THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

music for recorder and strings

Purcell Incidental music from *Abdelazer*
Arnold Cooke Concerto for treble recorder and strings
Vivaldi Concerto for sopranino recorder and strings
Colin Spiers Music, like the dark husk of earth, abiding
Biber Battalia

Karyn Ashley, recorder
David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 18 May 2003

St. Stephen's Church, Newtown

Thank you for attending the second Bourbaki Ensemble concert for 2003. We are very excited to be able to present the world premiere performance of *Music, like the dark husk of earth, abiding* by Colin Spiers, a work which the composer regards as one of his personal favourites among his own compositions. In addition, it recently emerged that (so far as we can tell) the Arnold Cooke recorder concerto will be receiving its first performance in Australia. You can hear Mozart, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky anywhere you go, but for exciting music that you've not heard before, please keep coming to the Bourbaki Ensemble!

As always, we are deeply indebted to all at St. Stephen's for permitting us to hold concerts in the magnificent acoustics and beautiful surrounds of the church. Thanks in particular to Peter Rodgers and his helpers for organising the letterbox drop in the local area, and to Fran Morris who will lead all those interested on a journey through Sydney history, as reflected in St. Stephen's cemetery, at the conclusion of the concert. Our thanks are also due to Jim Broadfoot for the loan of the harpsichord used in this performance.

Two further concerts will be given this year by the Bourbaki Ensemble. In October we welcome guitarists Raffaele and Janet Agostino, who will perform a solo each and a double concerto. Please remember that this concert will be given on Saturday 25 October (not Sunday) here at Newtown, and will be repeated on Sunday 26 at Macquarie University. There will be a special concert on Thursday evening 14 August at the Garrison Church in The Rocks: the programme will consist of music by Mozart, Vivaldi, Bizet, Grainger... and some works you've (probably) not heard before! See the back cover for more information; better still, join our email list to receive full details of all our concerts. Forms will be available at interval and after the performance.

PROGRAMME

Henry Purcell Incidental music from *Abdelazer*

1. Overture
2. Rondeau
3. Aire
4. Aire
5. Minuett
6. Aire
7. Jigg
8. Hornpipe
9. Aire

Arnold Cooke Concerto for treble recorder and strings

1. Allegro vivace
2. Andante
3. Scherzo: presto
4. Variations on Prince Rupert's March

Karyn Ashley, recorder

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

Antonio Vivaldi Concerto in C major for sopranino recorder and strings, RV444

1. Allegro non molto
2. Largo
3. Allegro molto

Karyn Ashley, recorder

Colin Spiers Music, like the dark husk of earth, abiding

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber Battalia

The period following the Restoration of Charles II was one of the great eras of the English theatre, a golden age not only for actors and playwrights but also for musicians. The leading British composer of his day, **Henry Purcell** (1659–1695) wrote incidental music for over forty plays, as well as "proto–operas" such as *Dido and Aeneas* and *The Fairy Queen*, based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Besides his theatre music, Purcell composed numerous instrumental fantasias and choral works. His *Funeral Music for Queen Mary* was performed at his own funeral when he died, much lamented, at the age of thirty–six.

Restoration playwright Aphra Behn led a life which was interesting by any standards, and quite extraordinary for a woman in seventeenth century England. She spent time as a traveller in Surinam, as a spy in Holland and as a debtor in prison. Despite all this she was sufficiently esteemed as a dramatist to be buried in Westminster Abbey, where her epitaph reads,

> "Here lies a proof that wit can never be
> Defence enough against mortality."

Abdelazer, a rather gory revenge tragedy, was first produced in 1676. Purcell's music for the play consists of a few numbers which would have been played before the curtain rose, an overture, and a "tune" to end each act. The arrangement of pieces we perform today begins with the *Overture*, which displays French influence in its strongly rhythmic opening and fugal continuation. It is followed by a *Rondeau*, which achieved posthumous fame when used by Benjamin Britten as the basis of his *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, and a succession of diverse airs and dances. The *Hornpipe*, a sailors' dance, seems to have been a particular favourite of Purcell's, though nowadays its appearance in "serious" music may strike us as a little comic. The airs are informed by a wonderful warm sensuousness quite at odds with many listeners' ideas of Baroque music.

Going to the theatre in the Restoration period was very much a social occasion, there being no particular expectation that plays be viewed in an atmosphere of hushed reverence. Performers were quite accustomed to audiences who combined their playgoing with gossip, dalliance or dining. If you have some sandwiches in your pocket, we invite you to do the same!

Arnold Cooke was born in Yorkshire in 1906. He read history and music at Cambridge University before travelling to Berlin, where for three years he studied composition under Paul Hindemith. In 1933 he was appointed as professor of composition at the Royal Manchester College of Music, and from 1947 to 1978 occupied a similar position at Trinity College of Music. He is now in his ninety–seventh year.

The soaring main theme of Cooke's *Concerto for treble recorder and strings* is announced immediately by the soloist over a bustling string accompaniment. It is soon echoed by the orchestra, and is succeeded by a more chromatic recorder melody. After this material too has been shared with the orchestra, there follows a section of agile figuration both in duplets and triplets. A short development culminates in a slow version of the main theme on solo viola and then solo second violin, followed by a recapitulation of all the themes from the movement.

