THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

longing for peace

Morton Gould Spirituals for Strings

Gustav Mahler Adagietto

Frederick Septimus Kelly Elegy

Susan Spain–Dunk Suite for Strings

Maxim Shalygin Drop after drop

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 17 March 2024

St. George's Hall, Newtown

Welcome! The first Bourbaki Ensemble concert for 2024 is centred around works expressing a longing for peace and freedom. The texts of many African–American spirituals, including some of those set for strings and harp by Morton Gould, aspire to freedom both from the (metaphorical) chains of this life and from the (literal) chains of enslavement in the American south. The *Elegy* by Australian composer F.S. Kelly was written in memory of the poet Rupert Brooke, who died in World War I; its restrained textures amount to a heartfelt prayer for the poet's eternal rest. More recently, composer Maxim Shalygin's plea for peace *Drop after drop* urges an end to the war in Ukraine. Our concert also includes Mahler's sublime *Adagietto*, and the *Suite* by Susan Spain–Dunk, a twentieth–century British composer whose music has recently begun to earn an increasing number of perfomances and recordings.

As well as giving two further concerts this year in Newtown, the Bourbaki Ensemble will be joining Ayşe Göknur Shanal, soprano, for a special extra concert in a venue we have not played before (hint: harbour views). Brief information is given on the back cover of this programme; further details can be found at `www.bourbakiensemble.org`. We hope you enjoy today's concert, and look forward to seeing you again in the future.

PROGRAMME

Frederick Septimus Kelly Elegy for String Orchestra (in memoriam Rupert Brooke)

Susan Spain–Dunk Suite for Strings in B minor

I Prelude
II Interlude
III Romance
IV Scherzo
V Finale

Gustav Mahler Adagietto, from Symphony No. 5 in C♯ minor

INTERVAL
20 minutes

Maxim Shalygin Drop after drop, for string orchestra

Morton Gould Spirituals for Strings

1, Gospel Train—Old Time Religion
2. Were You There?—Steal Away
3. All God's Children Got Wings
4. Little David Play on Your Harp
5. Calvary—He Never Said a Mumblin' Word
6. Ezekiel Saw de Wheel

Born in 1881, Australian composer and pianist **Frederick Septimus Kelly** received his early musical and general education in Sydney, before moving to England and gaining an M.A. degree from Oxford. He was evidently a pianist of great talent, his public performances including concertos by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms, and chamber music with the celebrated cellist Pablo Casals. Also a champion rower, he was a member of the Leander Club eight which won a gold medal (for Great Britain) at the 1908 Olympic Games.

On the outbreak of the European war in 1914, Kelly joined the British naval forces, and in 1915 was posted to the Dardanelles, where he took part in the Gallipoli landings. One of his comrades was the poet Rupert Brooke, widely known even then for his patriotic verse. Brooke, also posted to Gallipoli, died in a French hospital ship before reaching the conflict, and was buried on the isle of Skyros in the Aegean Sea; Kelly was present at his burial, and later composed in his memory the *Elegy* for string orchestra with harp and solo violin. Kelly himself perished some eighteen months later in November 1916 at the battle of the Somme.

The *Elegy* bears as epigraph two lines of the Greek poet Callimachus (310–240 BC). Written on the death of his friend and fellow poet Heraclitus, they translate as, “But your nightingales [presumably a metaphor for songs, or poems] are alive, against which Hades, the robber of all things, cannot lift his hand”. The music begins with a four–note motif marked *semplice*, “simply”, introduced by various sections of the orchestra in turn. Solemn, chant–like passages alternate with more passionate melodies, frequently set against a background of murmuring triplets, before a quiet and peaceful chord in four–part violins brings the work to a gentle close.

Susan Spain–Dunk (1880–1962) was an English composer and instrumentalist. Among other engagements, she regularly played viola in the string quartet of Walter Cobbett, the celebrated patron of chamber music and compiler of *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*. Spain–Dunk seems to have enjoyed a gratifying measure of esteem around the 1920s, when a number of her orchestral compositions were performed at the London Promenade Concerts, the composer herself conducting on at least one occasion. After the second war performances became less frequent, perhaps owing to the increasing encouragement given to more "modern" music.

Since the turn of the present century, Spain–Dunk's music has enjoyed an increasing level of attention both in performance and recording. The *Suite for Strings* (1924), whose idiom, it must be admitted, could have been regarded as dated even when it was written, can now be re–evaluated, and recognised as possessing an elegance and poise well worth hearing.

