

## La Belle Alliance

### PROGRAMME

*Sonata in A major for Violin and Keyboard, BWV 1015*

*J.S. Bach  
(1685-1750)*

*(Andante)*

*Allegro assai*

*Andante un poco*

*Presto*

Bach wrote the six sonatas for Violin and Keyboard between 1717 and 1723, while serving as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold in Cöthen, along with the Suites for Cello Solo plus Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo. Bach had a penchant for addressing one genre at a time, working through every possibility it presented. He broke new ground in these sonatas for violin and keyboard by substituting a cembalo concertante for the standard basso continuo consisting of gamba or cello and harpsichord. This innovation makes the right hand of the keyboard free to engage in contrapuntal dialogue with the violin, rather than just supplying chords, creating the model that Mozart, Beethoven and others followed. The four movements in alternating tempi follow the form of a 'sonata da chiesa' or 'church sonata'. The contrapuntal devices of imitation and canon result in a soulful, meditative air in the slow movements, then high energy and excitement in the quicker ones where motifs and passagework scurry back and forth between the three parts--the left hand, right hand and violin.

*Sonata in F Major for Violin and Piano (1838)*

*Mendelssohn  
(1809-1847)*

*Allegro vivace*

*Adagio*

*Assai vivace*

Although Felix Mendelssohn mentioned the Sonata in F Major for violin and piano in a list of newly completed works in 1838, the youthful, high-spirited work was only brought to light and published in 1953. Its outer movements burble along with light, spirited effervescence, framing a middle movement of solemn, lyric beauty. Especially worthy of notice are the many similarities in composition between this sonata and Mendelssohn's beloved violin concerto, beginning with the inclusion of a simple triad as part of the rising, opening theme. A more noticeable feature occurs at the end of the development on the cusp of the recapitulation. It is at this point that the composer inserted his cadenza in the concerto—a innovative idea that achieved organic unity in the movement by that one stroke. In the sonata, at the same point, the violin busily scurries up and down the finger-board whilst the piano reintroduces fragments from the opening theme underneath, propelling both instruments to the joyous arrival of the recapitulation. The poised Adagio which follows demonstrates Mendelssohn's marvellous melodic gifts. A recitativo/cadenza-like episode roils the calm for contrast before the opening melody returns, reformatted as a dialogue between violin and piano. A whirlwind of perpetual motion serves as the closing movement. Listen for a quasi canon section when the left hand of the piano (with the indication *buffo*—joking or comic) plays a slowed-down version of the theme with great self importance! A giddy coda summons the final cadence with every last byway of semiquaver passagework in F Major thoroughly explored.

**INTERVAL**

*Etude No. 11, Harmonies du soir*  
*from the Transcendental Etudes (1852)*

*Liszt*  
*(1811-1886)*

Liszt's *Harmonies du soir* is a study in chords and tone painting with the palette of colours we associate with French impressionism. A distant, deep bell at the opening suggests an alpine valley shrouded in the purple-blue hues of twilight. Outlines of a granite cathedral begin to appear—a hallucination or a revelation? As in Debussy's *Sunken Cathedral*, the listener is swept away by a powerful flood of sound that creates a grand edifice in the mind's eye and ear.

*Meditation for Violin and Piano, Op. 133 (2008)*

*Anthony Ritchie*  
*(b.1960)*

Anthony Ritchie's *Meditation* takes an ancient Chinese poem as its point of departure, a text that focuses on Nature and its relationship to humans. The music spontaneously expresses thoughts of Nature and beauty, using simple ideas based around pentatonic modes, repeated ostinati, and a mixture of long melodic lines and shorter motifs. The piece is in three main sections, slow-faster-slow, played without a break. It was commissioned by La Belle Alliance for their concert celebrating the opening of the Dunedin's Chinese Gardens.

*Flight of the Albatross (1980)*

*Larry Pruden*  
*(1925-1982)*

Larry Pruden's short piece is based on a score he composed for a National Film Unit nature documentary *Royal Albatross* (1970). Violinist Tania Dysett requested this piece "using the simple pictorial element and sense of immediacy that portrays the pattern of movements of the bird wheeling and soaring over the illimitable sea". Robert Hoskins also writes: "Pruden ... rehearsed [the work] with Tania Dysett, who remembers that he chiefly wanted the piece to be rhythmically flexible, 'as if to capture differing wing positions'; he also insisted that the music must 'soar up'...*Flight of the Albatross* was Pruden's final work before the onset of terminal cancer"

*Dragon Lantern Dance (1953)*

*Ma Sicong  
(1912-1987)*

Ma Sicong, or Ma Sitson, is one of China's most famous violinists and composers. He went to Paris as a boy to study music and returned to China in 1929, quickly rising to national prominence. He was eventually made the President of the Central Institute of Music in Peking (Beijing). Leaving China in 1967 to seek refuge in the USA, it was only in 2007 that he was 'repatriated', his ashes and manuscripts returned to China. His collected works have only just been published for the first time. Ma Sicong's folk-like melodies and idiomatic use of the violin's resources demonstrated in these works are at once culturally evocative and universal in their exuberance.

*Tambourin Chinois (1910)*

*Fritz Kreisler  
(1875-1962)*

Austrian-born Fritz Kreisler, an award-winning violinist as a young boy, ceased violin tuition at the tender age of 12! His playing was characterized by a particularly sweet vibrato and elegant bowing style still admired today. Tambourin Chinois, a bon-bon savoured by concert violinists and audiences, is inspired by the hustle and bustle of a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco, although the middle section wafts from the coffee shops of Vienna.

## LA BELLE ALLIANCE

**Tessa Petersen** grew up in Dunedin, New Zealand. She studied with Pamela Bryce-Dowsett at the University of Otago, won numerous prizes, and led the New Zealand Youth Orchestra. She was awarded a British Commonwealth Scholarship that took her to London to study with Levon Chilingirian at the Royal College of Music. Ms. Petersen went on to play and tour with leading chamber orchestras in England. After marrying American pianist John Van Buskirk in 1993, Ms. Petersen moved to Northeast America, where she was in demand as an orchestral player, chamber player, concertmaster, recitalist and teacher in New York and throughout New England. She has participated in the Aldeburgh Music Festival in the UK, as well as various music festivals in the USA. Tessa is currently Lecturer in Violin at the University of Otago.

**John Van Buskirk**, a versatile pianist referred to by the NY Times as “sensitive and assertive”, has a broad experience of music both as an academic and as a practical discipline. He has played from Los Angeles and New York to Budapest, from Prince Edward Island to the Netherland Antilles as a recitalist, chamber music player and recital partner to singers and instrumentalists. A graduate of the Eastman School of Music and the Juilliard School, he completed post-graduate study at the Liszt Academy in Budapest. He has performed in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and Wigmore Hall; also for radio broadcast in the US and the UK. Mr. Van Buskirk’s prolific recordings include those made as a member of the New York Chamber Symphony and the Harmonie Ensemble among others; his solo recordings include Music of Robert Schumann, The Art of the Fortepiano and Songs of Robert Schumann, with Jane Bryden. Since relocating to Dunedin, John Van Buskirk has adjudicated IRMT competitions, tutored at the University of Otago and is an examiner for the New Zealand Music Examinations Board. In addition to concerts of La Belle Alliance, he has performed with such well-known New Zealand artists as Terence Dennis, Dame Malvina Major, Edith Salzman, Alexa Still and Deborah Wai-Kapohe.