

Quek Jun Rui

Oboe Senior Recital



6 May 2024 | 10.30am

**Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music
Concert Hall**

Telemann | Francaix | Deslandres | Britten

Matthew Mak, *piano*

Programme

TELEMANN

Oboe Sonata in E minor, TWV 41:e6

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Grave
- IV. Vivace

FRANCAIX

L'horloge de Flore (Flower Clock)

- I. 3 heures (Galant de Jour)
- II. 5 heures (Cupidon Bleu)
- III. 10 heures (Cierge a Grandes Fleurs)
- IV. 12 heures (Nyctanthe du Malabar)
- V. 17 heures (Belle de Nuit)
- VI. 19 heures (Geranium Triste)
- VII. 21 heures (Silène Noctiflore)

- Intermission -

DESLANDRES

Introduction et Polonaise

BRITTEN

Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op. 49

- I. Pan
- II. Phaeton
- III. Niobe
- IV. Bacchus
- V. Narcissus
- VI. Arethusa

About the Performer

Quek Jun Rui (b. 2001) is a Singaporean oboist who began his formal music education at the age of 8 and started playing the oboe 2 years later, under the tutelage of Simon Lee and Elaine Yeo. He joined the Singapore National Youth Orchestra (SNYO) in 2013 and was appointed Principal Oboe in 2017.

In 2017, Jun Rui was accepted into the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YST) Young Artist Programme and was subsequently granted early admission into the Bachelor of Music (Honours) Degree programme the following year, in the teaching studio of Rachel Walker and Carolyn Hollier. He also attended masterclasses by Gordon Hunt, Diana Doherty, Celia Craig, Liu Mingjia, Wei Weidong, Melinda Maxwell, Oliver Boekhoorn and Josep Domenech. From 2020 to 2022, he was a military musician in the Singapore Armed Forces Band. He was appointed the woodwind section leader of the Ceremonial Band and he was selected to perform several concerts alongside the SAF Central Band.

As a soloist, Jun Rui made his debut after winning the SNYO Concerto Competition in 2021. He then performed with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) as a winner of the prestigious President's Young Performers Concert in 2022, where former Singapore President Mdm Halimah Yacob was in attendance. His playing was commended by The Straits Times as "plaintive bel canto lyricism...displaying immaculate articulation and dexterity...".

His musical journey has taken him to various music festivals around the world. He travelled with SNYO to Malaysia in 2016, and to China & Hong Kong in 2018 for the inaugural Asian Pacific Youth Symphony Orchestra Festival. In the summer of 2023, he participated in RondoFest in Malaysia, International Double Reed Society Conference in Thailand and the Taiwan Music Academy and Festival.

In 2016, he was featured in an episode of "On the Red Dot" on Channel NewsAsia titled "Passion Pursuits", which shed light on youths taking up music as a career despite being tied down with academics.

Jun Rui is currently a final year undergraduate student at YST.

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681 - 1767)

Oboe Sonata in E minor, TWV 41:e6

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Grave
- IV. Vivace

Georg Philipp Telemann was one of the most distinguished composers of the baroque era. Since his first music lesson at the age of ten, he displayed profound musical talent, which met with the disapproval of his family. Determined to pursue his interests, he taught himself about a dozen instruments in secret, even completing his first opera at twelve years old. He was responsible for over 3000 compositions, making him the most prolific composer in history. He took up positions as music director and Kapellmeister in various churches in Leipzig, Frankfurt and Hamburg. He was also commercially active in publishing and selling much of the music that he wrote, not only during his tenure in the churches, but also eagerly seeking and fulfilling additional commissions from home and abroad.

Today, the first name that comes to mind with regard to baroque music is Johann Sebastian Bach, who was a close friend and contemporary of Telemann, largely overshadowing his fame. However, Telemann was known to be more popular in his lifetime and even to have a higher annual income than Bach. Despite living around the same period of time, both composers had stark differences in their compositional approaches, with Telemann favouring the melodic, uncomplicated music of the galant style, as opposed to the contrapuntal complexity and highly decorated music of Bach.

In the first movement, the oboe enters with an elegant theme in E minor, followed by the basso continuo in a stately manner. The second movement transitions into a dance-like mood, with a dignified accompaniment by the continuo. Graceful, yearning melodies fill the third movement, giving the oboe the liberty of ornamentation and expressiveness. Similar to the second movement, the final movement brings back the energy, more intense and heavier than before.

