

PROGRAMME



TAURANGA MUSICA
2012
concert series

John Chen

John Chen began his piano studies at the age of three. He studied with Rae de Lisle for 11 years, gaining a Master of Music degree from the University of Auckland by the time he was 18. He won his first piano competition at the age of nine, and over the subsequent years was successful in a number of national competitions. He made his official orchestral debut aged 15, performing Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. John remains the youngest-ever winner of the prestigious Sydney International Piano Competition, having captured that prize and special prizes for best performance of works by Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Chamber Music, and the 19th/20th Century Concerto at the age of 18. His Sydney win came close on the heels of his first-prize in the Third Lev Vlassenko Australasian Piano Competition in Brisbane the year before, a competition where he also swept all the special prizes.

In the years since, John has become one of the very few worldwide, whose career has matched its auspicious competition beginnings. He has performed in New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, USA and Germany. In 2006 he completed a tour of 31 Australian cities, which holds the record for the longest Australian tour ever undertaken by a classical musician. The same year he toured 14 New Zealand cities with Chamber Music New Zealand. Last year he was the featured soloist of the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra tour to Japan, and earlier this year toured with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra on their Chinese New Year celebration concerts.

John is based in Hamburg, where between recitals and touring he is working towards his doctorate in piano performance at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

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John Chen, piano



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Sonata No 18 in F Major, K 533 /494

Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Allegro

Andante

Rondo: Andante

This sonata was published in 1790 by his friend F A Hoffmeister and although the public readily approved the work Mozart had bluffed them just a little. In 1788, shortly after returning from the premiere of *Don Giovanni* in Prague, Mozart wrote two movements of a piano sonata, an *Allegro* and *Andante*. To these he added a *Rondo* (K 494) that he had composed two years earlier. Musicologist Alfred Einstein explains this by stating that Mozart "owed Hoffmeister money at the time and doubtless partly acquitted the debt with this sonata."

The *Allegro* opens with an unharmonized right-hand theme that seems to be a fugue subject in itself. Yet the movement is in sonata form, and soon an agreeable second subject arrives, flowing easily along its triplet rhythms. In the development section that the tonality darkens and the rhythms of the two themes are extended contrapuntally through a range of unexpected tonalities.

The *Andante* is in Bb Major, but there is hardly a bar in that key. With its unexpected and cumulative dissonant suspensions this music is so daring in its harmonic language that it can surprise audiences even today.

Einstein labeled the *Rondo* "innocent" in relation to the first two movements which he said were written for "an entirely different and more powerful instrument". Originally written for one of Mozart's students, it is set high on the keyboard giving a music-box quality. Yet Mozart did not simply add this movement onto his sonata, he re-wrote it to match the gravity of what had gone before. Mozart's revision in 1788 includes an intense central episode in F minor, as well as a contrapuntal cadenza which leads to a mysterious ending low in the piano's bass register.

Sonata in F minor, Op 24 No 1

George Enescu (1881-1955)

Allegro molto moderato e grave

Presto vivace

Andante molto espressivo

A national hero in his native Romania, Enescu was a distinguished violinist, conductor and teacher, and could have made a highly successful career at any one of those, but it was composition that he chose. He studied at the Vienna conservatory until 1894, when at the age of 13 he was regarded as a fully formed virtuoso, and then went on to the Paris Conservatory for further violin tuition, and to study composition with Dubois, Massenet and Fauré. This mixture of late Romantic German and French training helped give his music its distinctive quality. Many of Enescu's works were also influenced by Romanian folk music.

Enescu's models were the French impressionists, but his unique voice has a complexity alien to French music. Sonata No 1, written in 1924, has constantly shifting harmonies, and its rhythmic irregularities and improvisatory character display a close affinity to Romanian folk music. Although in sonata form, the work has an episodic character which generates swift changes of mood. It is an extraordinary piece that copies no school and constantly surprises the listener. The first movement is an exploratory unpredictable piece on a large scale, often harsh and almost menacing. The following *Presto* has an engagingly dry, quirky sense of humour.

The tolling repeated notes that underpin the atmospheric *Finale* call to mind 'Le gîbet' from Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*, but without the sinister overtones – Enescu later said that he was aiming to evoke Romania's wide-open spaces at night.

INTERVAL

From the Mountains to the River

Dorothy Buchanan (b1945)

Dorothy Buchanan has had a long career as a composer and in music education. She became New Zealand's first composer-in-schools and has been a guest lecturer, adjudicator, musical director, advisor to teacher support services, an assessor with Creative New Zealand panels and president of the Composers' Association of New Zealand. In 2001 she was made an ONZM for a lifetime's involvement in music.

This work was inspired by *The Scene* from *Arawata Bill* by New Zealand poet Denis Glover. Originally one of three vocal works composed for Burnside High School chorale in the 1970s, it was later rewritten as a piano solo. The opening stanzas of the poem set the mood: "Mountains muzzle mountains / White-bearded rock-fronted / In perpetual drizzle. / Rivers swell and twist / Like a torturer's fist / Where the maidenhair / Falls of the waterfall / Sail through the air."

Fantasia in C Op 17

Schumann (1810 – 1856)

Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen; Im Legenden-Ton

- Mässig. Durchaus energisch

- Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten.

The piece has its origin in early 1836, when Schumann composed a piece entitled *Ruines* expressing his distress at being parted from his beloved Clara Wieck (later to become his wife). This later became the first movement of the *Fantasia* and is rhapsodic and passionate. Later that year, he wrote two more movements, the middle movement (in E flat) is a grandiose rondo based on a majestic march, with episodes that recall the emotion of the first movement; and the finale is slow and meditative.

Schumann created the work as a contribution to the appeal for funds to erect a monument to Beethoven in his birthplace, Bonn. He offered it to the publisher Kistner, suggesting that 100 presentation copies could be sold to raise money for the monument. Other contributions to the Beethoven monument fund included Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses*.

The original title of Schumann's work was "Obolen auf Beethovens Monument: Ruinen, Trophaen, Palmen, Grosse Sonate f.d. Piano f. Für Beethovens Denkmal". Kistner refused, and Schumann tried offering the piece to Haslinger in January 1837. When Haslinger also refused, he offered it to Breitkopf & Härtel in May 1837. The movements' subtitles were removed before they eventually issued the *Fantasia* in May 1839, with a dedication to Franz Liszt.

The Beethoven monument was eventually completed, due mainly to the efforts of Liszt, who paid 2,666 thaler, the largest single contribution. It was unveiled in grand style in 1845, the attendees including Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and many other dignitaries and composers, but not Schumann, who was ill.

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Love's Nature

Saturday 8 September, Tauranga Park Auditorium, 3.00pm