

Presented by
Tauranga Musica

in partnership with
Chamber Music
New Zealand

Menzies/ Endres DUO



Franz Schubert Rondo in B minor "Rondo Brilliant"
Alfred Schnittke Violin Sonata No 2 (quasi una sonata)
Salina Fisher Mono no aware (物の哀れ)
—interval—
Ludwig van Beethoven Sonata No 9, op 47 "Kreutzer"

Graham Young Youth Theatre

Sunday 25th June 2023, 4.00pm

THE MUSIC

The sensation of playing Schubert's *Rondo in B minor*, is intense. Sometimes referred to as "Rondo brilliant", the piece was written in 1826 to provide virtuosic repertoire for the Czech violinist Josef Slavík: this substantial composition challenges both the virtuosic and soulful player with the violin and piano parts equally an exhilarating ride.

This is no doubt partly thanks to the creative challenge Schubert set himself: audaciously, the main theme of this Rondo is an obvious reference to the first movement of Beethoven's Kreutzer sonata—the piece which will end this programme. Schubert takes this arresting idea to create a spacious and elaborate Rondo in a way which stands in stark contrast to the taut obsessiveness of Beethoven's first movement.

References to other composer's music is at the heart of Schnittke's epic *Violin Sonata No 2 (quasi una sonata)*. Even this title is a riff on Beethoven's practice to call some of his piano sonatas *quasi una fantasia*—with Beethoven suggesting a liberation of expressive form from classical-era formalities and enabling the pursuit of expressive choices generated by their own terms.

Late twentieth century music had an abundance of expressive choices, so the message communicated in Schnittke's *quasi una sonata* title points to the opposite of Beethoven's idea: a kind of titanic struggle to contain the various expressive choices—and they are indeed expressively varied!—into a disciplined structure. Trying to put the expressive genie back into the bottle...

One way to view Schnittke's piece is to say it repeatedly, and spectacularly fails to achieve this goal. It's various conclusions, as well as it's outrageous denouement (the pianist hammers 114 repetitions of a G minor chord while the violin desperately tries to regain 'proper' protocol of musical development) release a symphonic-level of intensity, as if the very duo ensemble is trying to burst out of a chrysalis-like intimacy, into an elaborate being of much more alien and bizarre appearance and behaviour.

Another, equally valid, way to hear Schnittke's *quasi una sonata* would be as a series of perfectly and distinctly created episodes that cross-reference themselves; in the process, strangely, they don't really develop into an organic whole, almost as if that art of "developmental" composing (think Schubert or Beethoven) is a vestige of a bygone era, inappropriate to the challenge of saying something meaningful to today's world.

Schnittke wrote his *Violin Sonata No 2 (quasi una sonata)* in 1968 for the violinist Mark Lubotsky and pianist Lybov Yedlina and it is dedicated to them.

Salina Fisher's *Mono no aware* offers us a meditative reprieve from the intensities of the Schnittke and Schubert first half pieces. Salina writes:

"Mono no aware (物の哀れ) is a Japanese concept that refers to the transience of existence, and a melancholic appreciation that accompanies this. Perhaps most commonly associated with mono no aware is the ephemeral beauty of cherry blossoms, the appeal of which is heightened by an awareness of their fragility and inherent impermanence. Accepting this impermanent and uncertain nature of life

helps us to recognise the beauty of fleeting moments, and of change. This piece reflects on my relationship with this concept during a time of significant change in my life.”

Mono no aware was written in 2019 for the cellist Matthew Barley and pianist Stephen De Pledge with the version for viola and piano created in 2020.

In sketches for the *Kreutzer* sonata, Beethoven titles the piece as ‘Sonata per il Pianoforte ed uno violino obbligato in uno stile molto concertante come d’uun concerto’—essentially creating a new form where both instruments are playing music written in a “high” (meaning highly virtuosic) concerto style. Completely blowing out of the water the idea that a violin sonata was an intimate, chamber music affair.