The second movement of the concerto is an elegiac *andante* very reminiscent of some slow movements by Vaughan Williams, its mood initially characterised by melodic lines which rise in wide intervals and then fall away chromatically. A second section is dominated by mysterious *pizzicati* in the strings, which never quite die away even with the return of the first section. A final haunting chord in violins and violas is suspended over a single *pizzicato* in the celli.

An orchestral unison in trochaic rhythm opens the *scherzo*, providing an immediate contrast to the *andante*. The soloist enters with a nervous figure of *staccato* quavers which in the course of the movement will be shared among all the instruments. A more *legato*, though hardly more relaxed, theme (recorder, then first violins) leads into a *forte* passage where irregular rhythmic patterns alternate between soloist and strings. The remainder of the movement is a virtuosic combination of all these elements.

The finale consists of seven variations on *Prince Rupert's March*. The march apparently dates from the English Civil War, Prince Rupert, a nephew of Charles I, having been a leading commander on the Royalist side. Cooke gives the theme to the recorder, the first variation to the strings and the second to the recorder again, in flowing triplets lightly accompanied. The third variation is *staccato*, rhythmic and a little faster, while the next three all feature canons of various kinds. A dashing *prestissimo* concludes the concerto in spectacular fashion.

There has been considerable dispute over the identity of the solo instrument in the three concertos for "flautino" composed by **Antonio Vivaldi** (1678–1741). These works belong to an era in which the so–called "transverse flute" (held horizontally like the modern flute and its smaller companion the piccolo) was beginning to be employed alongside the older recorder. When, after many years of neglect, Vivaldi's works began to regain prominence in the mid–twentieth century, it was usually assumed that the concertos were written for piccolo, and they are still sometimes performed on that instrument. However, as early as 1968 American musicologist David Lasocki had argued that the concertos were intended for the sopranino recorder, and this view is nowadays generally accepted.

The concerto which we perform today begins with an *allegro non molto*, distinguished by breathtaking (literally!) displays of technical brilliance from the soloist. Peter Holman, in a sleeve note for Hyperion Records, sees the movement in pictorial terms: "the *ritornello* [orchestral opening] suggests a sunrise and the soloist is given a large repertory of virtuoso birdsong figures". The subsequent *largo* sets further florid passages for the recorder against a spare two–part accompaniment. Vivaldi marked the finale *allegro molto*, evidently feeling that he had left room in the first two movements for the soloist to play still faster. Four closely related passages for the full ensemble, easily recognised by insistent trills in the violins, alternate with yet more astounding solos replete with scales, trills and arpeggios.

Australian composer **Colin Spiers** was born in Brisbane in 1957 and studied at the Queensland Conservatorium, graduating with a Medal of Excellence in 1979. Since 1990 he has been on the staff of the Newcastle Conservatorium, where he now holds the position of Senior Lecturer in Composition. Colin is also a noted 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.

Music, like the dark husk of earth, abiding is a fifteen–minute composition in one movement for string orchestra, and is dedicated to the memory of Florence Sarah Anne Hollywood, the composer's maternal grandmother. It originated as the second movement of a *Sinfonietta* written in 1983, and takes the form of a prelude and fugue. In a communication to the present writer, Colin Spiers described the music's atmosphere in such terms as "dark", "bittersweet", "intensely lyrical", and stated that "out of the fifty or so works I have written, this is one of the most personal, and one I hold in a lot of affection".

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Music, like the dark husk of earth, abiding* is its sonorous harmony. The composer frequently achieves this effect by superimposing two tonalities – but they are always closely related tonalities, and the result is nothing like the acerbic bitonality employed by various composers in the 1920s. Another immediately noticeable characteristic is the multitude of lines given to individual players, the orchestra being divided into as many as fifteen separate parts. The movement begins with a melody for solo viola, initially striving upwards but eventually falling away, above an accompaniment consisting of heartbeat–like *pizzicati* in lower instruments and gently cascading arpeggios. A solo cello takes over the viola melody, leading the music into a theme marked *lamentoso* and given to all the violins. After a brief silence the fugue begins, *tristamente e molto legato* (sadly and very smoothly), in the first violins. It rises to a *fortissimo* passage in five–part close harmony; this in turn gives way to a hushed statement of the fugue theme on solo bass. After two further climaxes of a similar nature the work comes to rest with flowing passages in the violas and deep, rich, serene harmonies.

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644–1704) was one of the most extraordinary composers of the Baroque era. Bohemian by birth, his career led him to positions as violinist and conductor in Salzburg and Bavaria. His ennoblement by Leopold III in 1690 indicates the status he had by then achieved.

Biber's best known works are the fifteen *Mystery Sonatas* for violin and basso continuo, which illustrate episodes from the life of Christ and are surely the most extreme examples of *scordatura* (unconventional tuning of the violin) ever composed. Every single one of the sonatas demands a different tuning, only the first being the standard G–D–A–E. By this means Biber not only facilitates unusual chords, but alters the whole sound of the instrument, so that, for example, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection are portrayed in vividly contrasting colours.

