AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

# WARM WINDS
# WITH CHRISTOFFER SUNDQVIST

FRIDAY 24 MAY 7PM
ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

**Duration**

**Carl NIELSEN (1865-1931)** Wind Quintet, op. 43 (1922) *27'*

*i. Allegro ben moderato*
*ii. Menuet*
*iii. Prelude. Adagio – Theme and variations. Un poco andantino*

**Christoffer Sundqvist** director/clarinet
**Maria Zhdanovich*** (SA) flute
**Oscar Gillespie*** (VIC) oboe
**Kina Lin-Wilmoth*** (VIC) bassoon
**Oliver Harris** (NSW) horn

**Sebastian FAGERLUND (b. 1972)** Octet *'Autumn Equinox'* (2016) *21'*

*i. Espressivo*
*ii. Lento misterioso – 'Autumn Lullaby'. Semplice*
*iii. Adagio con forza ma espressivo*

**Georgia White** *(VIC) clarinet
**Stephanie Sheridan*** (WA) bassoon
**Oliver Harris** (NSW) horn
**Peter Gjelsten** *(NZ) violin
**Sola Hughes*** (QLD) violin
**Hanna Wallace** *(NSW) viola
**Jack Overall*** (SA) cello
**Oakley Paul*** (WA) double bass

*— INTERVAL—* *20'*

**Antonin DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)** Serenade in D minor, op. 44 (1878) *26'*

*i. Moderato quasi marcia*
*ii. Menuetto – Trio: Presto*
*iii. Andante con moto*
*iv. Finale. Allegro molto*

**Christoffer Sundqvist** director/clarinet
**Joshua Webster** (NZ) oboe
**Alex Tsang*** (NSW) oboe
**Dario Scalabrini*** (QLD) clarinet
**William Hanna*** (VIC) bassoon
**Stephanie Sheridan*** (WA) bassoon
**Kina Lin-Wilmoth** *(VIC) contrabassoon
**Emma John*** (WA) horn
**Madeleine Aarons*** (NSW) horn
**Tom Allen** (VIC) horn
**Ariel Volovelsky*** (NSW) cello
**Oakley Paul*** (WA) double bass

*Approximate duration: 102 minutes (incl. interval)*

**Supported by Syndicate or Training Scholarship donors*

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## OLD FORMS, NEW IDEAS: INSPIRATION BEYOND RECONSTITUTION

The rich history of the Western art music canon can be difficult to escape, and formal study demands an understanding of what has come before, whether to continue evolving or to break free completely. Each of the works presented today make gestures to their predecessors, taking inspiration from masters of the past and using these forms to propel new ideas into existence.

**Carl Nielsen's Wind Quintet, op. 43**, is a fine example of the neo-classical refinement of Western art music styles the turn of the twentieth century brought with it. In his early years the Danish composer was a deeply conservative composer, imitating Viennese classical forms and working within the rules of what had come before even more fastidiously than their originators. Though Nielsen admits to the rigidity of his early output, the models used established a technical mastery of the craft that underpins the freer expression and tonal adventurousness of his later output, including this Wind Quintet.

Nielsen is best known abroad for his six symphonies, and at home in Denmark for his vocal music and his opera *Maskarade*. From his formalist beginnings, Nielsen became a compositional parallel to Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) and Charles Ives (1874-1954) in his stretching of diatonic boundaries to the very borders of what can be considered tonal. His gift for melodies and a strong understanding of counterpoint and voice leading allowed harmonic and rhythmic elements freedom to embody Nielsen's unique language.

The structure of the Wind Quintet mirrors Classical composers in its formality: the first movement, *Allegro ben moderato*, unfolds in sonata form, introducing, deconstructing and eventually re-stating two themes; a dancing menuet serves as the middle movement, complete with a trio section; and a final *Theme and variations* is prefaced with a fiery *Prelude*. Throughout the Quintet, Nielsen plays with the pairings of instruments, encouraging dialogue between the players. Nielsen wrote the Quintet for the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, who workshopped the piece as it was being written, and interviews suggest a warm and amicable relationship between musicians and composer, further encouraging this playfulness and dialogue.

The *Theme and variations* were immediately the best-received part of the work, treating a hymn tune of Nielsen's own to virtuosic variations across the five voices. Nielsen had initially struggled with the voicing, and it was only after hearing the cor anglais in Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, op. 14, that he had the inspiration to have the oboe play this auxiliary instrument and, with its lower register, provide the richer sound Nielsen needed.

