THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

double strings – and more!

Michael Tippett Double Concerto

Anna Clyne Within Her Arms

Emily Howard Passacaglia

Chris Williams Time before and Time after

Colin Spiers Anna

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 19 November 2023

St. George's Hall, Newtown

Welcome to the third and final Bourbaki Ensemble concert for 2023. Our theme “double strings – and more” refers to the numerous parts employed in many of the works on our programme. While the five–part string orchestra of first violins, second violins, violas, cellos and basses has been more or less standard since the nineteenth century (before that, cellos and basse generally formed a single part), only two of the works we play today fit into that format – and even those two to a certain extent do so only “on paper”, each section being frequently subdivided. The Tippett piece, however, is explicitly scored for “double string orchestra” – meaning exactly that: two ensembles, each comprised of the five usual parts. Anna Clyne’s wonderful *Within Her Arms* goes further than this, dividing each section into three, fifteen parts in all; Colin Spiers’ *Anna* specifies five violin, five viola, five cello and two bass parts.

A great deal of baroque, classical and romantic print music can nowadays be obtained for free online. Modern repertoire generally cannot (and rightly so – composers must earn a living), and the costs of hiring music for a Bourbaki programme can be quite considerable. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Richard and Sue Willgoss for covering almost the whole cost of music hire for this concert.

I was recently asked what is on the horizon for the Bourbaki Ensemble. I could only answer that the Bourbaki horizon is rarely more than an arm’s length away! Coming up with original, attractive and inventive programmes takes a lot of thought; juggling dates so as to suit orchestral players, soloists and venues is frequently an intricate task; and the concert tends to emerge over the horizon with just enough time to get the programme rehearsed. So there is not much to say about 2024, except that we intend to give three concerts in St. George’s Hall. We hope you will be here with us!

PROGRAMME

Emily Howard Passacaglia (to end prejudice)

Chris Williams Time before and time after

Colin Spiers Anna, for 17–part string ensemble

Anna Clyne Within Her Arms, for 15–part string ensemble

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Sir Michael Tippett Concerto for Double String Orchestra

I Allegro con brio
II Adagio cantabile
III Allegro molto

Emily Howard (1979–) is a British composer whose music makes frequent reference to her other passion – mathematics. Her orchestral works include *Sphere* and other geometry–inspired pieces *Antisphere* and *Torus* (the mathematical term for a doughnut shape). Some compositions are inspired by the life and ideas of Ada Lovelace (1815–1852), who was associated with Charles Babbage in the development of what are now regarded as the first programmable computing devices; and others have scientific connections: *Cloud Chamber*, *Magnetite*, *Obsidian*.

One of Howard's earliest acknowledged works, *Passacaglia* (2002) for string orchestra is subtitled (*To End Prejudice*) and bears the dedication "for friends in Manchester". The standard form of a *passacaglia* is of a repeated theme in the bass, decorated and elaborated in the upper parts. After a brief introduction consisting of intertwining violin melodies above static harmonies, Howard's passacaglia theme begins, in accordance with tradition, in cellos and basses; thereafter, however, the composer takes considerable liberties with classical precedent. The bass theme is transferred to the middle and upper registers, and is frequently interrupted by interludes, some based upon the introductory material. In the end, the passacaglia theme returns to the bass, and a very much curtailed version of the introduction brings the work to a close.

Australian composer **Chris Williams** is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music; since leaving the Conservatorium he has completed a Master's in Composition at Oxford University, and is currently studying towards a Ph.D. in composition at Duke University, USA. He has worked and studied with eminent composers including Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Kaija

Saariaho, Nigel Butterley and Robert Saxton. He has been commissioned by Carnegie Hall, and by the Sydney Theatre Company, for whom he composed incidental music to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In 2016, the Bourbaki Ensemble commissioned and premiered his work for string orchestra *Lines at Infinity*. In 2020, Chris made some revisions to the piece, gave it a new title, entered it the *Musica per Archi* competition sponsored by the Lviv Philharmonic Society, Ukraine – and won first prize! We are proud and delighted to perform *Time before and time after* for our local audience.

Chris writes that the piece "continues an obsession I have with basic musical shapes – gestures – and an endless fascination with the expressive possibilities of single lines, be they musical, visual, or mathematical... [It] grows out of two melodic lines, first heard in the violins. They are actually the same line, though at different speeds and alignments, and they repeatedly converge despite being 'in parallel'. Similarly, the piece, in two distinct halves, also converges. Just as the second musical idea establishes itself, we hear it transformed, revealing its relationship to the same, simple, descending line which has absorbed the entire first half of the piece. This simple descending line finally turns into a restless, relentlessly ascending line, before seeming to disappear, converging 'at infinity'".

