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Tauranga Musica

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**Chamber Music**  
New Zealand



# SYLVIA JIANG

Gareth Farr    The Horizon from Owhiro Bay

Kenneth Young    A Time and Place There Was

George Walker    Piano Sonata No.2, 1<sup>st</sup> Movement

Frédéric Chopin    Piano Sonata No.2 in B-flat minor, Op.35

— *Interval* —

George Gershwin    Three Preludes

Gao Ping    'Nostalgia' from *Distant Voices*

Sergei Prokofiev    Piano Sonata No.7 in B-flat major, Op.83

X Space, Baycourt, Tauranga

Sunday 21st July 2024, 4.00pm

## THE MUSIC

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When I left New Zealand at the age of 18 to move to New York City for further studies, I was full of optimism and excitement. Now ten years later (armed with perhaps a slightly different sense of optimism and excitement) I'm thrilled to present a programme that reflects not only my journey thus far, but the person that I am becoming. This programme is an eclectic blend of sounds both old and new, with a particular New Zealand and American flair.

**Gareth Farr (b. 1968)** – The Horizon from Owhiro Bay

**Kenneth Young (b. 1955)** – A Time and Place There Was

**George Walker (1922-2018)** – Piano Sonata No.2, I. *Theme and Variations*

The Journey begins with a trio of New Zealand and American composers, each highlighting a different journey and compositional point of view. Native Wellingtonian Gareth Farr is known for his spectacular percussion masterpieces, and brings his mastery of sounds to the piano in order to depict the view from outside his home of beautiful Owhiro Bay. In this piece, Farr takes us on the sonic journey of a wave – slowly rising on the horizon, slowly gaining momentum as it reaches shore before crashing onto the beach then reabsorbing back into the ocean.

Comparatively, whilst Invercargillite Kenneth Young also utilizes the sounds of Aotearoa through his mimic of bird cry as the main motif of the piece, *A Time and Place There Was* is more so based upon a feeling of nostalgia and a yearning for the simplicity of a bygone era. This piece is dedicated to Young's mentor Douglas Lilburn so perhaps more simply this expresses the yearning of times shared with a friend.

As the first African-American man to win the Pulitzer Prize for composition, George Walker overcame the many trials of a systemically racist system to find recognition and success in the classical music field. The first movement of his second Piano Sonata is approached with almost a pure early 20<sup>th</sup> Century compositional vigor, and yet there is an underlying sense of volatile play as if the notes vibrate and pull *slightly* against one another whilst placed in strict musical form.

**Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)** – Piano Sonata No.2 in B-flat minor, Op.35

- I. *Grave – Doppio movimento*
- II. *Scherzo*
- III. *Marche funèbre: Lento*
- IV. *Finale: Presto*

Described by Schumann as one of the most disturbing pieces he'd ever heard, the shocking fourth movement has been overshadowed in modern times by the popularity of the third movement "Funeral march". Yet the joys and genius of this Sonata is in the construction and originality of each of the four movements. The first (*Grave – Doppio movimento*) is filled with angst, tenderness, and longing – a formidable yet somewhat typical opening for a Piano Sonata. The second movement (*Scherzo*) follows with a dance-

like rhythmic opening and quietly soulful second theme. The third movement is where Chopin begins to experiment, with a clear programmatic attempt to his *Marche funèbre* (funeral march), going against the convention of a Classical sonata. The final movement (*Finale: Presto*) is not a melodious, dramatic conclusion as one might expect of a work of this scale. Instead, Chopin describes this movement as the chattering after a funeral and creates an ending that is both sinister and unexpected.

—INTERVAL—

### **George Gershwin (1898-1937)** – Three Preludes

- I. *Allegro ben ritmato e deciso*
- II. *Andante con moto*
- III. *Agitato*

A monumental figure in what we know of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century American classical sound, Gershwin found his popularity by bringing the popular sounds of American songbook, Jazz, and Rag to Classical instruments and compositional form. Critics will say that there is nothing progressive compositionally about his music, and whilst it is hard to argue this particular point, it is impossible to deny that Gershwin's music brings audiences a remarkable amount of joy, sparkle, and a sense of fun. These three short pieces offer a taste of the many popular music influences of the time and transports us to a New York City bustling with jazz clubs and dance halls.

### **Gao Ping (b. 1970)** – 'Nostalgia' from *Distant Voices*

Chinese-New Zealander Gao Ping shares a similar journey to mine, also having traversed to America to further his compositional and piano studies. A former professor at the University of Canterbury and Waikato University, Gao composed *Nostalgia* in his college days in Cincinnati. In his own words, this piece was inspired by the rain falling outside his practice room window, reminding him of his childhood in China, and fueling a burning sense of homesickness.

### **Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)** – Piano Sonata No.7 in B-flat major, Op.83

- I. *Allegro inquieto*
- II. *Andante caloroso*
- III. *Precipitato*

Prokofiev is considered one of the defining figures of 20th Century piano composition, and yet he did so under the duress of a Stalin regime that considered Classical music to be a crowning jewel of Soviet cultural prowess. As a result, it is difficult for us now to truly know a composer's true feelings towards the regime as all music was highly censored. Yet, entitled the second of three "War Sonatas", it is clear that Prokofiev felt a sense of profound grief and depicts a militaristic volatility throughout this sonata. In the second movement, he begins with a mournful yet beautiful melody, which inevitably also descends into madness in the second theme.

## THE ARTIST

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Hailed by critics as a 'gifted young pianist of genuine substance' and 'New Zealand's most notable young emerging pianist', Sylvia Jiang's performances have delighted audiences across the globe. She was inducted as a member of the Astral Artists roster after being named as a winner in their 2023 Competition and was the sole recipient of Peabody Conservatory's Artist Diploma Award in her cohort. Sylvia's performances have been featured on BBC News, TV3, ABC Australia, Radio New Zealand Concert, Māori Television, and other notable news networks and publications. Over the years, she has won numerous top prizes at national and international level competitions including the prestigious Hastings International, Music Academy of the West, Astral Artist, Kerikeri, Lev Vlassenko, and Wallace National Piano Competitions. Sylvia currently studies with Richard Goode and Yong Hi Moon and is a graduate of the Juilliard School.

As an avid soloist, Sylvia has performed with numerous international orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic, Auckland Philharmonia, Queensland Symphony, and Juilliard Chamber Orchestras. She has performed extensively in Australasia, Europe, Asia, and North America at venues such as Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center, the Concert Hall at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington DC, the Banff Center in Canada, and The Morgan Library in New York City. As a keen Collaborator, Sylvia is particularly interested in multi-disciplinary collaborative work and currently serves as the Artistic Director and co-founder of non-profit organization *Muffin Music*. She was invited to be a featured soloist in The Kennedy Center's *Ballet Across America* with Dance Theatre of Harlem and Miami City Ballet where she worked with choreographer Pam Tanowitz on a new commission combining both dance companies.

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