**Sebastian Fagerlund's Octet** is given the title *Autumn Equinox*, linking it to his opera *Höstsonaten* (*Autumn Sonata*) composed at the same time, sharing its sound world and at times making quotations from it. Written for the 2017 Delft Chamber Music Festival, artistic director and violinist Liza Ferschtman envisaged the octet alongside Schubert's (D. 803) for the same novel collection of instruments – a string quartet augmented with double bass, clarinet, bassoon and horn.

Fagerlund was initially "almost overwhelmed" by the instrumentation and possibilities, before leaning into the "inspiring" musicianship of Ferschtman and the musicians of the premiere performance, which included Christoffer Sundvqist. Sundqvist and Fagerlund have been working together since 1997, and Fagerlund's Clarinet Concerto (2006) was commissioned for Sundqvist. Leaning into the clarinettist's virtuosity mirrors the Schubert Octet's own conception, which was commissioned by the talented amateur clarinettist Count Ferdinand von Troyer. Both works find themselves propelled by virtuosic lines on the naturally melodic instrument.

*Autumn Equinox* embraces a dynamic and rhythmic character, charged with overlapping lines and repeating figures which collide through the first movement. Fragments pass between instruments as the texture increases to a frenetic atmosphere, with feathered entries between the woodwinds creating a seamless shift between their colours. The slower second movement is a reflective breath, concluding with a direct quotation from *Autumn Sonata*. The final movement returns to the hasty energy of the first, with an incessant triplet ostinato giving way to overlapping scales across the ensemble.

**Antonín Dvořák's Serenade for Winds, op. 44**, finishes our program as another intersection of influences, through which Dvořák's burgeoning Czech character emerges. At the time the Serenade was written, Dvořák's compositional fortunes were beginning to turn, in large part thanks to the efforts of friend Johannes Brahms.

In 1877, Dvořák had already written five operas, five symphonies and further chamber and orchestral works, supporting himself financially working as an organist, violinist and piano teacher. However, exhibitions of his works were limited to Bohemia, the lands of the Czech peoples then under the control of Austria-Hungry and eventually, after innumerable atrocities of the twentieth century, becoming today's Czech Republic. Czech ethnic identity had been repeatedly challenged by successive Austrian efforts to 'Germanise' the area. Though a successful revival of Czech culture saw the championing of Czech language and arts through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the music of the then-Bohemia was seen as inferior to that of the Austrians and Germans.

Living under the last vestiges of the Hapsburg monarchy, Dvořák was able to apply for Austrian state grants to support his compositional activity. He received grants in five successive years (1874-78), four of those with Johannes Brahms on the panel. This was Brahms' introduction to Dvořák's music, and he was immediately impressed, describing Dvořák as: "a very talented man. Moreover, he is poor!" Brahms introduced Dvořák to publisher Fritz Simrock, and when the *Slavonic Dances* were published, Europe was sent into a frenzy. Dvořák's popularity exploded across Europe.

The Serenade was written prior to Dvořák's print debut, but was immediately popular in Prague and was praised by Brahms in a letter to Joseph Joachim, who said of Dvořák: "A more lovely, refreshing impression of real, rich and charming creative talent you can't easily have." The work was inspired by a performance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's own wind serenade, the *Gran Partita*, K. 361, which left such an impression on Dvořák that he completed his Serenade just two weeks after attending the performance.

Dvořák's Serenade uses almost the same instrumentation as Mozart's, a wind ensemble with bass, made richer by Dvořák's addition of a cello. The wind ensemble, also known as a *harmonie*, originated out of village bands, becoming the ensemble of choice in German courts who, lacking the funds for a full orchestra, held a resident ensemble of doubled winds. The works composed for this ensemble tended towards background music for outdoor events until Mozart's *Gran Partita* refused anything less than the full attention of audiences.

Adopting the form of Mozart's *Gran Partita*, Dvořák infuses a pastoral character with Czech folk characteristics. In the footsteps of Bedřich Smetana, Dvořák soon ascended to the status of national composer, incorporating Slavic influences through his works, though never directly quoting folk melodies. Within this nationalism, traditional dance forms and folk-inspired melodies are frequent features. Like the Nielsen, neat pairings of instruments within the ensemble create a dynamic dialogue, with the second movement also featuring a trio. The polka influences the final movement's rhythm, propelling the music forward to a joyous conclusion.

*Program notes written by Alex Owens, ANAM Librarian (Robert Salzer Foundation Music Library)*

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