THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

treechange for strings

Peter Sculthorpe My Country Childhood

Nigel Butterley Goldengrove

Thomas Tallis O Nata Lux

Ruth Gipps Cringlemire Garden

Gustav Holst A Moorside Suite

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 6 November 2022

St. George's Hall, Newtown

Welcome to our “treechange” – the Bourbaki Ensemble’s relocation (in imagination) from the city to a selection of gentler and more serene climes. We visit a garden in the Lake District with neglected British composer Ruth Gipps, the English moors with Gustav Holst, and the countryside of northern Tasmania with Peter Sculthorpe.

In today’s programme we are delighted to perform the magical *Goldengrove* by Sydney composer Nigel Butterley. This work is not a depiction of any specific locale, but is inspired by (among other things) Gerard Manley Hopkins’ lines “Margaret, are you grieving/ Over Goldengrove unleaving?” It expresses the joy and sorrow inherent in the glorious, and then fading, foliage of autumn. Nigel was a great supporter of the Bourbaki Ensemble, attending many of our concerts until ill health made this impossible. He passed away in February this year after a long illness, and we are proud to present this performance of *Goldengrove* in his memory.

It’s also a great pleasure to introduce to Australian audiences (probably – it’s hard to be certain) the atmospheric *Cringlemire Garden* by English composer Ruth Gipps. Formerly a rarity in the concert hall, and even more so in the recording studio, a number of Gipps’ symphonies, as well as her acclaimed piano concerto and a selection of chamber music, have recently been released on CD by leading recording companies.

Although there are no firm Bourbaki Ensemble plans for 2023, we hope to give three concerts, the first probably early in the year (late January or early February). You can keep in touch with us through Facebook, and if you are not already on our mailing list, please consider joining – there is a sign–up link on our website, `www.bourbakiensemble.org`. Don’t miss out on thrilling presentations of music you (probably) haven’t heard before!

PROGRAMME

Ruth Gipps Cringlemire Garden, impression for string orchestra, Op. 39

Thomas Tallis O Nata Lux de Lumine, transcribed for strings

Nigel Butterley Goldengrove, for string orchestra

I Fantasia
II Canzona
III Chaconne

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Peter Sculthorpe My Country Childhood

I Song of the Hills
II A Church Gathering
III A Village Funeral
IV Song of the River

Gustav Holst A Moorside Suite, for string orchestra

1. Scherzo
2. Nocturne
3. March

English composer **Ruth Gipps** (1921–1999) was born and brought up in Sussex, receiving much of her education at home. She later studied oboe and piano at the Royal College of Music: a flourishing career as a piano soloist was unfortunately curtailed when Gipps suffered a shoulder injury at age 33. Her musical activities from then onwards centred upon composition, which she had also studied at the RCM under Gordon Jacob and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Gipps founded and conducted a number of orchestras, partly with the aim of performing her own and other neglected composers' music, partly to give students and young professionals opportunities to become acquainted with standard classics which they would need to handle in their future careers. She was awarded an MBE in 1981.

Ruth Gipps' compositions centre around orchestral music – five symphonies, various solo concertos – and chamber works, many of which feature wind instruments. Some have rather whimsical titles, such as *Honey–Coloured Cow* for bassoon and piano, *Sea–Weed Song* for English horn and piano. Much of her music was performed after a long delay or not at all: a major choral work was commissioned by the BBC and then not even paid for! However she did achieve some notable successes, including a rapturously received performance of her *Knight in Armour* at the Last Night of the Proms in 1942. She wrote a *Coronation Procession* in 1953 which, surprisingly, was premiered in Melbourne in 1954, but it is probably safe to say that very little of her music has been performed in Australia (yet). Today's performance is very likely an Australian premiere.

Cringlemire Garden was composed in 1952. Subtitled "an impression for string orchestra", it recalls a visit Gipps had made to the Lake District the previous summer. Although the work quite evidently belongs to the "English pastoral" tradition, it is very far from being a mere compilation of stock melodies and harmonies. Even before the opening theme has finished – a murmuring texture of first and second violins introducing a solo violin – it is echoed by cellos and basses in an entirely different key. Soon afterwards, a striking passage presents a firmly tonal theme for cellos and basses accompanied by utterly unrelated harmonies. Further rhapsodic solos are given to cello and viola. A slightly faster episode in the unusual rhythm of seven quavers to the bar gives the impression of a quiet dance heard from afar, before an expansive section for full strings returns to the theme of the opening. There is one last viola solo, and even a tantalisingly brief double bass solo before Ruth Gipps' evocative nature picture closes with a quiet major triad.

