THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

swing, tango, serenade

Aaron Copland Clarinet Concerto
Astor Piazzolla Oblivion
Diana Blom Modern Tango
John Corigliano Voyage
Tchaikovsky Serenade for Strings

Jason Xanthoudakis, clarinet
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 19 February 2023
St. George's Hall, Newtown

Welcome to Bourbaki 2023! Our first concert is based upon themes of jazz, dance and popular music. We are delighted to welcome outstanding soloist Jason Xanthoudakis to perform Copland's magnificent clarinet concerto, with its jazz influences consciously inserted by the composer in tribute to Benny Goodman, who commissioned the work. This will be Jason's third performance with Bourbaki, having previously presented saxophone concertos by French and Australian composers.

At Bourbaki, we always feel that a concert programme should not be a random collection of unrelated pieces, but a selection in which the different items complement and comment upon each other. The dance elements already mentioned include not only two tangos but also the enchanting waltz that Tchaikovsky wrote as the second movement of his *Serenade*. It's curious, however, how frequently accidental connections emerge after the programme is settled. Three of our composers today spent all or part of their childhood in New York – two in Brooklyn, one a short distance away in Lower Manhattan. Two of them later studied with the eminent composition teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and found their future careers substantially determined not only by Boulanger's inspiring teaching, but also by her uncanny ability to divine their true talents.

Audiences may wonder what's going on with the construction taking place in St. George's Hall. It's not a permanent layout change, but the set for the NHSPA production of Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*, which will open on March 8. We congratulate the cast, crew and musicians on their audacity in taking on this complex project, and wish them all the best!

There will be two further Bourbaki performances this year. Dates will most likely be late June and mid–November. Please follow Bourbaki on Facebook or join our email list to receive the earliest possible notification of programmes and other details.

PROGRAMME

John Corigliano Voyage, for string orchestra

Diana Blom Modern Tango

Astor Piazzolla Oblivion, arranged for strings by Robert Longfield

Aaron Copland Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra, with Harp and Piano

- I Slowly and expressively—Cadenza—
- II Rather fast

Jason Xanthoudakis, clarinet

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky Serenade for Strings in C major, Op. 48

- I Pezzo in forma di sonatina
- II Valse
- III Elegia
- IV Finale (Tema Russo)

John Corigliano (1938–) was born and raised in New York, and studied composition at Columbia University. His extensive catalogue of orchestral works and concertos includes three symphonies, the second of which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2001. His opera *The Ghosts of Versailles* was commissioned for the 100th anniversary of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Composed in 1976, *Voyage* for string orchestra is a version of Corigliano's *L'Invitation au Voyage* for unaccompanied chorus, a setting (in English translation) of Baudelaire's celebrated poem. In transcribing the work for strings, the composer allocates important parts to three solo violins, and, later, three solo violas. Throughout the piece, a generally relaxed texture of subtle and sometimes gently dissonant harmonies seeks to portray the sensuality of the text; the hushed ending evokes Baudelaire's repeated refrain: *"Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté"*. "There, there is nothing but order and beauty, Luxury, calm and pleasure."

Composer and keyboard player **Diana Blom** was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, and has been based in Australia since 1969. For ten years from 1978 she lived in the USA, Hong Kong and Malaysia, and she notes that the sounds of these countries are sometimes heard in her music. Diana's compositions include works based on texts by David Malouf, Helen Garner and many others; these works include "long songs" (the composer's term) setting a Garner short story and an excerpt from a Peter Goldsworthy novel *Maestro*. Diana describes her *Modern Tango* as follows.

Sydney dance teacher, Ian Murphy, tells how the Argentinean tango began in the ghettos of Buenos Aires, with dance steps grouped in 5s and 7s which worked across the music's phrasing. However, when it was taken to Europe, extra dance steps were invented to fit into groups of 8. I heard a modern tango, with its faster tempo, performed at Darling Harbour in Sydney one Sunday afternoon, and my *Modern Tango* explores the grouping of 5 within this faster tempo. Written as one of five tangos (*Tango Cinco*) for solo piano, the string orchestra version of *Modern Tango* has shifting harmonies and a long, long melody.

Programme note kindly supplied by the composer.

Throughout musical history, "popular" dance forms have gradually been assimilated into "art" music. One need only call to mind the many minuets to be found in classical symphonies, Chopin's piano mazurkas and polonaises, and the waltz which so attracted many of the later romantics. Argentinian composer **Astor Piazzolla** (1921–1992) is often regarded as the founder of the modern "concert tango" – not something which invariably endeared him to "tango traditionalists" in his own country. Indeed, the story of the tango in the twentieth century is neatly summarised in Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango* for flute and guitar, with its movements entitled *Bordel 1900*, *Café 1930*, *Nightclub 1960* and *Concert d'aujourd'hui*.

