

ANAM RECITAL: KAREN CHEN (CLARINET)

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER 11AM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Jean FRANÇAIX (1912-1997) Theme and Variations (1974)	9'
<i>i. Theme. Largo cédez moderato</i>	
<i>ii. Variation 1. Larghetto misterioso</i>	
<i>iii. Variation 2. Presto</i>	
<i>iv. Variation 3. Moderato</i>	
<i>v. Variation 4. Adagio</i>	
<i>vi. Variation 5. Tempo di valse</i>	
<i>vii. Cadence</i>	
<i>viii. Variation 6. Prestissimo</i>	
Ross EDWARDS (b. 1943) Binyang (1996)	8'
<i>i. Binyang</i>	
<i>ii. Interior</i>	
Jörg WIDMANN (b. 1973) Fantasie (1993)	8'
Jabra LATHAM (b. 1978) Fire Music (2021)	23'
<i>i. Life</i>	
<i>ii. Fire</i>	
<i>iii. Desolation</i>	
<i>iv. Renewal</i>	

Karen Chen (NSW) clarinet

Berta Brozgul (ANAM Associate Faculty) piano

Steven Bryer (QLD) percussion

Approximate duration: 60 minutes

ABOUT KAREN CHEN

Karen Chen is a versatile clarinetist hailing from Sydney, NSW. Karen completed a Bachelor of Music Performance with a High Distinction average at the Sydney Conservatorium, where she was a recipient of the University of Sydney Academic Merit Prize, Board of Governors' Scholarship and the Corinna Taylor Memorial Prize for the highest marks in a Performance degree. In 2024, Karen commenced her first year at ANAM under the tutelage of David Thomas (Principal Clarinet, MSO). Find out more at anam.com.au/musicians

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PROGRAM NOTES

Jean Françaix wrote *Tema con variazioni* in 1974 on a commission from the Paris Conservatoire, to be used that year as the clarinet department's '*pièce de concours*'. The piece is written in a standard format, opening with the theme followed by six variations, with a clarinet cadenza between variations 5 and 6. The work is filled with technical virtuosity, or in the composer's own words, being "perilous to perform" – showcasing the clarinetist with flourishing passages, quick register changes, flutter tonguing and slap tonguing. The work is almost as equal in difficulty for the pianist, as expected of Françaix, a student of Nadia Boulanger in his early years. Françaix dedicated this work to his grandson, Olivier, and above the first utterance of the theme in the piano, then the clarinet, the word 'O-livier' appears in brackets. The motif starts with three notes, an upward leap followed by a downward one, creating a sing-song tune – how a grandfather might call to his grandson. It is to no surprise that despite this work being a test piece, Françaix knows how to deceive us, and gladly so, with its light-hearted witty character.

Binyang, meaning 'bird' in the language of the Dharug people, was brought to life when **Ross Edwards** heard a "persistent and strikingly melodic" birdcall, from which he derived a scale. Composed in 1996 for Peter Jenkin, the then-Principal clarinetist of the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, the first movement is a light-hearted dance for the clarinet, with increasing interjections by the clapping sticks. The second movement, *Interior*, is in stark contrast with the former. Marked 'calm but intense', the percussionist switches to crotales, establishing an introspective, iridescent colour. At times it almost sounds like a reverse play on the former movement's opening rhythm and birdcall motifs are still heard, this time only more mysteriously distant, albeit with the occasional outcry in the foreground.

Born just a year before *Tema con variazioni* was composed, **Jörg Widmann** has become one of the leading composers of his generation. He was formerly a clarinet and composition professor at the Freiburg Musikhochschule, is currently composition professor at the Barenboim-Said Akademie, as well as Composer in Residence with the Berlin Philharmonic – a close-knitted relationship with the orchestra having performed his works for more than a decade. Widmann composed *Fantasie* in 1993, premiering the work by himself a year later at the age of 21. Inspired by a staple of the clarinet repertoire, Igor Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet* (1919), as well as the theatrical Harlequin figure of the Italian commedia dell'arte, the work features dance, klezmer and jazz elements, intertwined with extended techniques including key clicks, glissandi and a recurring multiphonic. Besides standard notation of rests, Widmann includes invisible bar lines and the intentional differences between a marked comma breath mark, one with a fermata, and a fermata alone by itself. Widmann owes his credo to a quote by Busoni, "Music was born free; and to win freedom is its destiny", reflecting: "Surprise and freedom: these are the concepts that shape my artistic thinking."

Earlier this year, having enjoyed playing **Jabra Latham's** *Solo*, it was wonderful to discover he had written more works for clarinet. Based in Tasmania, Latham has been regularly commissioned, performed and presented by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Musica Viva and ABC Classic. *Fire Music* was collaboratively created with author Marie Heitz in response to the 2018-2019 Tasmanian bushfires. Latham describes that: "Mary envisioned a cycle of life and fire, tracking our native bush environment, the character and destructive power of fire, the devastation following an inferno, and the gradual return to life that is a particular part of the Australian bushfires." The piece was originally conceived for clarinet and string orchestra and was premiered by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra with their Principal clarinetist Andrew Seymour. Having a personal interest in contemporary classical styles, I hear quotes from some of my favourite works including Max Richter's *The Four Seasons Recomposed* and Tan Dun's *Double Bass Concerto*. I am immensely excited to perform this work today, embraced by the beautiful nature at the Convent and the surroundings of Abbotsford.

Written by Karen Chen