Frederick's conservative musical tastes, and it may be that he over–reacted to the freedom he enjoyed in a later position at Hamburg. One of his contemporaries described CPE's music as "fantastical and far–fetched", while a recent writer, reviewing recordings of his symphonies, has said that "at times… the music evokes Monty Python" and has described the composer as "the eighteenth century's most inspired eccentric".

Bach's string symphonies do little to contradict these assessments. The A major work performed today begins with a sweetly murmuring arpeggio figure which, however, lasts only three bars before bursting out into a theme of irregular and angular rhythm which immediately contradicts the nominal tonality. This is just the first sudden switch in a work (one might almost say, a career) based on such contrasts. To say much more would risk spoiling the listener's fun, but do listen out for the startling moment when the first movement crashes abruptly into a different key, tempo and atmosphere to begin the second.

A commentator more sympathetic to the composer sets C.P.E. Bach firmly in the context of post–Enlightenment German culture. The rationality and order of the baroque era, as exemplified by the fugal writing of J.S. Bach (though where does this point of view leave Handel's operatic extravagances?) was to give way to a music of human emotions, in which the heart was no less important than the head. Monty Python or proto–Romanticism? Depth of feeling or lack of compositional experience? In the end, listeners must decide for themselves.

Robert Constable (born 1947) is an Australian pianist, composer, teacher and music education leader who has developed a multi–faceted career in Australia, New Zealand and internationally. A renowned musician among his peers, he has had a distinguished career in leadership of three university music schools in Australia and New Zealand, including a long period when he was Dean of Music at the University of Newcastle's Conservatorium.

Robert Constable holds the academic rank of Professor and is now retired and resides in Kangaroo Valley, Australia. He is still professionally active as a teacher and mentor both in Australia and internationally. He was awarded an AM for services to music in the 2021 Australia Day Honours.

The composer writes: *Medea* had a slow and slightly hesitant beginning. I wrote the initial idea, heard at the beginning of the piece, for the final scene of Euripides' tragedy *Medea*, and subsequently turned that musical theme into an extended fugue for string orchestra to fulfil a commission from Pan Pacific Music Camps in 1989. Although my string orchestra version was completed and performed in 1989, I was never entirely happy with the ending I'd written. Euripides' play ends in despair, but I wanted a musical ending which offered hope and beauty. To my mind, therefore, this music was incomplete. It languished in a cupboard for nearly 30 years until 2018, when, at the invitation of my friend and colleague, David Stanhope, I completed the music as you hear it now.

In the play, Medea, wife of Jason, punishes her unfaithful husband by murdering their two children, thus creating one of the most harrowing and psychologically disturbing conclusions in all theatre. In my musical response to this tragedy, the first section – approximately 60% of the overall piece – is relentlessly contrapuntal. From a quiet beginning, it pursues its musical goal with single–mindedness as the fugue subject is gradually developed and transformed, eventually morphing into a long descending E minor scale which becomes progressively slower as it is taken over by the lower strings. It is as though the music becomes weighed down by its self–obsessed pursuit of a single thought. It can go no further.

Having seemingly come to an emotional standstill, a transition occurs; the final cycle of the same descending E minor scale takes the listener only as far as the note A, which is now established as a new pedal note and new tonal centre. A short transition introduces a lullaby: hypnotic music of a totally different character. Perhaps this gently rocking music represents the liberation of the souls of the two murdered children. Written for two solo instruments, violin and cello, each playing in a very high register, the melodies of the lullaby float high above a gentle string accompaniment. The lullaby is music of regeneration and renewal.

The overall structure of *Medea* resembles that of a sonnet: the first section is longer than the second and each provides a different way of looking at the same subject.

A commercial recording of *Medea*, performed by David Stanhope and his Orchestra with soloists Dimity Hall (violin) and Julian Smiles (cello), is available on Tall Poppies (TP 264).

