THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

Fantasia: music for strings

Vaughan Williams Tallis Fantasia

Gordon Jacob Rhapsody

David Matthews Three Birds and a Farewell

Mark Grandison Three Dances

Sibelius Andante Festivo

Ella Macens The Lake

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 28 July 2024

St. George's Hall, Newtown

A warm welcome to the Bourbaki Ensemble's winter concert for 2024! We are delighted to once again perform Ralph Vaughan Williams' great *Tallis Fantasia*, alongside other British and Australian music – and a short contribution from Finland. Gordon Jacob's *Rhapsody* shows to great advantage the well–loved melodic capabilities of the cor anglais, while contrasting them with a less familiar quirkiness: we welcome soloist Rachel Tolmie, making her sixth appearance in Bourbaki concerts. English composer David Matthews employs one "artificial" and three genuine folk songs in his charming suite. Incidentally, David's brother Colin, also a respected composer, was the editor of the Holst *Moorside Suite*, played by Bourbaki in 2022.

We are thrilled to present in this concert Australian composer Mark Grandison's *Three Dances* for string orchestra, and are immensely grateful to the composer for his assistance with putting on the performance. Mark not only transcribed his existing handwritten parts into modern musical typesetting, but also took the opportunity to make some improvements in the third dance. Thanks Mark for your magnificent efforts – and for your exciting music too! Following the performance of Ella Macens' *Superimposition* last year, we are confident that our audience will enjoy *The Lake*, a poignant yet serene composition featuring solo parts for violin and cello.

The next Bourbaki performance will be in a new (for us) and prestigious venue – the Utzon Room of the Sydney Opera House. This will be a joint concert with Ayşe Göknur Shanal, soprano: full details may be found on the back cover of this programme. Regular audiences please note that the concert will be on a Saturday, not a Sunday. Then in November we'll be back in Newtown for a programme of music "with a Latin accent" – connections with Spain, Chile and Puerto Rico. We look forward to seeing you at both of our forthcoming concerts.

PROGRAMME

Jean Sibelius Andante Festivo

Mark Grandison Three Dances for string orchestra

I Presto
II Andante
III Allegro

Ella Macens The Lake, for string orchestra

Warwick Pulley, violin; John Napier, cello

Gordon Jacob Rhapsody for Cor Anglais and Strings

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

David Matthews Three Birds and a Farewell, Op. 118: suite for string orchestra

1. The Blackbird
2. The Cuckoo
3. Interlude
4. The Song Thrush
5. Goodnight Song

Ralph Vaughan Williams Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Warwick Pulley, Julia Pokorny, violins; Kathryn Ramsay, viola; John Napier, cello

Unquestionably one of the great symphonic composers of the twentieth century, **Jean Sibelius** (1865–1957) also provided music for a wide variety of occasions such as theatre productions (*Pelleas and Melisande*) and local and civic celebrations (*Karelia*). Improbably, his *Andante Festivo* originated with a proposal in 1922 for music to celebrate the 25th anniversary of a sawmilling plant in Säynätsalo, central Finland. Instead of a cantata as requested, Sibelius provided a string quartet, which was performed at the celebrations – a most generous response, one might think, from a body which had really wanted a striking orchestral and vocal apotheosis. It seems that Sibelius gave little thought to securing further performances of the work, though it was played at the wedding of one of his nieces in 1929. The piece was adapted for string orchestra, with optional timpani, and conducted by the composer on New Year's Day 1939 in a radio broadcast to celebrate the New York World's Fair.

The *Andante Festivo* has a restrained grandeur which well suits a concert opener. It consists of a hymn–like tune, repeated a number of times with subtle variations of contour and phrase length. Though no doubt a minor piece, there are occasional echoes of Sibelius' ever idiomatic symphonic string writing. It ends with a sustained plagal ("Amen") cadence.

Mark Grandison (born 1965) has composed a wide variety of works, which have received performances not only in Australia but also in the USA, New Zealand and south–east Asia. They include orchestral and wind band scores written for both young and professional performers: the former prompted, presumably, by his position for thirty years as Director of Music at Kambala, a post which he took up in 1994 after completing composition studies with Richard Meale in Adelaide.

Mark's *Three Dances* for string orchestra were composed in 1993, shortly before the move to Sydney, and have kindly been revised by the composer for the present concert. The *presto* first movement begins with a hushed but vibrant thrumming in the violas, which typifies the mood of most of the piece. A notable use of metric complexity and syncopation is attributed by the composer to his " childhood and youth absorbed in popular and jazz music". The movement is two–thirds finished before the subdued atmosphere bursts out into a sustained *forte* – only to be interrupted by a slower passage culminating in sonorous chords. After a brief return to the opening textures, the movement evaporates into a sonic vapour.