Born in Brisbane in 1957, **Colin Spiers** studied at the Queensland Conservatorium, graduating with a Medal of Excellence in 1979. In 1990 he joined the staff of the Newcastle Conservatorium, where he held for many years the position of Senior Lecturer in Composition. Colin has also had a successful career as a pianist, having been a member of leading contemporary music ensemble *Perihelion*. His compositions include five piano sonatas, the second of which, composed in 1992 and subtitled *Desperate Acts*, won the prestigious Jean Bogan Prize. His orchestral works have been performed by the Queensland Symphony, the Queensland Philharmonic, and the Hunter Orchestras.

Anna, for strings in 17 parts (five violin parts, five viola, five cello and two bass) is dedicated to the memory of Florence Sarah Anne Hollywood, the composer's maternal grandmother. It is generally sombre in mood, the score bearing markings such as "with resignation" and "with despair", and is almost continually underpinned by a repeated short–long rhythm reminiscemt of tolling bells. The opening focusses upon sub–ensembles of the string orchestra: five violas for a start, then one violin accompanied by cellos, and then cellos alone. As the instrumentation expands, so does the harmonic language: conventional chords generally have one foreign note added to them, creating a sense of grief without harsh dissonance. Two prominent climaxes are succeeded by vividly characterised effects: "crystalline" harmonics, and "distant, eerie" tremolos, before the work ends on superimposed C major and C minor triads.

Anna Clyne's *Within Her Arms* takes its title from lines of the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and poet Thích Nhất Hạnh:

Earth will keep you tight within her arms dear one–
So that tomorrow you will be transformed into flowers.

The piece has been described by one reviewer as "a fragile elegy for fifteen strings [in which] intertwining voices of lament bring to mind English Renaissance masterpieces of Thomas Tallis and

John Dowland" and by another as "a sombre, deeply felt meditation on loss". The work begins with thematic fragments given to the six violin parts, intermittently doubled by high notes from the lower instruments; repeated pauses give the music a hesitant mood which, perhaps, expresses the difficulty of coming to terms with a recent grief. Clyne's sound–palette is extraordinarily subtle. Frequently two or more instruments will be asked to perform the same notes in different ways: one with *vibrato* and one without; or one played normally and one over the fingerboard; or one with a *glissando* between two notes, and one without. The result is a complex and hazy texture in which the melodic line constantly disappears from one part and reappears in another. Harmonies, initially a pure G major, gradually develop hints of closely related keys, and melodic snippets begin to appear also in the violas and cellos. About half way through, the work is reduced to near–complete stasis, rumbling basses supporting the occasional semi–coherent stuttering of violins and violas. After reaching a complete silence, the music begins to recover its spirits, the texture blossoming into running arabesques; and finally, into the glorious Taizé melody "O Lord, Hear my Prayer". A fragmentary and ethereal coda brings Clyne's heartfelt composition to a haunting close.

Within Her Arms was composed in 2009 to a commission from the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, and is dedicated to the composer's mother.

Anna Clyne (1980–) was born in London and now lives in New York. Her first public appearance as a composer was at age 11; since then she has studied music at the University of Edinburgh and the Manhattan School of Music, one of her teachers being Julia Wolfe (composer of *Cruel Sister*, performed by Bourbaki in 2019). Her compositions include a wide range of solo works, some accompanied by orchestra and others by tape; and much orchestral and chamber music. She has been composer–in–residence with orchestras including the Chicago Symphony, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia, and has fulfilled commissions from institutions such as the Barbican (London) and the Sydney Opera House.

The twentieth–century English tradition of string music includes a number of great works in which the orchestra is subdivided into more than its customary five parts – one recalls the Elgar *Introduction and Allegro* for string quartet and string orchestra, and the Vaughan Williams *Tallis Fantasia* for quartet and two string orchestras. The *Concerto for Double String Orchestra* by Michael Tippett holds an important place in this category, being scored for two full string orchestras of equal importance, which in today's performance we have chosen to arrange symmetrically across the stage to the audience's left and right. The composer treats the two orchestras in a wide variety of ways: sometimes they play entirely different material; sometimes the same material, either simultaneously or alternately; sometimes they are conceived as a single ten–part ensemble. The opening of the first movement, *allegro con brio*, immediately exposes two contrasting themes: a strongly marked theme in the upper instruments of the first orchestra, and a more expressive melody in the lower part of the second orchestra. Both themes are notable for their syncopation: the entire movement will display a rhythmic vitality which prefigures the composer's later interest in jazz and blues. In a slightly grotesque episode towards the middle of the movement, the opening four–quaver figure is reduced to half speed, then half again, and then to half again, ushering in a hushed section which gradually regains confidence and issues into a recapitulation of the initial material.