In 1954, funded by a French government award, Piazzolla travelled to Paris to study with esteemed pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, intending to embark upon a more "classical" style of composition. Boulanger, however, recognised the individual and personal voice displayed in Piazzolla's tangos, and dissuaded him from abandoning what she felt to be his true vocation.

Piazzolla was greatly admired not only as a composer but as a performer on the bandoneon, an accordion–like instrument of German origin which became immensely popular in South America. Tango ensembles in Argentina frequently consisted of some combination of bandoneons, violins, bass, guitar and piano. Many of Piazzolla's tangos were composed for his own performance. *Oblivion*, one of his most popular works, was originally written for an Italian film *Enrico IV*.

Acknowledged as the leading jazz clarinettist of the "swing" era, Benny Goodman also took a great interest in "classical" repertoire. He recorded the Mozart Clarinet Quintet and Clarinet Concerto, as well as major works by Brahms, Debussy and Weber. An assiduous promoter of new music, he commissioned works by Copland, Bartók, Hindemith, Poulenc and others. His 1940 recording of Bartók's *Contrasts* for violin, clarinet and piano, together with the composer at the piano and Joseph Szigeti on violin, is still available today, and is an indispensable part of the recorded repertoire.

In 1947, Goodman commissioned a work for clarinet and orchestra from Aaron Copland. Interrupted by a lecture tour of Latin America and the composition of a film score for Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*, the *Concerto* took Copland a year to complete. He had determined upon a work in two parts, with a lyrical first movement linked by a solo cadenza to a more upbeat second, and on an unusual orchestral scoring for strings, harp and piano. The concerto begins with a gentle accompaniment figure for harp and basses, other strings being added gradually, which supports a gently flowing clarinet melody. The wide range of the solo instrument is exploited to great effect. The movement gradually expands to allow the orchestra occasionally to shine (while never denying the soloist's prominence), and eventually lights upon a delicately sustained string chord.

A clarinet cadenza, beginning quietly and gradually increasing in virtuosity, leads immediately into the second movement.

Featuring complex and jazzy writing both for clarinet and orchestra, the finale begins with fragments of theme on violins and violas, supported by piano (its first appearance in the work) and harp. The soloist joins in, weaving elements already heard in the cadenza into a coherent whole. Allusions to jazz styles include plentiful syncopations and offbeat accents; a "humorous, relaxed" solo over a plucked bass accompaniment; a fast–paced bass with frenetic lines for the clarinet, piano and upper strings. After a series of titanic chords for the full ensemble, the concerto ends with a soaring *glissando* ("slide") for the soloist, recalling the similar effect at the opening of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Perhaps Copland was aware that in 1942, Benny Goodman had been especially invited to join the NBC Symphony Orchestra in the *Rhapsody* by conductor Arturo Toscanini.

Aaron Copland (1900–1990) was born in Brooklyn, the youngest child of a family which had emigrated to the United States from Russia. He showed an early interest in music, studying piano and composition privately; a major step forward came in his early twenties when he travelled to Paris. There he studied with the renowned teacher Nadia Boulanger, the first of many American composers to do so. On his return to America, he began to work as a professional composer, with support from leading figures including Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Philharmonic. A number of his compositions of this period showed the influence of jazz; but this soon faded – not to be reinstated until the *Clarinet Concerto* – and was replaced by a more complex modernist style. Before long, however, America succumbed to the economic depression of the 1930s, and Copland felt obliged to write music which would communicate more directly with his listeners. Most of the music for which he is best known comes from the next decade or so, and much of it seeks to depict various aspects of American life: the urban (*Quiet City*, 1940), the rural (*Appalachian Spring*, 1944), the frontier (*Billy the Kid*, 1938; *Rodeo*, 1942). In the 1960s, Copland began to feel a loss of inspiration for composition, and instead sought to develop a career as a conductor. He performed and recorded most of his own orchestral works, as well as those of other composers. He remains probably the most important American composer of the mid–twentieth century.

No–one could turn a scale into a tune with as much skill as **Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky** (1840–1893). The great cello theme in the pas de deux for the prince and the sugar–plum fairy from *The Nutcracker* is probably the most famous example, but the symphonies and the *Serenade for Strings* are also full of scales. The melody which opens the third movement, *Elegia*, for instance, is simply a ten–note ascending scale, given some rhythmic interest and contrasted with a descending scale in the bass; similar themes are scattered throughout all four movements.