The second dance, slower, is based around an alternation of passages for the full orchestra and for groups of four or five solo performers. Tense harmonies culminate in a passage of tightly wound violin trills above a repetitive accompaniment, which issues into a mighty outburst for the whole ensemble. The finale, based unremittingly on a rhythm of three–two–three quavers in the bar, concludes the piece in a dance of wild abandon.

Ella Macens is an Australian composer of Latvian heritage. She studied at the Sydney Conservatorium, completing a Bachelor of Music with first class honours in composition, and is now a member of the teaching staff at the same institution. Ella's music has been performed by eminent Australian ensembles including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Goldner String Quartet and the Song Company, and overseas by the State Choir Latvija and the Riga Cathedral Girls' Choir. Ella's orchestral composition *The Space Between Stars* was recently nominated by Simone Young as a candidate for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's inaugural "People's Choice" concert.

Written in 2018, *The Lake* is scored for a multiply divided string ensemble: eight violin lines, three violas, two cellos and a bass. The first violin and first cello parts are designated as solos, and the composition consists largely of their intertwining melodic lines, supported by more fragmentary thematic material and sonorous harmonies in the rest of the orchestra. A series of chords for the lower instruments leads into the first cello solo, soon joined by violin. After a brief interlude for the seven orchestral violin parts, the solos resume, accompanied by violas, cellos and bass; a final harmonic twist leads into a hushed close. The composer has commented that *The Lake* "was born out of a personal longing for inner peace, strength and healing".

With over seven hundred works to his credit, Gordon Jacob was one of the most prolific composers of the twentieth century. He wrote a great deal of orchestral music, some of it transcriptions of other composers' music (Byrd, Schumann, Chopin, Elgar), both for the concert hall and ballet stage. There are two symphonies for full orchestra, as well as others for string orchestra, small orchestra, wind band and more; there are many chamber works – a quick browse discloses music for string quartet, saxophone quartet, woodwind quartet and tuba quartet – and a couple of dozen concertos and other solo pieces with orchestral or band accompaniment.

Wind players have always had a fondness for Jacob's work on account of his bountiful provision of solos for their instruments. (Not to mention violists – two concertos.) The *Rhapsody* in this afternoon's programme was composed in 1948 for Terence MacDonagh. It begins with a poised and elegant solo set within a mysterious, gently dissonant texture of *pizzicato* and *tremolo* sonorities which seem reluctant to settle down to any clear traditional harmony. A faster and more angular section offers many opportunities for musical humour and unexpected twists, before a short coda brings the work to a close.

Gordon Jacob was born in London in 1895, and served in the first world war, where he was captured and spent time as a prisoner of war. It appears that his first inclinations towards a career in music may have begun in the camp, where he came across a harmony textbook and began composing. After the war he embarked upon studies at the Royal College of Music, London, and later taught there for over forty years; many famous names are to be found both among his teachers (Vaughan Williams, Howells, Boult) and his students (Malcolm Arnold, Ruth Gipps, Imogen Holst). His vast teaching experience resulted in a number of esteemed and widely–used textbooks on orchestration and score–reading. He continued to compose after retirement from the RCM, and died in 1984.

British composer **David Matthews** was born in London in 1943. In an engaging autobiographical note on his website (`www.david-matthews.co.uk`), David describes giving up piano lessons in adolescence in favour of rock and roll, before at the age of sixteen he "rediscovered classical... and orchestral music" and resolved to become a composer. In this endeavour he was obliged largely to find his own way, without the help of any institutional music education; but he had the benefit of close associations with many eminent figures in British music. From 1966 he was an assistant to Benjamin Britten in Aldeburgh, and learned a great deal from observation of the older composer, though not from any formal instruction. In 1972 he met Peter Sculthorpe, at that time teaching at Sussex University, whom Matthews regards as his "best teacher", citing as a particular inspiration the Australian composer's interest in non–European music. He assisted with Sculthorpe's music theatre piece *Rites of Passage* and with the film music for *Burke and Wills*. Before achieving financial stability as a composer, Matthews supported himself with a variety of related occupations such as arranging (the rehearsal score for Britten's *Burning Fiery Furnace*), editing and film music (orchestration of music for Abel Gance's 1927 silent film *Napoléon*).

David Matthews now has a substantial list of compositions: eleven symphonies and much other orchestral music; seventeen string quartets and other chamber music; choral and vocal music and an opera. He is also the author of biographies of Sir Michael Tippett and of Britten, as well as numerous articles on musical topics. His *Three Birds and a Farewell* evidences an interest in birdsong (somewhat recent, perhaps, though the composer acknowledges that it goes back at least as far as a visit to Peter Sculthorpe in Australia in 1974) and folk song. The work consists of pieces written for differing ensembles at various times from 1998 onwards, collected together and arranged for string orchestra in 2011. It begins with *The Blackbird*, in which the Welsh song *Y Deryn Du* is given three times: to violas, to a solo cello, and finally to upper strings in canon. *The Cuckoo* gives its familiar call in the key of C major – which, Matthews claims, is ornithologically accurate – in support of a somewhat vigorous tune performed initially by a solo violin. A brief chordal *Interlude* leads directly into *The Song Thrush*, of which the composer wryly comments, "I could not find another bird folksong that I liked and so wrote my own". The solo violin begins the movement with Matthews' "folksong", and closes it with a barrage of bird calls. The concluding *Goodnight Song* begins with an introduction marked *con moto spettrale*, "with a ghostly motion", before giving its melody to unaccompanied viola and then to full strings, with haunting harmonies. The tune is the traditional Manx song *Arrane Oie Vie*: “Lads, it’s time to go home/The fire is failing…/It’s time to say good night”.