One of the unfortunate things about being a child prodigy is that people don't always take you seriously. In the popular imagination, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–1791) is frequently thought of as composing concerti and symphonies with the greatest ease, knocking off one or two – as it were – each day between lunch and dinner. While Mozart often did write with great fluency, he took composition very seriously, and it does him a disservice to suggest that he had no need of application and industry. In the early 1780s he made an intensive study of contrapuntal writing in the works of Bach and Handel; one of the results of this immersion in the baroque was the Fugue, K 426, (1783) for two pianos.

Mozart returned to this work five years later. Perhaps feeling that it lacked gravity, he rescored the fugue for string orchestra, and added a slow introduction to alleviate the abruptness of the opening. The *Adagio* begins with stern dotted figures very much in the style of a baroque overture; its alternations of *forte* and *piano*, and the dissonance of its harmonies, create a somewhat disturbing and deeply expressive movement.

After a half close, the fugue begins in the celli and bass. Its uncompromising solidity and grim aspect can be compared with little else in Mozart's output, except for parts of the *Requiem*.

Unquestionably one of the great composers of the twentieth century, **Igor Stravinsky** (1882–1971) was born in the town of Oranienbaum (now Lomonosov), on the shore of the Gulf of Finland not far from St. Petersburg. Most of his life was, however, spent away from Russia: the years of World War I saw him resident in Switzerland, and although he welcomed news of the Russian revolution in 1917, his views soon changed and he decided that he could not return to Russia. In 1920 he emigrated with his family to France, and in 1939, prompted not only by the threat of another war but also by the deaths from illness of his mother, wife and daughter, to the USA. But despite extensive relocations, and many profound changes in his compositional style, Stravinsky never ceased to consider himself as fundamentally a Russian composer. He was deeply affected when in 1962, after decades of official disapproval, he was invited to give concerts in the USSR.

In Greek mythology, Apollo was venerated as the god of music and poetry, the giver of laws and personification of the sun (among numerous other attributes). As such, he is a particularly appropriate choice as the subject of a ballet which belongs to, and is sometimes considered the pinnacle of, Stravinsky's "neo-classical" style. In works of this period, the composer sought to emphasize classical ideals of clarity, restraint and proportion above the exotic subjects and lavish orchestration typical of early masterpieces such as *The Rite of Spring* and *The Firebird*. Many assessments have testified to the "classical" atmosphere of the music: choreographer George Balanchine described it as "pristine white", while impresario Sergei Diaghilev's evaluation was "extraordinarily calm, and with greater clarity than anything he has so far done; . . . music not of this world, but from somewhere above". It was composed in 1928 to a commission by American patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, and along with many other of Stravinsky's works, was revised (partly for copyright reasons) in the late 1940s. The work comprises ten movements arranged into two *tableaux*, and is scored for strings alone, though the inclusion of two separate cello parts throughout slightly extends the resources of the traditional string orchestra. Stravinsky was always adept at making the instrumental medium match his expressive intention, and the choice of strings superbly realises his ideal of classical clarity.

A prologue, *The Birth of Apollo*, opens the work with stately dotted rhythms inspired by the example of Lully and other French baroque composers; a faster episode leads to a varied reprise of the opening textures. The second movement features Apollo alone, the music consisting of an elaborate cadenza for solo violin, followed by a duet for two violins. The succeeding *Pas d'Action* is made up of a series of calmly expressive melodies, the occasional poignant dissonance reminding us that this is "neoclassical" rather than purely "classical" music.

