

## ANAM RECITAL: ALEX TSANG (OBOE)

## Oboe is "Fun"

WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 4PM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

**Carl Philipp Emanuel BACH (1714-1788)** Sonata in G Minor, H. 549 (1735)

9'

*i. Adagio**ii. Allegro**iii. Theme and Variations. Vivace***Alex Tsang** \* (NSW) oboe**Fergus Ascot** \* (VIC) cello**Francis Atkins** \* (NSW) harpsichord**Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)** *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1914-1917, arr. 1970)

15'

*i. Prélude**ii. Fugue**iii. Menuet**iv. Rigaudon***Emica Taylor** \* (NZ) flute**Alex Tsang** \* (NSW) oboe**Karen Chen** \* (NSW) clarinet**Laura Radajewski** (ACT) bassoon**Madeleine Aarons** \* (NSW) horn**Henri DUTILLEUX (1916-2023)** Oboe Sonata (1940)

11'

*i. Aria. Grave**ii. Scherzo. Vif**iii. Final. Assez allant***Alex Tsang** \* (NSW) oboe**Aidan Boase** (ANAM Associate Faculty) piano**Jeffrey AGRELL (b. 1948)** *Blues for D.D.* (1993)

4'

**Alex Tsang** \* (NSW) oboe**Aidan Boase** (ANAM Associate Faculty) piano*Approximate duration: 50 minutes*

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*Alex is the 2026 Simon Lee Foundation scholar and is further supported by ANAM Syndicate donors Elida Brereton, the late Milton Robinson and Helen Ballantyne.*

*\* Indicates ANAM musicians supported by ANAM Syndicate donors or foundations.*

*This concert features ANAM's harpsichord, funded by Rosemary and the late John Macleod.*

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## OBOE IS “FUN”

This program sends the oboe across three centuries of musical style, from C.P.E. Bach's expressive rhetoric to Ravel's elegant dances, through the shifting colours of Dutilleux, and into the playful jazz-inflected world of Agrell's *Blues for D.D.* — a whistle-stop tour of history, proving the oboe has always had more personality than it gets credit for.

**Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach** occupies a fascinating place in music history, suspended between the intricate architecture of his father's Baroque world and the emotional immediacy that would define Classical style. His music often feels startlingly modern in its unpredictability, full of sudden contrasts, rhetorical pauses, and gestures that seem almost improvised.

This sonata and variation set reveals that restless imagination beautifully. The opening movements balance elegance with quicksilver shifts of mood, while the variations progressively transform a single musical idea into different expressive states. What begins as clarity gradually becomes character study.

I'm especially drawn to how this work treats ornamentation and gesture almost like speech. Every phrase feels as though it is thinking aloud. In performance, that creates an intimacy that feels surprisingly contemporary despite the music's eighteenth-century origins.

**Listen for:** *the way each variation changes the emotional colour of the same material — sometimes through texture, sometimes through articulation, and sometimes through a single harmonic turn.*

**Maurice Ravel's** *Le tombeau de Couperin* is music about memory. Written during the First World War, each movement serves as a tribute to friends Ravel lost in the conflict, yet the piece resists grief in any overt sense. Instead, it transforms remembrance into elegance, grace, and dance. As Ravel famously suggested, the dead are sad enough in their silence.

The title invokes the French Baroque tombeau tradition — a memorial piece, literally translating to 'tomb' — and the reference to Couperin reaches back to the world of French dance suites. Yet this is unmistakably Ravel: crystalline textures, biting harmonic colours, and a sense of nostalgia filtered through modern precision. In Mason Jones' wind quintet arrangement, these qualities become especially vivid. The colours of the five instruments sharpen the contrasts between movements, from the flowing *Prélude* to the earthy brilliance of the *Rigaudon*. What I love about programming this work here is how it mirrors the Bach: both pieces engage directly with older forms, but Ravel's gaze is one of historical memory rather than lived style.

**Listen for:** *how each dance movement retains its courtly outline while the harmonies quietly destabilise the expected elegance.*

Though **Henri Dutilleux's** oboe sonata is an earlier work, it already contains the qualities that would define his mature voice: clarity of structure, meticulous colour, and an obsession with transformation. Written in post-war France, it stands in dialogue with French elegance while refusing easy lyricism.

The first movement unfolds like an aria in the truest sense — a vocal line shaped through long breaths and subtle harmonic unease. The Scherzo then fractures that stillness with mercurial energy, pushing articulation and timing to the forefront. The finale gathers the work's tensions into a line that feels both inevitable and elusive.

This sonata has always fascinated me because it feels like the oboe is constantly negotiating identity: lyrical singer, agile technician, and colouristic instrument all at once. It demands precision, but what makes it rewarding is the way every technical demand serves a shift in atmosphere.

**Listen for:** *the way motifs reappear transformed across the three movements, as though the piece is remembering itself.*

**Jeffrey Agrell's** *Blues for D.D.* closes the recital with a complete change of atmosphere. After the refined worlds of Bach, Ravel, and Dutilleux, this short work invites the oboe into a looser, more vernacular language: slides, inflections, rhythmic flexibility, and the unmistakable expressive pull of the blues.

What makes this piece such a satisfying ending is its refusal to treat classical and jazz idioms as opposites. Instead, it feels like a reminder that the oboe is capable of far more than the polished sound we often associate with it. Here, it becomes smoky, conversational, and deeply human.

I wanted the recital to end not with closure, but with a wink: a final reminder that musical history is never linear. After centuries of stylistic evolution, we arrive somewhere improvisatory, almost casual, yet still connected to everything that came before.

**Listen for:** *the tension between written structure and the illusion of spontaneous improvisation.*

Words by Alex Tsang