A similar concern for highly descriptive sonorities is evident in Biber's *Battalia* of 1673. The piece depicts a battle, together with its prelude and aftermath, and includes many audacious effects (though not *scordatura*). Its original extraordinary scoring for three violins, four violas, no cellos, two basses and continuo is often adapted for a more conventional string orchestra.

Battalia begins with trumpets, at first distant and then closer, as the soldiers assemble; the tramp of feet is suggested by the musicians playing *col legno* (with the wood of the bow). The second scene, "dissolute company with humour of all kinds", portrays a crowd of soldiers at a tavern. One party begins a folk song, others joining in one by one. As the soldiers – and the tunes – come from Slovakia, Italy, Bohemia and elsewhere, and as they sing in various keys, the result rapidly descends into chaos. There follow three short movements in which one can hear the clash of swords, drum rolls (double bass, with a piece of paper placed between the strings) and the galloping of horses. An *Aria*, alternating orchestral and solo passages, bids a sad farewell before the battle itself, in which the composer asks for the strings of celli and bass to be plucked so hard that that they "rebound [from the fingerboard] like cannon".

One might expect a Baroque battle piece to be a celebration of victory and heroism. Biber, on the contrary, ends his work with a *Lament of the Wounded Musketeers*. Opening with funereal chords, the lament descends in a grief–stricken keening to a solemn close.

David Angell, conductor

David took up conducting in 1998 with a highly successful season of *West Side Story* for Holroyd Musical and Dramatic Society. He has organised and conducted the Bourbaki Ensemble since its inception, and has programmed works by composers including Sculthorpe, Mahler, Shostakovich, Butterley, Villa–Lobos and Britten. In 2002 David co–wrote and conducted the soundtrack for the film *Compost Monster* which has been screened in Sydney and in London. He has studied conducting privately with Richard Gill.

David also conducts *Orchestra 143*, whose first concert for 2003 included Haydn's Symphony No. 44 and the Clarinet Concerto in E♭ by Karl Stamitz, with soloist Deborah de Graaff. This will be followed by an all–Mozart programme in August.

Karyn Ashley, recorder

Karyn has been playing recorder since pre–school years, pursuing it as her principal instrument because of the strong early music culture in her home town of Armidale. Awards and scholarships soon followed, culminating in her winning the under 18 section of the National Recorder Championships in 2000. This was followed by a distinction in her AMEB Licentiate performance examination.

In 2002, Karyn received the highly sought after Sony Foundation Youth Music Scholarship, and began her studies in Music and Arts at the University of New South Wales. Recorder studies were continued under the tutelage of Hans–Dieter Michatz. She threw herself into university life, participating in the Law and Medicine Revues, the New College Revue (as musical director) and a production of *West Side Story* (all on the trumpet). She recently performed as a soloist with the UNSW Orchestra, playing the Vivaldi concerto you will hear today.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble numbers among its members professional musicians, talented amateurs and current or recent students. The ensemble aims to perform both familiar and lesser–known works from the string orchestra repertoire, and takes a particular interest in Australian composition. Recent performances have included music by Nigel Butterley, Colin Brumby and Betty Beath.

General Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki (1816–1897) was an important figure in the senior ranks of the French army. Not everyone knows that his original intention was to follow a vocation for music. As a young man he composed a piano concerto and a symphony which attracted fulsome praise from Cherubini. The latter work, however, was savaged by critics; in a mood of bitterness Bourbaki swore to forsake composition and embraced the military career which was eventually to lead him to such glittering eminence.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Rebecca Pulley*, Natalie Adby*, Paul Hoskinson, Catherine Howard, Heather Orr, Gary Tiu, Warwick Pulley. *[viola in *Battalia*]

Violas Dana Kern, Janice Buttle, Suzanna Powell, Gareth Young.

Violoncellos Guy Curd, Rosalind Graham, Ross Warner.

Bass Nicole Murray–Prior.

Harpsichord Chris Berensen.

Lute Andrew White.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

a special additional concert

Works by **Vivaldi**, **Bizet**, **Grainger**, **Mozart** and others

7.30 pm, Thursday 14 August 2003
in The Garrison (Holy Trinity) Church
corner Lower Fort and Argyle Streets, The Rocks

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

music for guitars and strings

Warwick Pulley Delta–H
Richard Charlton Serenade for Guitar and Strings
Holst Brook Green Suite
Máximo Pujol Suite Buenos Aires
Vivaldi Concerto for Two Guitars and Strings
Rawsthorne Concerto for String Orchestra

Raffaele and Janet Agostino, guitars

2.30 pm, Saturday 25 October 2003
at St. Stephen's Church, Newtown
Tickets $15, concessions $8

2.30 pm, Sunday 26 October 2003
at the Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University
Admission free

Tango rhythms permeate Pujol's suite for guitar and strings, while Holst's music is decidedly English. Warwick Pulley's short piece opens the concert with energetic gestures. Alan Rawsthorne's concluding *Concerto* is by turns turbulent, elegiac, and serene.

Programme details subject to change