Generally recognised as the finest English composer of his time, **Thomas Tallis** (*ca* 1505–1585) is celebrated for his spectacular motet *Spem in alium* which employs no fewer than 40 separate vocal parts. Among his numerous shorter works is *O Nata Lux de Lumine*, a hymn for the feast of the Transfiguration. In 1575, Queen Elizabeth I granted Tallis and his younger colleague William Byrd an exclusive licence for printing music and music paper in England. The failure of this monopoly to show a profit surely says something about the English attitude to music at the time; or, perhaps more likely, about the unwisdom of entrusting a business venture to two composers.

Nigel Butterley (1935–2022) was, with Peter Sculthorpe and Richard Meale, one of the major Australian composers to come to prominence in the 1960s. Notable among his earlier compositions are the octet *Laudes* and the orchestral *Meditations of Thomas Traherne*; more recent works such as *For Sor-*

rowing Earth demonstrate a concern for the natural environment. Butterley's *Spell of Creation* was critically acclaimed as "possibly the most important choral work yet written in this country", and was awarded the Paul Lowin Orchestral Prize. Nigel was also active for many years as a pianist, and received particular recognition for his recording and performances of the *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano by John Cage.

Many of Butterley's compositions draw upon literary sources, especially the poetry of writers including Thomas Traherne, Walt Whitman and Kathleen Raine. *Goldengrove* takes its title and its expressive aims from Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Spring and Fall*. Hopkins' poem is addressed to a young child and deals with her first recognition, with the falling autumn leaves, of the transience of beauty, and of life itself. The first movement, *Fantasia*, is in some ways very complex, and rewards repeated listening. Perhaps the best approach on a first hearing is to concentrate on the atmosphere, which begins with a suggestion of quietly rustling (or falling) leaves, an effect which recurs regularly throughout the movement. In conversation with the composer, the present writer suggested that the movement as a whole could be viewed as a musical equivalent of a forest, being made up of a multitude of shapes which are recognisably related, but rarely identical. Nigel very graciously replied that while that had not been his intention, it was a very appealing interpretation! Other important elements of the *Fantasia* are an extended and expressive,

Spring and Fall: to a young child

Margaret, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for,
can you?
Ah! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you *will* weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

almost "romantic" viola melody, later taken over by cellos and then violins; and a sequence of slow, quiet violin chords derived from the motet *O Nata Lux* by Thomas Tallis.

The second movement, *Canzona*, originated in deeply personal circumstances. Much of it was written while travelling back and forth by train between Sydney and Gosford, where Nigel's partner Tom was confined to hospital after a serious road accident. It is based on the dual theme (not, the composer insists, a theme with accompaniment) which appears at the very outset. One strand, initially heard in the second violins, is characterised by its steady quaver movement and expressively arching contour; the other, on first violins and violas, by longer notes with a cooler, more serene rise and fall. A slightly faster interlude contrasts brief solos with full strings before leading into further statements of the paired themes. The movement ends with sustained harmonies in the violins, and quiet but perhaps somewhat uneasy scales in the lower instruments.

The third and final movement is entitled *Chaconne*. The term customarily denotes a piece based on a repeating melody in the bass instruments. In this case, the repetition is rhythmic rather than melodic, and is initially heard in first and second violins alone about a minute and a half after the start. The eight–bar chaconne rhythm, given to various instruments, is heard ten times as an accompaniment to increasingly elaborate thematic lines which frequently recall elements of the opening *Fantasia*. After a climactic statement for the cellos and basses, the music slows into the final section of the work. Over a chordal line for violas, cellos and basses, violins divided into six parts proclaim a joyful melange of separate melodic lines, all cascading on top of one another, and ultimately coalescing into a firm unison which carries the work to its robust conclusion.

In 1999, composer **Peter Sculthorpe** (1929–2014) completed his autobiography *Sun Music*. The book's first chapter, *My Country Childhood*, conveys memories of Peter's early years in a village near Launceston, northern Tasmania. There soon followed, as was, in the composer's words, "perhaps inevitable", a collection of musical reminiscences of the same period, under the same title. The work is a remarkable blend of simplicity and sophistication, suggesting the innocence of childhood tempered by more mature reflection. In each of the four movements, the tonality centres around traditional major and minor keys; but the composer adds poignant "foreign" notes to heighten the emotional impact of the music at significant moments. *Song of the Hills* opens with a flowing melody for violas, soon joined by second violins; this turns out to be not a principal theme as such, but an accompaniment for the main melodic ideas in the first violins. *A Church Gathering* is grounded by a repeated line for cellos and basses; the theme given initially to the second violins had previously appeared in Sculthorpe's *Songs of Sea and Sky* for clarinet and piano. A motif of triplets shared between violas and violins is intended as a faint reminiscence of Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*.