The five–movement work begins with a *Prelude* based principally upon the cello/bass theme heard at the very beginning; it moves from its opening B minor through sometimes quite adventurous chromatic harmonies to a close in B major. The succeeding *Interlude* is full of melodic imitation and has something of the spirit of Mendelssohn's youthful string symphonies. There follows a *Romance* whose principal theme is first heard on four solo cellos. Whether or not so intended by the composer, the light–footed *Scherzo* again brings Mendelssohn to mind. The opening theme of the first movement returns in a slower and sadder mood to launch the *Finale*; after an increasingly turbulent introductory section, it is the same theme, in a faster version, which carries the *Suite* to its conclusion, once again in a richly sonorous B major tonality.

The reputation of **Gustav Mahler** (1860–1911) as the composer of colossal and angst–ridden symphonies does justice (if at all) to only one side of his genius. Mahler was also an important composer of songs with piano accompaniment; even when his symphonies employ huge forces, they are rarely used all together, and many passages display an intimate scoring using only a few instruments. The fifth symphony, completed in 1902, is a good example. Overall, the orchestra comprises triple woodwind, six horns, four trumpets, heavy brass, half a dozen percussion players, harp and strings; but there are numerous passages for solo instruments (trumpet, horn, woodwind) with little or no accompaniment.

And then there is the *Adagietto*. In this, the fourth of five movements, Mahler abandons his wind sections and writes for strings and harp alone. Analysis of the movement is superfluous: a series of melodies, now calm, now impassioned, flows through the string parts and is supported by a gentle background of broken chords in the harp. The feeling behind the movement has often been ascribed to Mahler's joy at his marriage to Alma Maria Schindler, which took place at about the time of its composition.

In 1911 the German author Thomas Mann, in Venice, read Mahler's obituary. Inspired by the city, by its atmosphere of decay, and possibly by the character of the composer, he wrote his short novel *Death in Venice*, centred on the figure of an aging writer. Luchino Visconti's 1971 film of the novel opens with the *Adagietto* accompanying scenes of a misty Venetian dawn; throughout the film, the piece supplies an evocative background to Mann's tale of the ill–fated Gustav von Aschenbach.

Maxim Shalygin was born in 1985 in the Ukrainian city of Kamianske, situated on the Dnipro River some 370 km south–east of the capital Kyiv. He studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatorium, in Kyiv and at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, and now lives and works in the Netherlands. Many of his compositions explore the musical potentialities of single instruments: an example is his *Letters to Anna*, a 25–minute work described as a "symphony for violin solo". Other major interests include electronic music and ballet.

Drop after drop was written in 2022 as a plea for peace and for an end to the conflict in Ukraine. The composer has written:

> *Since the first day of the war in Ukraine, a terrible pain has settled inside me. Every time I close my eyes, I want to wake up from this terrible dream... but alas, it is not a dream. 'Drop after drop' is a kind of an ingot of that pain and memories of my childhood, when my relatives were telling me about the war years and sang wartime songs. I hear those songs inside me again and I wish they would stop...*

After a few bars of introduction, violins state a rather static, quiet and melancholy melody above an unvarying harmony. In fact, the whole piece consists of repetitions of the same theme: it increases in volume as a bass line is added, followed by middle parts. As the intensity decreases again to an extreme marking of *pppp* – not just softly but very, very, very softly – the perfomers change the mode of playing from *arco* (bowed) to *pizzicato* (plucked), and the music ceases without warning.

Morton Gould (1913–1996) had a wide–ranging career as composer, arranger, performer and conductor. Born in New York, he earned a living during the depression years by playing piano in cinemas as an accompaniment to silent movies, as well as participating in stage productions, and was appointed staff pianist at Radio City Music Hall when it opened in 1932. Over the next couple of decades he became increasingly involved in writing and conducting orchestral and band arrangements, film scores and Broadway musicals. Gould won many honours and awards, including the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for *Stringmusic*.

A great deal of Gould's music deals with American stories and American popular music. The ballet *Fall River Legend* tells the tale of accused murderer Lizzie Borden, though a great deal of liberty is taken with the historical record. ("It's called poetic licence", Gould is reported to have said.) His symphonies include No. 2, *Symphony on Marching Tunes* and No. 4, subtitled *West Point*; there is also a *Latin–American Symphonette*. Besides marches and popular song, Gould was fascinated by the musical heritage of the African–American people, and wrote numerous arrangements of both well–known and lesser–known spirituals. The six movements of his *Spirituals for Strings* set, between them, nine different songs.

