

ANAM RECITAL: ALEX TSANG (OBOE)

Exploring the Oboe's Expressive Evolution Through Bach, Mozart, and Dutilleux

THURSDAY 31 JULY 1.30PM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750) Oboe Sonata in G Minor, BWV 1030b (c. 1736) 18'

- i. Andante*
- ii. Siciliano. Largo e dolce*
- iii. Presto*

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791) Oboe Quartet in F Major, K. 370 (1781) 17'

- i. Allegro*
- ii. Adagio*
- iii. Rondo. Allegro*

Marina DRANISHNIKOVA (1916-2013) *Poem* (c. 1953) 7'

Alex Tsang (NSW) oboe #
Daisy Wong (NSW) violin #
Daniel You (alum 2025) viola
Fergus Ascot (VIC) cello #
Liam Furey (NZ) harpsichord #
Daniel Le (ANAM Associate Faculty) piano

Approximate duration: 45 minutes

ABOUT ALEX TSANG

Alex is in his second year at ANAM, under the guidance of Jeffrey Crellin. Alex's dedication to his craft has been shaped by masterclasses abroad with esteemed oboists such as Nick Deutsch, Ivan Podyomov, and Fabian Thouand. These experiences have broadened his artistic perspective and challenged his technical abilities.

Alex is the 2024 Simon Lee Foundation Scholar and is further supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Helen Ballantyne and Milton Robinson, Elida Brereton.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Though perhaps better known in its incarnation for flute and obbligato harpsichord (BWV 1030), **J. S. Bach**'s oboe sonata finds new life in its G minor version for oboe. While debates continue over whether Bach himself transposed the piece or whether this version was created later, the work's character sits astonishingly well on the oboe — its plaintive, singing lines made all the more human through the instrument's voice-like phrasing.

In typical Bach fashion, the sonata marries structural integrity with expressive depth. The first movement, a flowing Andante, weaves dense contrapuntal textures between oboe and keyboard. The second movement, a lively Allegro, showcases rhythmic inventiveness and lightness, while the final Presto is an exuberant fugue bursting with energy.

I was drawn to this sonata not just for its beauty but for the way it invites a conversation between instruments. The obbligato keyboard part is no mere accompaniment; instead, it's a true equal partner. This version has allowed me to approach Bach through the oboe's unique lens: lyrical, earthy, and direct.

Listen for: how the melodic ideas pass fluidly between the oboe and keyboard, and the subtle shifts of mood within the tightly woven counterpoint.

Composed in early 1781 for the virtuoso oboist Friedrich Ramm — whom **W. A. Mozart** greatly admired — the oboe quartet is a sparkling work full of wit, lyricism, and theatrical flair. In many ways, it feels like a miniature opera for oboe and strings: dramatic entrances, conversational interplay, and moments of pure comedic timing.

The opening Allegro is packed with brilliance and agility, demanding both technical precision and charm. The Adagio, by contrast, offers one of the most tender oboe melodies in the repertoire — poised and understated. The Rondeau finale is buoyant and unpredictable, laced with quick changes of character and phrasing that recall Mozart's operatic writing.

This piece has accompanied me since my early chamber music days, and returning to it now feels like meeting an old friend — one who always has something clever to say. It's an ideal showcase for the oboe's dual personality: elegant and cheeky in equal measure.

Listen for: the short, high note (a written C) that occurs repeatedly in the first movement — a famously awkward note for Classical oboists of the time — and how Mozart uses it almost as a joke, pushing Ramm's technique to its limits.

Marina Dranishnikova's *Poem* for oboe and piano is one of those works that feels like it's been hiding in plain sight. Largely forgotten outside Russia for many years, it is now finding new audiences — and deservedly so. Written during the Soviet era, this short, single-movement work blends a late-Romantic sensibility with a distinctly Russian emotional intensity.

The title "Poem" is apt. The piece unfolds like a soliloquy: deeply expressive, at times melancholy, at times yearning. Lush harmonies, sweeping lines, and sudden outbursts of passion give it a rawness that's rare in oboe repertoire. Unlike the refined elegance of the Bach or Mozart, this is music that wears its heart on its sleeve.

My discovery of this work was almost accidental — it came up during a YouTube rabbit hole late one night. But its immediacy struck me instantly. It demands not only breath control and tonal nuance but a willingness to lean into vulnerability. Performing it feels like telling a secret.

Listen for: the way time seems to stretch in the slower sections, and how moments of silence or near-stillness carry as much weight as the music itself.

Why did I program these pieces? Across these three works, I was drawn to how the oboe's voice is transformed — sometimes delicate and formal, sometimes playful, sometimes searingly emotional. Together, they form a kind of emotional arc: from the intellectual depth of Bach, through the operatic brilliance of Mozart, to the introspective poetry of Dranishnikova. Each composer allows the oboe to reveal a different facet of its character, and each piece has shaped how I think about my own voice as a musician.

Words by Alex Tsang