Jean Françaix (1912 - 1997)

L'Horloge de Flore (Flower Clock)

- I. 3 heures (Galant de Jour)
- II. 5 heures (Cupidon Bleu)
- III. 10 heures (Cierge a Grandes Fleurs)
- IV. 12 heures (Nyctanthe du Malabar)
- V. 17 heures (Belle de Nuit)
- VI. 19 heures (Geranium Triste)
- VII. 21 heures (Silène Noctiflore)



Jean Françaix was a French composer, pianist and orchestrator from Le Mans, France. Born into a musical family, his father was the director of the Le Mans Conservatory, while his mother was a vocal teacher. Because of his upbringing, Françaix developed exceptional musical skills at a young age. He learnt to read music before learning the alphabet. His mother would sing Bach, Handel, Schumann and Ravel to him, which would play a crucial role in influencing his musical tastes. Throughout his childhood, he attended concerts, talked to performers, practiced piano and composed. Ravel himself commended Françaix's extraordinary capabilities, encouraging and supporting his endeavours. He wrote notably, "Among this child's gifts, I especially remark the most fruitful that an artist can possess, that of curiosity."

Since then, Françaix became an award-winning pianist and celebrated composer. Besides composing for almost every genre of music, he was also known for his orchestrations of works by Chopin, Schubert, and Mozart. His music can be described as witty, fresh and eccentric, setting himself apart from his contemporaries. His composition style was rooted in neoclassicism, which steered away from the Romantic aesthetic of the composer pouring his inner soul into the music. His ideas remain fundamentally tonal, melodically elegant and rhythmically incisive. This can be heard in his multifaceted oboe concerto, one of his best known concertos for solo instrument. It was commissioned by John de Lancie, former principal oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, in 1957. He was responsible for the commissioning of two oboe concertos, this being one of them, and also planting the idea of writing a concerto into Richard Strauss's mind, resulting in one of the most famous oboe concertos to be written.

L'horloge de Flore (Flower Clock) is a seven movement work inspired by Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus. Known as the "Father of Modern Taxonomy", he was revered for his pioneering work in identifying, naming and classifying all living organisms. In 1951, he published a textbook titled "Philosophia Botanica" about systematic botany and botanical Latin. In his book, he hypothesised about a flower clock that details the times of different flowers blooming during the day. This concept forms the overarching structure of the concerto, where each movement describes the flower's appearance, accompanied by rhythmical elements that suggests the intricate mechanisms of a clock. The flowers were selected from the flower clock created by Linnaeus.

3 heures (Galant de Jour)

The piece begins with the depiction of the Day Jessamine (*Cestrum diurnum*). The plant contains fragrant white flowers in a trumpet shape with poisonous black berries. The movement starts with pizzicato strings at 60 bpm to imitate a ticking clock. The oboe plays a smooth, meandering melody, much like how the fragrance of the white flowers travels.



5 heures (Cupidon Bleu)

This movement is a depiction of Cupid's Dart (*Catananche caerulea*). It contains cornflower blue to violet-colored blooms. The flowers were supposedly used by the god of love, Cupid, as a key ingredient in a love potion, hence the name. The accompaniment plays short and spiky quavers, excentuating the quirkyess of the music in the new time signature of 5/4. The oboe melody is filled with many large leaps, perhaps mimicking the movement of Cupid's arrow.



10 heures (Cierge à grandes fleurs)

This movement is a depiction of the Night-Blooming Cereus (*Selenicereus grandiflorus*). It comes from a species of cactus and is usually white or very pale yellow, surrounded by stems. The accompaniment plays slurred and pizzicato semiquavers, while the oboe plays a slow, reflective melody. The movement is only fifteen bars long, making it the shortest movement in the whole piece. This reflects the short period of time the plant blooms because it only blooms once every year.



12 heures (Nyctanthe du Malabar)

This movement is a depiction of the Night-Flowering Jasmine (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*). The blooms are white with fragrant petals surrounding a red-orange centre and the leaves have medicinal purposes. It is the most dance-like movement, where the oboe and clarinet engage in a humorous duet, while the accompaniment supports with syncopated, groovy pizzicatos.



17 heures (Belle de Nuit)

This movement is a depiction of the Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*). Its name comes from the characteristic of the bloom, which is round and white. The mood is calm, the clarinets play a soothing lull and the strings support with long held drones. The oboe plays a long, lyrical melody with close intervals, perhaps indicating the round shape of the flower.



19 heures (Géranium triste)

This movement is a depiction of the Geranium (*Pelargonium triste*). The flowers have white with dark purple or brown markings, and the leaves of the plant resemble ferns. While the clock-like figure returns with a constant quaver rhythm throughout the movement, the oboe weaves in and out of lyrical and light articulated melodies, which shows the contrast between leaves and blooms.