Spirituals originated among enslaved African peoples in the American south towards the end of the eighteenth century, and since then have become a central part of American folk culture. Some began as work songs; others were retellings of Bible stories which were used both in and outside church. Many drew analogies between the plight of the Hebrew people in the Bible – the captivity in Egypt, the Babylonian exile – and that of the African–American people bound in slavery. The yearning for escape from earthly life to an eternal paradise was combined with aspirations for escape from southern slavery to freedom in the northern states, or Canada. The writer, orator and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, himself a former slave, described the spiritual genre as "a prayer to God for deliverance from chains".

It is believed that the words of some spirituals contained, alongside their surface religious readings, covert messages directed at those slaves who understood their secret content. One such, *Gospel Train*, is set by Morton Gould in the first movement of his *Spirituals for Strings*, where it is combined with *Old Time Religion*. "The gospel train is coming/ I hear it close at hand" may on occasion have been used to alert those in the know to the imminent possibility of flight, perhaps by the "underground railroad", a network of escape routes used by many to reach freedom.

Others among the spirituals in Morton Gould's settings have texts which paraphrase various Bible stories. The songs *Were You There?* (second movement), *Calvary* and *He Never Said a Mumblin' Word* (fifth movement) explicitly reference the crucifixion of Jesus. Gould sets the latter to almost unbearably painful music. It is not hard to imagine the slaves connecting the death of Jesus with the very real possibilities in their own lives of injustice, persecution, punishment and death at the hands of their owners. *Ezekiel Saw de Wheel* (sixth movement) alludes to the vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel, as related in the Old Testament. At the time of the vision, Ezekiel and the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon – possibly a reason for the great popularity of this song among African–American communities.

By contrast, *Little David, Play on Your Harp* is a joyful song of praise with few, if any, hints of distress. It is heard initially as a free rhapsody featuring instrumental solos and many overlapping parts, before the tempo increases to a faster and more vigorous section, closer to the way the song is traditionally sung. Overall, Morton Gould's *Spirituals for Strings* provide an overview of the many facets of traditional African–American song, set in a way that imaginatively uses all the techniques available to the string orchestra.

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). In 2023 David was invited to direct a concert for The Lawyers' Orchestra; their second collaboration, in February 2024, presented 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 great names such as Richard Strauss, Stravinsky and Vaughan Williams, as well as fascinating music by present–day composers. Every concert features at least one work by an Australian composer, most recently Chris Williams, Ella Macens, Michael Grebla and Diana Blom.

Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki, a prominent figure in the French military at the time of the Franco–Prussian War, was also a composer of undisputed talent. Inspired by his soldiers' resort to song in order to maintain morale while interned in Switzerland (1871), Bourbaki on his repatriation to France composed a *Grand Fantaisie sur des Chansons Militaires Françaises* for four solo ophicleides and string orchestra. It seems that Bourbaki's superiors regarded the work as an ignoble commemoration of defeat; all copies of the music were seized and destroyed by firing squad.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Julia Pokorny, Joanna Buggy, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, Jenny Mee, Rob Newnham, Paul Pokorny, Warwick Pulley, Carol Tang, Richard Willgoss, Victor Wu.

Violas Philip Poulton, Daniel Morris, Kathryn Ramsay, David Tocknell, Evonne Voukidis.

Violoncellos John Napier, Ying Huang, Nicole McVicar, Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, George Machado.

Harp Marjorie Maydwell.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

dance fantasies

Jean Sibelius Andante festivo
Vaughan Williams Tallis Fantasia
Gordon Jacob Rhapsody for Cor Anglais
Ella Macens The Lake
Mark Grandison Three Dances
David Matthews Three Birds and a Farewell

2.30 pm, Sunday 28 July 2024

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

A special extra concert with

Ayşe Göknur Shanal, soprano

in an exciting venue Bourbaki has not played before!
Details to be announced

4.00pm and 8.00pm, Saturday 7 September 2024

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

with a Latin accent

music by Manuel de Falla, Joaquín Turina,
Luis Saglie, Roberto Sierra and Peter Sculthorpe

2.30 pm, Sunday 24 November 2024

`www.bourbakiensemble.org`

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