There follows *A Village Funeral*. A series of sombre harmonies for cellos and basses introduces an extended lament for viola, subsequently taken up by a solo violin. The full orchestra enters with what would be a conventional D major chord, were it not undercut by the grief–stricken dissonant keening of the second violins. The concluding *Song of the River* begins as a gently flowing stream, which becomes an accompaniment to the viola theme from the beginning of the first movement, now given to cellos; by the end of the work, it has transformed into a rushing torrent, flashing and shimmering in the sunlight.

The *Moorside Suite* by **Gustav Holst** (1874–1934) has a slightly curious history. Having originally composed the Suite for brass band, Holst made a string arrangement in 1932 for the junior orchestra of St. Paul's Girls' School, London, where he had been teaching since 1913. This version seems to have been lost and unperformed, though the brass version was independently arranged for strings (at least twice) by various hands. In the 1990s, however, Holst's own score was rediscovered, and was edited for performance by British composer Colin Matthews. This is the version we perform today.

Although the *Moorside Suite* is relatively unfamiliar both to players and to audiences (probably because of its history as detailed above), it has many original features, and is arguably at least as successful as the better known *Brook Green Suite*. The first movement is a *scherzo and trio*: a very classical form, to which, however, Holst adds his own individual touches. The first four notes of the *scherzo* become an incessant background in the trio, whose irregular phrase lengths create a feeling of fluidity and seamlessness, amplified by the refusal to settle on any one clear tonality.

The succeeding *Nocturne* features a number of individual solos both at the start and in the course of the movement. The serene and nostalgic atmosphere occasionally rises to the rich texture of full *fortissimo* strings. In a sleeve note for a recording of her father's music, Imogen Holst mentions "its quiet singing tone in the phrases for solo quartet and its tranquil sense of space in the slow *tutti* procession". The last movement is a *March*: again, a very conventional finale (especially for a brass band piece) which Holst subtly reimagines. There are clear trumpet fanfares, which nonetheless work brilliantly in the string idiom, and the work comes to a close with a broad and strong, though not overblown, peroration.

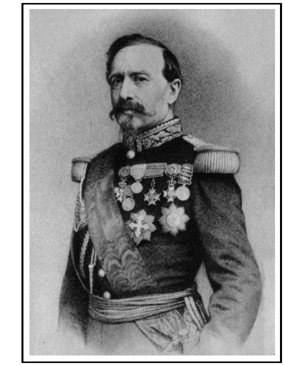
David Angell, conductor


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. He was the son of Constantin Denis Bourbaki, a Greek officer who served for a time with the French army. After participating in the latter stages of the Napoleonic wars, Bourbaki Snr retired to Spain; but he took up arms again in the cause of Greek independence. He was defeated at the Battle of Kamatero in 1827, captured by the opposing forces and executed. The younger Bourbaki, an impressionable 10–year–old at the time, was no doubt horrified by his father's fate. While continuing to view the military as an honourable career (in which, eventually, he gained great advancement) he developed a strong belief in the arts, especially music, as a worldwide heritage of greater importance than the acquisition of territory or power.



Since he never aspired to professional activity, Bourbaki's musical life has left few reliable records. Oral tradition, however, affirms that he was a performer and composer of no little merit. The Parisian press contains tantalising hints of the performance of *Enfance à la campagne* for ukulele orchestra, which was described as "an unrepeatable experience", no doubt an expression of the highest praise, in the short–lived musical journal *Le Tatou*. Family archives are said to contain manuscript lists of further Bourbaki compositions, including such titles as *Marais des saules* and *Suite: au bord de la lande*. But reliable documentation of these works is lacking, and actual scores appear at present to be completely unavailable. Any scholar who can succeed in locating primary sources and publishing suitable editions for modern performance is assured of everlasting renown in the field of nineteenth century musicology.

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, Britten and Stravinsky, as well as fascinating music by present–day composers including John Adams, Pēteris Vasks and Julia Wolfe. Every concert features at least one work by an Australian composer, most recently Peter Sculthorpe, Nigel Butterley, Richard Meale and Robert Constable. The Bourbaki Ensemble has given world premieres of well over a dozen pieces, some written especially for our concerts.

Violins Warwick Pulley, Julia Pokorny, Stephanie Colomb, Clare Fulton, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, David Loonam, Deborah McGowan, Jenny Mee, Rob Newnham, Paul Pokorny, Richard Willgoss, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Rob Nijs, Philip Poulton, David Tocknell.

Violoncellos John Napier, Liesje Jansen Van Rensburg, Darsha Kumar, Ian Macourt, Catherine Willis.

Basses George Machado, Deniz Emul.

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