The poignant *adagio cantabile* is based upon two themes: one pentatonic and reminiscent of Scottish folk song, the other more chromatic. A brief introduction leads to the first theme, given initially to a solo violin supported lightly by the orchestra, and then to all of the first violins. The second theme, introduced by the violas and second violins of the second orchestra, is less stable than the first both in harmony and in rhythm: it is sometimes difficult to tell where the main beat is. As the violas and cellos of orchestra 1 join in, it becomes clear that Tippett is writing a fugue, albeit in a modern idiom. The fugue winds down (the careful listener will hear a reminiscence of the opening from the first movement), and the beginning of the *adagio* returns, this time introducing a cello solo version of the pentatonic theme. Recollections of both themes lead to the quiet close of this memorable movement. The *allegro molto* finale is in *rondo* form, alternating vigorous rhythmic figures with a more songlike theme initially given to cellos – the latter notable for its artful combination of duple and triple metres – and finishes with another Scottish folk tune.

Michael Tippett (1905–1998), one of the leading British composers of his century, wrote music in many genres: his catalogue includes four symphonies and five operas. Perhaps his greatest work, *A Child of our Time* delivers a strong and clear anti–war message (Tippett was a firm pacifist, and spent two months during World War II in jail as a conscientuous objector). It loosely follows the form of Bach's oratorios and passions, substituting African–American spirituals for Bach's Lutheran hymn tunes. Of the operas, *The Midsummer Marriage* is a sort of updated *Magic Flute*, and displays Tippett's interest in Jungian psychoanalysis, while *King Priam* is based upon Greek mythology. Tippett received many honorary doctorates and other accolades, and was knighted in 1966.

David Angell, conductor

photo: Steve Dimitriadis, www.mestevie.com

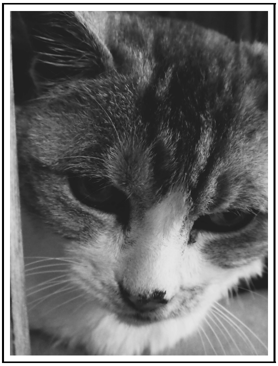
As a violist and chorister, David has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Richard Bonynge. Since taking up conducting in 1998, he has directed a number of musical societies and orchestras, most frequently the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143. A highlight was the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, in which David conducted all the symphonies of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a series of five concerts spread over a single weekend. He has also been guest conductor for two concerts with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (Thame, UK). David was recently invited to direct a concert for The Lawyers' Orchestra; their second collaboration, in February 2024, will present music by Beethoven, Mozart, Reinecke and Hofmann with flute soloist Christine Draeger. David has studied conducting with Richard Gill.

David is actively involved in arranging music for strings. His orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* suite has been performed both in Australia and in the UK, and the first Bourbaki Ensemble concert of 2022 premiered his arrangement of the accompaniment to Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*. 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 has contributed translations of Russian and Italian poetry to the *Lied and Art Song Texts* website.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble is a chamber string orchestra which has been giving concerts in Newtown since 2001. Programmes include works by composers such as Vaughan Williams, Stravinsky and Richard Strauss, as well as fascinating music by present–day composers including John Adams and Julia Wolfe. Every concert features at least one work by an Australian composer, most recently Ella Macens, Michael Grebla, Diana Blom, Nigel Butterley and Peter Sculthorpe.

Later a leading figure in the French army, **Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki** (1816–1897) was in earlier days a student of the Paris Conservatoire, and was a keen member of the group of youthful musicians which gathered around the charismatic figure of Hector Berlioz. Bourbaki was so inspired by Berlioz' use of additional brass bands, separate from the main orchestra, in his *Requiem* (1837), that he immediately resolved to follow his idol's example. Reminiscences of Bourbaki's fellow students mention a concerto for ophicleide accompanied by four flageolet bands, but there is no extant record of this as a completed work, and modern scholars generally conclude that it never reached the stage of performance. It appears that Bourbaki's ideas shifted to the composition of string music, and he composed a *Symphonie pour quatre petits orchestres d'ukulélés*. No copies of this work survive, and it may be that Bourbaki's *magnum opus* was a victim of the disastrous fire at the publishing house *Éditions dindons* in 1841.



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Violins Adrian Keating, Julia Pokorny, Warwick Pulley, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Clare Fulton, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Deborah McGowan, Daniel Morris, Rob Newnham, Paul Pokorny, Rob Sison, Carol Tang, Richard Willgoss, Alvin Wan, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Kirsten James, Emily Speers Mears, Jane Silcock, David Tocknell.

Violoncellos John Napier, Serena Devonshire, Deirdre Hanrahan–Tan, Liesje Croeser, Nicole McVicar, Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, Deniz Emul, George Machado.

www.bourbakiensemble.org

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