In the early years of the twentieth century, yet to make his mark as a composer, **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872–1958) was engaged in editing the *English Hymnal*. Besides writing some of the music himself, he keenly sought to include some of the great English musical heritage of earlier centuries. It was in this connection that he came across the tunes written by Thomas Tallis in 1567 for Matthew Parker’s verse renderings of the Psalms. The third tune is composed in the Phrygian mode, of all early tonal systems the most distant from the major and minor keys; this feature must have strongly attracted Vaughan Williams, who was striving to depart from the well–worn paths of musical romanticism and to move in new directions.

The *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* was premiered at the Three Choirs Festival in 1910. It is scored for two string orchestras, the second in fact consisting of only nine players and placed at a distance from the first; in some passages four members of the first orchestra play as a string quartet, with first violin and viola having extensive solos. The variation of texture does much to establish the unique sonority of the *Fantasia*.

In the initial part of the work the whole ensemble largely plays as one, introducing and developing Tallis’s theme. Subsequent sections exploit the contrast between solos, small orchestra and full orchestra; after a majestic climax the theme is given at length once more, by solo violin with a wonderfully rhapsodic solo viola counterpoint. A radiant G major chord concludes a composition which is, beyond dispute, one of the supreme creations of Western musical literature.

Rachel Tolmie, cor anglais

Rachel started playing the oboe at ten years of age and the cor anglais at twelve. On successful completion of her Fellowship in Music Diploma for Oboe Performance (AMEB), she travelled to England and completed with Distinction a Postgraduate Diploma at the Royal College of Music, London, specializing in Solo and Chamber Music Performance. Since her return to Australia, Rachel has released eight CDs as a soloist with the Wirripang label, which specialises in Australian music.

Presently, Rachel is a chamber music tutor at the Conservatorium of Music High School, Sydney. She has appeared as soloist with several orchestras in NSW, and is delighted today to be collaborating with the Bourbaki Ensemble once again.

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 David conducted all the symphonies of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a series of five concerts spread over a single weekend. He has been guest conductor for two concerts with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (Thame, UK).

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 his arrangement of the accompaniment to Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* will be heard in the Sydney Opera House this coming September. He 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.

A highly respected figure in the French military, General **Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki** (1816–1897) was also a minor shareholder in a *fromagerie* specialising in the "smelly" cheeses of Livarot, Normandy. To celebrate the institution's 25th anniversary in 1839, he requested a cantata from his *confrère* Charles Gounod, then a senior composition student at the Paris Conservatoire. Barely a fortnight before the scheduled performance, Gounod withdrew his cantata *Fernand*, and entered it instead in the prestigious *Prix de Rome*, winning first prize and thereby launching a stellar career. The disappointed Bourbaki stepped into the breach, performing an ophicleide solo of his own composition.

Violins Warwick Pulley, Julia Pokorny, Joanna Buggy, Clare Fulton, Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Deborah McGowan, Rob Newnham, Paul Pokorny, Michael Poulton, Carol Tang, Alvin Wan, Victor Wu.

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

Violoncellos John Napier, Liesje Croeser, Serena Devonshire, Ying Huang, Ian Macourt, Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, Daniel Murphy, Maureen Wallace.

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A special extra concert in the
Sydney Opera House, Utzon Room, with
Ayşe Göknur Shanal, soprano

Richard Wagner Wesendonck Lieder
Osvaldo Golijov Tenebrae
Peter Sculthorpe Night Song
Peter Sculthorpe Maranoa Lullaby
A selection of Turkish folk songs

8.00pm, Saturday 7 September 2024

We are delighted to announce Bourbaki's Sydney Opera House debut! The Ensemble will join soprano Ayşe Göknur Shanal for a programme of *Dreams and Shadows*. The dreams are the final song, *Träume*, of Wagner's five *Wesendonck Lieder*, with the original piano accompaniment arranged for strings by David Angell; the shadows are the title of Osvaldo Golijov's *Tenebrae* for clarinet, soprano and strings. The evocation of a nocturnal world continues with two pieces from Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe: an original work for strings, and a transcription of the indigenous *Maranoa Lullaby*. A contrasting mood is provided by an exciting suite of Turkish folk song settings for soprano and strings.

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