

# ANAM RECITAL: ANDREW FONG (CLARINET)

Wednesday 5 June 1pm

**BRAHMS** Clarinet Trio in A minor, op. 114

**BERG** *4 Pieces for clarinet and piano*, op. 5

**HAKOLA** *Diamond Street*

**BAX** Sonata for clarinet and piano

**Andrew Fong QLD** clarinet

**Caleb Wong NSW** cello

**Peter de Jager** piano

When planning a recital, I (as many have before me) endeavour to find a uniting theme, neatly tying works together to create a cohesive experience. However, after the arduous task of selecting repertoire that provide both the audience and yourself with some meaningful experience, you often end up with a half-eaten-trifle-like mishmash of works. So this year when faced with this all too familiar situation the solution was found in my biography; written two years ago and slightly neglected since. I found it rather fitting that my final recital at ANAM (and possibly in Melbourne) should be a condensed and distilled selection of music that I've grown to love through playing the clarinet.

When gifted the opportunity to collate a self-indulgent wish list of my dearest works and styles the **Brahms** Trio was the work I immediately included. I can't think of a piece that is simultaneously more beautifully simple and emotion-inducing in every line and harmony. It was written in the final years of Brahms' life where he was about to retire from composition; writing to a friend that he "had achieved enough; here I had before me a carefree old age and could enjoy it in peace." Thankfully he discovered the playing of Richard Mühlfeld, a clarinetist at the Meiningen orchestra. This encounter revived his will to compose and resulted in the Clarinet Quintet, two Clarinet Sonatas and of course the Trio; all of which have become core works of the clarinet repertoire. In fact, Brahms was so taken by Mühlfeld's playing that he referred to him as his *Fräuline Klarinette* or 'his dear nightingale'. At the premiere of the work (with Brahms on Piano, Mühlfeld on clarinet and Robert Hausmann on Cello) Adolf Menzel, said to Brahms that it seemed as if "the Muse himself appeared in person for the purpose of executing a certain woodwind part." I remember Howard Penny saying that "you never forget your first *Quartet for the End of Time*." I believe the same thing is true for the Brahms Trio, even if only for the clarinetist (although having to work with a clarinetist is not an experience one forgets easily). As such I'd like to thank Jason Lim and Yun Mi Oh for the opportunity to experience this work for the first time five years ago.

Now not all the programming in this recital comes from a place of self-indulgence. My brilliant mentor and teacher David Thomas suggested **Berg's** *Four Pieces for clarinet and piano* should follow the Trio as a sort of 'what comes next'. In music history an emerging period or style tends to coalesce in reaction to the most prevalent style or period of the day. This is no different with the phenomenon of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School, reacting to the legacy of high-romantic composers like Wagner, Mahler and Brahms. The *Four Pieces* are typical of Berg's compositions

featuring a relatively sparse texture and most apparently a very brief duration. Typically, music of this style doesn't spark my interest. However, I found there to be a great deal of expression and character in each immaculately detailed gesture, giving the feeling that every last drop of ink is there for a reason. In my eyes the *Four Pieces* and the Brahms Trio share this extraordinary trait. What makes the Berg special was described perfectly by David a week and a day before this recital. "There can be as much music and emotion in three notes of the Berg as sixteen bars of the Brahms."

Now what would a recital by Andrew Fong be if it didn't contain an obligatory jazz or klezmer inspired work. In 2017 there was David Bruce's *Gumboots*, in 2018 the Horowitz Sonata and Martinu's *La Revue de Cuisine* (two in one year, it must have been a good recital) and this year is no different with Kimmo **Hakola's** *Diamond Street*. Honestly, I couldn't find very many notes about this work apart from three facts: It exists, sounds great, and the sheet music has a very stylish front cover.

The last part of my love letter to the clarinet concerns English Clarinet music and a very special clarinettist. The first work of this type that I grew to love is the Gerald Finzi Clarinet Concerto which I first performed only two years ago. The following year I was looking for one last work to fill out my recital. While listening to Arthur Benjamin's *Tombeau de Ravel* off Michael Collins' album *British Clarinet Sonatas, Vol. 2*, I stumbled upon the Horowitz Clarinet sonata which would then go on to open my 2018 recital. Since 2011 when I first played for him, Michael has been an incredibly inspiring mentor and a significant reason as to why I play on Yamaha CSG Clarinets. During his trip this year I was relaying the story of last year's recital to him and asked for suggestions for this recital. What I received from him were some mostly unknown and slightly odd works, none of which are included in this recital. However, the thought was still appreciated and what I believe to be the best recording of the **Bax** Clarinet Sonata exists on his *British Clarinet Sonatas, Vol. 1* album. Again, I have to thank David Thomas for introducing this work to me. The first movement is saturated with the beauty of unrequited yearning that remains unresolved until the final bar. The second and final movement starts virtuosically with a scherzando theme and flashy passagework. This is followed by the lyrical melodies you'd expect of a British clarinet sonata. Approaching the coda, we hear the theme of the first movement that dies away to a quiet, contented close. A fitting ending to a final recital.

I'd like to thank every individual that has made my experience at ANAM and with music what it was, whether you be the musicians that I performed alongside in countless concerts, the staff that do the real work ensuring things actually happen in this building (and reminding me that I haven't shown up to classes), my wonderful and inspiring mentors that have taught me more than just music, the kind security guards who I never quite have enough time to talk to, and you the audience. Congratulations and thank you for making it to the end of these avant-garde program notes.

Andrew Fong