What must be also noted in this sketchbook title is a stylistic reality of this time: what we call a violin sonata these days was called a piano sonata with an “attached” obligato violin part in Mozart and Beethoven’s day. With the arresting start of the *Kreutzer* sonata—the violin plays an unaccompanied phrase, answered by the piano—a shift in the role of the violin is obvious and it is no longer an attached supplement to a piano solo. (By the twentieth century the model had leaned in very much the other direction: a violin sonata programmed in a recital would appear to be a “star” violin soloist performing with piano accompaniment).

What follows the audacious *Kreutzer* introduction is an obsessive, driven and exhaustively “developed” first movement; a spacious theme and variations with a transcendent “coda” ending (as if reluctant to leave); and a kind of tarantella, of all things, as a final movement—a perfect way to hurtle towards the exit after so much music and expression has come before it.

Ever the career-maker—after all Beethoven was among one of the first composers to go freelance—the *Sonata Op 47* (Beethoven’s 9th for “piano with violin obbligato”) from 1803 was initially written for the British violinist of African descent George Bridgetower: he premiered the sonata with Beethoven in 1803. He was the original dedicatee, the composer offering more than a suggestion that the violinist’s mixed race inspired a “mixed style” composition, one that, as we have already seen, projects gestures of concerto writing on the intimate genre of duo chamber music.

However, the friendship with Bridgetower was not destined to last, and when the connection was broken Beethoven rededicated the piece—to an even more famous violinist of the day, Rudolph Kreutzer, who, despite the name, was part of the French tradition of violin playing and teaching.

This has led to the designation of the sonata as “the Kreutzer” despite the fact that maestro Kreutzer evidently scorned the composition, certainly never performed it, and whose own compositions and style of playing was about as distant from the highly flammable world of Beethoven’s sonata as one could possibly imagine.

THE ARTISTS

Mark Menzies has established an important, world-wide reputation as a violist and violinist, pianist and conductor. He has been described in the Los Angeles Times as an “extraordinary musician” and a “riveting violinist”. His career as a viola and violin virtuoso, chamber musician and pianist, conductor and advocate of contemporary music, has seen performances in Europe, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and across the United States, including prestigious appearances at New York’s Carnegie Hall, Los Angeles’s Disney Hall and so on.

In February of 2017, Menzies performed the debut of a remarkable series of solo recitals in Los Angeles. Called 4:7 (4-in-the-time-of-7)—four separate solo violin/viola programs in one week, the concerts received considerable critical praise with the *New Classic LA* blog writing “Menzies was in full command”. 4:7 has been since performed in Christchurch (2017), Sacramento (2019), Wellington (2020) and Auckland (2021).

Menzies’ compositions are increasingly played across the globe with recent premieres in The Netherlands, Italy, Los Angeles and Christchurch.

Viola, violin professor and coordinator of conducted ensembles at the California Institute of the Arts, from 1999-2016, where Mark Menzies curated a remarkable series of concerts at REDCAT at Disney Hall in downtown Los Angeles, he moved to New Zealand in 2016 to take up a Professor of Music & Head of Performance position at the University of Canterbury.

German Pianist **Michael Endres** performs worldwide as soloist and chamber music partner. After winning prizes at the Concours Geza Anda (Zurich) and First & Special Prizes at the International Schubert Competition (Germany) among others, he went on to be described by leading US critic Richard Dyer as “one of the most interesting pianists recording today”; the New York Times “the performances with pianist Michael Endres were revelatory” and the Gramophone Magazine stated: “he is an outstanding Schubert interpreter”. Michael Endres plays at festivals in Europe, America and Asia including Newport (USA), Beethoven Fest Bonn and Salzburg Festival, and has performed at the Berlin Philharmonie, Musikverein Vienna and Suntory Hall Tokyo, to name a few.

His extensive prizewinning discography of 29 CD’s includes the prestigious Diapason d’or (France) which he was recently awarded for the third time and the Choc du Musique which he has won twice.

He accompanied legendary Baritone Hermann Prey for many years and partnered the Berlin Philharmonic soloists, the Artemis and Fine Arts String Quartets. He has a distinguished teaching career as Professor of Piano at the Cologne, the Hanns Eisler Hochschule in Berlin, University of Canterbury, New Zealand and since March 2014 the Barrat Due Institute in Norway. He returned to New Zealand in 2019 and is now living with his wife Susan in Rangiora near Christchurch.