The *Serenade* opens in emphatic style, with a majestic introduction whose theme is in fact the top line of a series of *tutti* chords. On repetition the theme, essentially a scale with a few interpolated notes, is transferred to the lower instruments and the harmonies to the violins and violas; the tension relaxes through further statements until a brief silence is reached. The main part of the movement, *allegro moderato*, then begins. It is in two sections, the first built upon a surging figure which is heard in the first four notes of the *allegro*, the second starting quietly as *pizzicato* celli and bass support a dancing theme for violins and violas. The first section is repeated note for note, followed by the second with minor variations. In a brilliant stroke, the composer brings back the majestic introduction at the conclusion of the movement.

Tchaikovsky loved the waltz. He was the first to include it in symphonic music (with the isolated exception of Berlioz in his *Fantastic Symphony*), and gave it great prominence in his ballet scores, composing such famous set–pieces as the *Waltz of the Flowers* from *The Nutcracker*. That which forms the second movement of the *Serenade* is marked *dolce e molto grazioso* (sweetly and very gracefully). Once again the opening is a simple rising scale, as is the coda which ends the movement.

The beginning of the *larghetto elegiaco*, hesitant and wistful, soon leads into a more confident section whose *cantabile* (songlike) theme is given initially to violins, then in a more expansive version to violas and cellos. After a brief development section with a pulsating triplet background, the *cantabile* theme resumes quietly on violas. The music becomes increasingly passionate before breaking off on two mighty chords: melodic fragments are passed from cellos to first violins, fading into silence. After a long pause the opening of the movement returns and the *Elegia* gradually winds down to a peaceful close.

The finale is the most clearly Russian part of the *Serenade*. A mysterious opening employing the typical shapes of Russian folk music falls silent – a favourite Tchaikovsky device, and one which has already been heard twice in the *Serenade*. This time the pause is broken by a dance tune of rather square shape. Most of the movement is constructed from bits and pieces of this tune, though there are two interruptions for a gloriously lyrical cello theme. In fact, the dance theme is really just a faster version of the introduction from the first movement, a connection made clear when rushing scales lead to a reprise of that introduction. This in turn accelerates back into the final version of the dance, and brings our concert to an exciting conclusion.

Jason Xanthoudakis, clarinet

Jason has studied at Melbourne University, the Victorian College of the Arts, Monash University and the Sydney Conservatorium, and also in Paris, Amsterdam and London. His teachers have included eminent clarinettists and saxophonists Phillip Miechel, Peter Clinch, David Griffiths and Frank Celata. He has won the 3MBS Performer of the Year Award as well as many prizes in various music competitions.

Jason has a busy performance schedule including performances with the AOBO, the Sydney, Melbourne and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras and Orchestra Victoria, as well as frequent solo recitals and concerto appearances. He has performed several live broadcasts on Australian radio, has recorded for ABC Classic FM and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He has arranged or transcribed more than 50 works for saxophone and clarinet, and is very active in the field of contemporary music, encouraging composers to write music for saxophone and clarinet: over 20 works have been dedicated to him.

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 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 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. Despite the accolades heaped upon him in his lifetime, it would be a grievous error to see him as a soldier and nothing more: his bewildering variety of talents included enthusiastic activity in science and exploration, a lifelong devotion to artistic pursuits, and, in particular, music, where he excelled in performance, composition and instrument design.

The nineteenth century was a period of unparalleled inventiveness in the production of new musical instruments – and also, it may be said, of a certain level of self–promotion on the part of those involved. Adolphe Sax invented the saxophone in the 1840s (and named it after himself); the French bandmaster Pierre–Auguste Sarrus introduced the sarrusophone in 1863 (and accepted the name bestowed upon it by its inventor Gautrot); in the USA, John Philip Sousa got in on the act. In Germany, Heinrich Band (1821–1860) developed the concertina into a new instrument which he named the bandoneon.

Bourbaki followed these developments with great interest. Although he seems to have been less than impressed with Sax's instruments (unlike his great colleague Hector Berlioz) or with Sarrus's, he was very much struck by the bandoneon. While Band had intended his invention for liturgical use by congregations without access to an organ, Bourbaki saw great military potential in the instrument. He incorporated his own innovations such as imitation side–drum effects, and sought to patent the instrument under the name "bourbakeon". However, it appears that Herr Band raised legal objections to the patent, and no examples or detailed records of the bourbakeon survive.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a chamber string orchestra which has been giving concerts in Newtown since 2001. Bourbaki programmes include major string repertoire by composers such as Dvořák, 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 Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Julia Pokorny, Joanna Buggy, Clare Fulton, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Deborah McGowan, Daniel Morris, Paul Pokorny, Warwick Pulley, Richard Willgoss, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, David Loonam, Philip Poulton, Emily Speers Mears, David Tocknell.

Violoncellos Ian Macourt, Deirdre Hanrahan–Tan, Liesje Jansen Van Rensburg, Nicole McVicar, Catherine Willis.

Basses George Machado, Sasha Cotis, Deniz Emul.

Harp Verna Lee.

Piano Diana Blom.