There follows a sequence of four solo dances for the muses and Apollo. Calliope, muse of epic poetry, is given lilting music in a short–long rhythm; a central episode features a solo cello. Polyhymnia is known as the muse of sacred poetry, eloquence and pantomime: Stravinsky appears to have been largely inspired by the last of these in writing vivacious "circus" music which would not have been altogether out of place in his early success *Petrushka*. A graceful and expressive dance for Terpsichore, muse of dance, is given mostly to violins, above a simple accompaniment in the lower instruments. Apollo's own *variation* alternates weighty chords for the full ensemble with essentially chamber–music passages for string quartet or quintet. The ensuing *Pas de deux*, a tender and ethereal duet for Apollo and Terpsichore, is perhaps the most "romantic" part of the whole ballet. Muted strings open the movement in a slow tempo and an intensely hushed atmosphere; although the music in course develops a firmer outline, it never rises above a moderate volume. The *Coda* presents a more vigorous dance for all four characters, and leads into the *Apotheosis*. Here Apollo, having taught the muses their arts, leads them to the heights of Parnassus: the music recalls that which portrayed Apollo's appearance in the world at the beginning of Stravinsky's luminous essay in "classical" ballet.

David Angell, conductor

photo: Steve Dimitriadis, www.mestevie.com

As a violist and chorister, David has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Richard Bonynge. Since taking up conducting in 1998, he has directed a number of musical societies and orchestras, most frequently the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143. 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 been guest conductor for 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.

David is actively involved in arranging music for strings. The first Bourbaki Ensemble concert this year premiered his arrangement of the accompaniment to Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*, and his orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* suite has been performed in Australia and the UK. He has (with the composer's permission) adapted Andrew Ford's *Oma Kodu*, originally composed for clarinet and string quartet, as a work for clarinet and string orchestra; and he has arranged Marc–Antoine Charpentier's *Noëls* for (modern) string orchestra. He is the editor of a revised score of the *Concerto for Strings* by Margaret Sutherland, and has contributed translations of Russian and Italian poetry to the *Lied and Art Song Texts* website.

General **Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki** (1816–1897) was a leading figure in the French military during the Franco–Prussian war. The Bourbaki Panorama in Lucerne (`www.bourbakipanorama.ch`) depicts the sufferings of his soldiers during internment in Switzerland in the winter of 1870–1871, after they had been forced to flee the Prussian army after the siege of Belfort. Great assistance was provided by the Swiss people and by the International Committee of the Red Cross, recently founded in Geneva by Henry Dunant.

An incidental result of these events was Bourbaki's lasting affection for the Swiss nation, which had so hospitably received him and his men, and in particular for the city of Lausanne where many of them had found sanctuary and recovery. In later life, though frequently confined to France by professional obligations, and, no less, by his devotion to the musical life of Paris, he made regular summer visits to the area, renting accommodation in the vicinity of the city. His ambitions to become a successful composer, so often frustrated by the conservatism of the Parisian public, took flight in this serene retreat, and in June 1897, the 81–year–old Bourbaki floated the idea of a dance work which would dispense with the (as he saw them) decaying traditions of late nineteenth–century ballet and inaugurate a return to subjects drawn from the classical era. It appears that he left extensive notes on this project in his *chalet*; but passed away before he could return to work on the project the following summer. Bourbaki's sketches may still have been in existence when Igor Stravinsky lived in Lausanne from 1915 to 1918; but since Stravinsky lived at three separate addresses during this period, and the location of Bourbaki's 1897 tenancy is also uncertain, any direct influence must remain conjectural.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a chamber string orchestra which has been giving concerts in Newtown since 2001. Occasional further performances have been presented in venues as far afield as Camden and Macquarie University. Bourbaki programmes 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 concert features at least one work by an Australian composer, most recently Richard Meale, Christine Draeger, Andrew Howes and Graeme Koehne. The Bourbaki Ensemble has given world premieres of well over a dozen pieces, some written especially for our concerts.

Violins Adrian Keating, Julia Pokorny, Joanna Buggy, Clare Fulton, Stephanie Fulton, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Deborah McGowan, Jenny Mee, Paul Pokorny, Richard Willgoss, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Daniel Morris, Emily Speers Mears, David Tocknell.

Violoncellos John Napier, Clara Blazer, Deirdre Hanrahan–Tan, Darsha Kumar, Ian Macourt, Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, George Machado.

Harpsichord Diana Blom.