

ANAM RECITAL: OLIVIA KOWALIK (VIOLIN)

High Drama

MONDAY 18 AUGUST 3.30PM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Arvo PÄRT (1935-) *Fratres* (1977) 11'

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750) Violin Partita No. 2 in D Minor, BWV 1004 (c. 1720) 12'
v. *Chaconne*

Samuel BARBER (1910-1981) Violin Concerto, op. 14 (1939) 23'
i. *Allegro*
ii. *Romance. Andante*
iii. *Presto in moto perpetuo*

Olivia Kowalik (NSW) violin

Aidan Boase (ANAM Associate Faculty) piano

Approximate duration: 50 minutes

ABOUT OLIVIA KOWALIK

Olivia is currently in her second year of training at ANAM under the tutelage of Adam Chalabi. Her passion has grown, especially in orchestral playing. She has held principal and associate positions in the Australian Youth Orchestra, Sydney Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra, and L'Estro Armonico String Orchestra, and has recently played with Sydney Philharmonic Orchestra and Ensemble Apex.

Olivia's recent interests in repertoire have included early 20th century music ranging from French impressionism to mid-century Russian music. She also enjoys listening to and playing works by Polish composers, such as Szymanowski and Lutosławski, as a tribute to her Polish heritage.

Olivia is supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Jeanne McMullin, Jeanne and Frank Pleavin, Rosalind Price, Geoff and Margaret Stewart.

Olivia plays a Pressenda 1849 Violin 'Richard Polett' on loan to ANAM from Janet Holmes à Court AC

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PROGRAM NOTES

One of the most mesmerising openings in violin repertoire belongs to **Arvo Pärt's** *Fratres*. The Estonian composer was well established with his modernist, avant-garde presence in his works. It wasn't until a reset in the 1960's, where he began to study early Medieval chants and Renaissance music, that he invented his now most recognised compositional style, *Tintinnabuli* (roughly, 'bells'). Coinciding with his conversion to the Russian Orthodox faith, the emergence of the tintinnabula reimagined an other-worldly spiritual and minimalistic approach to sound, emulating its purity with bell-like resonances.

Fratres ('brothers' in Latin) is Pärt's most well-known work from this era. The main line has 3 voices, each using a tonal sequence derived from selected notes in the D harmonic minor scale. The simmering progression of fluttering arpeggios in the opening drastically disperses into the soft bell-like drones in the piano. The voices diversify in pitch elevation, and each variation searches for a new version of intensity, before gradually cooling down into a timbre that resonates into the heavens.

There is no doubt that there is a connection between *Fratres* and **Johann Sebastian Bach's** chaconne, from the iconic opening, its overstretched dramatic build of the set of variations, to the composer's deep connection to faith in their music. Out of the collection of partitas and sonatas that Bach wrote for solo violin, this fifth and final movement of the second partita constitutionally opened a whole new world in the dramatic potential of the solo violin. Little is known about Bach's intentions in composing these works, but historians speculate that the chaconne was written in a state of grief, after the death of his wife.

The mastery of this fifteen-minute work is expertly described by Johannes Brahms:

"The Chaconne is for me one of the most wonderful, incomprehensible pieces of music. On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and the most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind."

Drama surrounds the origins of **Samuel Barber's** violin concerto. The third movement was deemed "unplayable" before its premiere, yet the first two movements were "elementary" in their virtuosity, according to soloist Iso Briselli. This is the long-rumoured reason as to why he refused to perform it, commonly accepted until recent investigation revealed a slightly different story.

During his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in the 1920s, Barber met the virtuoso Briselli. Barber found much success after graduation and his string-writing abilities, as proven in his *Adagio for Strings*, were no doubt an exceptional display of profound lyricism. In 1939, Barber was offered \$1000 to commission a work for Briselli to play with orchestra to boost his solo violin career. The original remark regarding the concerto's lack of virtuosity may not have come from Briselli — we now believe his violin teacher Albert Meiff made these comments. Meiff believed the work would damage Briselli's reputation and even suggested mentoring Barber to rewrite the final movement. What Meiff's true intentions were may never be known, but this initial critical remark of the work is chiselled into the perception of the piece.

I too have fallen victim to this narrative, having often been told: "Barber's concerto is too easy for you! Choose a different one." My heart insisted that I must play it. Despite the circus act that is the "unplayable" movement, and the highly lush dramatic first two movements, the concerto exhibits some of the most soul-moving melodic writing for the violin and deserves to be recognised as a staple concerto for every violinist to learn.

Words by Olivia Kowalik