

## ANAM RECITAL: REUBEN JOHNSON (PIANO)

### Methods of harmony: an exploration into the ordering of tones

FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER 11AM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828) Piano Sonata No. 14 in A Minor, D. 784 (1823) 22'

- i. *Allegro giusto*
- ii. *Andante*
- iii. *Allegro vivace*

Christopher SAINSBURY (b. 1963) *Interrupted Cadence* (2024)^\* 6'

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897) Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56b (1873) 19'

- i. *Theme*
- ii. *Variation 1*
- iii. *Variation 2*
- iv. *Variation 3*
- v. *Variation 4*
- vi. *Variation 5*
- vii. *Variation 6*
- viii. *Variation 7*
- ix. *Variation 8*
- x. *Finale*

Reuben Johnson (QLD) piano

Paavali Jumppanen (ANAM Artistic Director) piano

Matthew Garvie (NSW) piano

*Approximate duration: 60 minutes*

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*Paavali Jumppanen's position of ANAM Artistic Director is generously supported by Janet Holmes à Court AC and John and Rosemary Macleod.*

*\* The 2024 ANAM Set commissions are generously supported by the Australian Government through Creative Australia and the Anthony and Sharon Lee Foundation.*

*^ World Premiere*



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## TWO AND A HALF PIANOS

**Franz Schubert** was, along with Ludwig van Beethoven, a key reason for the rapid development in western music as the style stormed into what we now consider the romantic period. His life was tragic by many accounts – dead at 31; extremely prolific, yet virtually unknown during his life. He would never know the profound impact his music would have on so many people, and the way he would shape the art form. Only once would he give a public performance of his own works. He lived a humble life, studied to become a schoolteacher, an artist in the true sense of the word. Creating beauty and meaning through composition for their own sake, and not for fame, fortune or any other external validation.

Like many of Schubert's works, the A minor sonata is a masterclass in drama and simplicity. Schubert's piano textures often appear sparse on initial reading. However there is a sophistication that reveals itself over time, and with deep consideration. The 'building blocks' of material which make up this piece are almost primitive as well. Take the first movement, a two note, strong-weak/long-short figure forms the basis of the entire movement. Even in the sustained and melodic second theme, this 'sighing' gesture is still present. This happens on a macroscopic level as well; bars, or whole phrases, often take a 'strong-weak' figuration. This movement also gives the impression of being very orchestral, perhaps it even began life as a sketch for a symphony, never completed - rapid changes between solo lines and full tutti chords are often awkward at the piano, and rapid left-hand semiquavers in bass registers seem most suited to a timpani. Nevertheless, the movement is highly effective and contains a few pianistic challenges which need to be managed to create a great sense of poignance and ease.

The Andante is a dialogue between a theme that floats above a tender harmony, and a tortuous figure which develops throughout the movement and often goes to unexpected places. The Finale begins with a triplet theme, with the hands chasing each other up and down the keyboard. They enter in different places to give a sense of rhythmic ambiguity, before joining together in the triple metre.

**Christopher Sainsbury's** *Interrupted Cadence* was commissioned in 2023 as part of this year's ANAM Set Festival. An ambitious project which connected a composer with a final year ANAM musician to collaborate on a new piece for their instrument. Growing up in rural Australia, many of the music facilities and instruments he had access to were from a bygone era. Pianos, particularly, were unmaintained, out of tune, and a far cry from the fine instruments of today's concert halls. "At the time I hated it" Chris told me, but over time he began to look back fondly on these instruments for what they were, and the sounds they made started to become incorporated into his compositional ideas.

There are a lot of pianos in the country like the one you see before you. Indeed, they hail from another era. Before every home had a radio, a television, and a corner of the living room reserved exclusively for TikTok dances - they had a piano. A status symbol, a source of pride, pleasure, entertainment and beauty. A heyday of the piano, now preserved only by these ghostly instruments.

"The piece opens with the birth date of Queen Elizabeth II (because her picture hung in most halls) - a motive which doesn't return, there is a clock-like motive representative of the passing of time and traditions, and conglomerate-type chords made of two or more chords - suggesting that there was always a wrong chord being played by someone in such regional or community settings. As well, near the end are quotes from three short pieces from Schumann's *Kinderszenen* - pieces that were heard in our communities. To suggest our practice habits the first quote is rendered in parallel motion, the second in contrary motion, and the third is harmonized in functional harmony and finishes with an interrupted cadence." (Christopher Sainsbury, score preface)

Written by **Johannes Brahms** in 1873, the *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* is a misleading title, as the theme is unlikely to have been written by Haydn. It was a common practice for publishers to put the name of a famous composer onto the work of someone lesser known, to help sell more copies. This is likely the case here, though regardless it proves as effective material. The initial part, which you will hear twice, is ten bars long - 2 phrase of five, which is rather unusual for a work of its time, and is likely what attracted Brahms's attention to it. The variations take us on an emotional journey, some heroic and others very tender. The work ends with a fugue, starting with a single voice, and building to an exciting apogee, featuring scales and bell like statements of the theme.

*Words by Reuben Johnson*