21 heures (Silène noctiflore)

This movement is a depiction of the Night-Flowering Catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*). It has white flowers that release a strong fragrance meant to attract insects that help pollinate the plant. This can be heard in the strong, articulated melody the oboe plays, with sharp dotted rhythms and flourish of notes.



Adolphe-Édouard-Marie Deslandres (1840 - 1911)

Introduction et Polonaise

Adolphe-Édouard-Marie Deslandres was a French composer and organist. He studied composition and the pipe organ at the Paris Conservatoire. In 1862, he succeeded his father as the organist at the Church of Sainte-Marie des Batignolles in Paris, France, which became his full-time job for most of his life. Despite being a composer of very little output, he was known for his operas and choral works, which were all well received, especially from fellow contemporary Charles Gounod. He also wrote works for keyboard and orchestral instruments, but his **Introduction et Polonaise** for oboe and piano is his one and only work for solo instrument and accompaniment.

This piano sets up an alluring mood in the introduction. The oboe takes over the melody, constantly moving up and down the range in large intervals. The piano bursts open with strong triplets and light-hearted quavers, immediately shifting the energy into a bright and jovial polonaise in true Chopin fashion. After a short cadenza, the oboe presents an uplifting theme, the first of three times in rondo form. The romantic second theme enters in D major, where the singing high range is juxtaposed against the comical grace notes. The third theme is more heartfelt, where the oboe expresses itself passionately in F major.

Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)

Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op. 49

- I. Pan
- II. Phaeton
- III. Niobe
- IV. Bacchus
- V. Narcissus
- VI. Arethusa

Metamorphose

/,mɛtə'mɔːfəʊz, mɛtə'mɔː'fəʊz/

change or cause to change completely in form or nature.

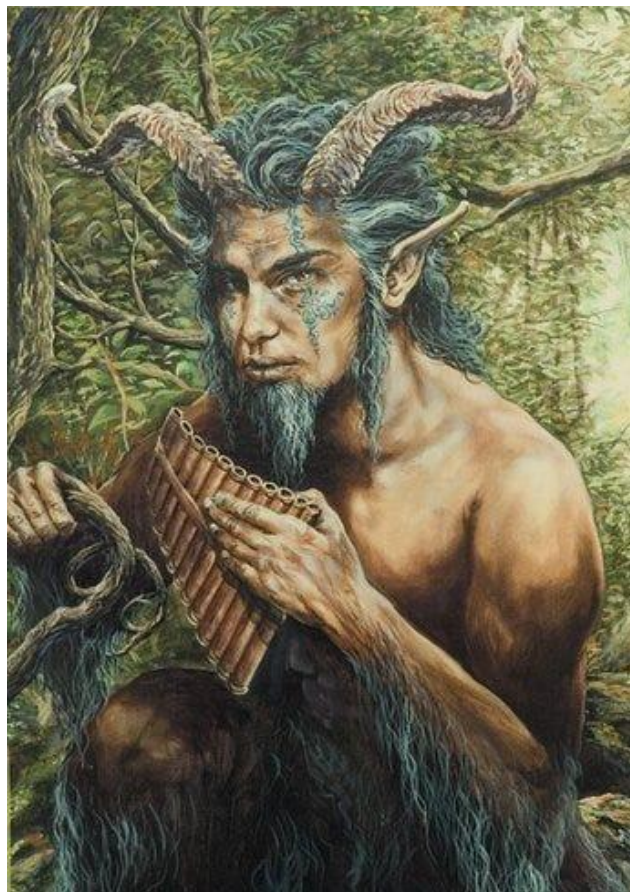
Benjamin Britten was another highly prolific composer in this programme from the 20th century. From an early age, he wrote for a wide variety of genres, including film scores. His compositional style emerged from exposure to the works of Schoenberg, Berg, Stravinsky, and Mahler, who were among his greatest influences.

As brilliant as Britten was, classical mythology was one of his unique compositional traits, which can be seen in works like *Young Apollo* (1939) and *The Rescue* (1947), both of which were based on Greek epic poems. **Six Metamorphoses after Ovid (1951)** is based on six characters from "Metamorphoses", a Latin narrative poem from 8 CE by the Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso, or Ovid. Each story tells the tale of different relationships between characters from Greek mythology, resulting in a fundamental change to occur.

Britten had a special affinity towards the oboe from an early age. His commitment and understanding of the instrument were illustrated through his solo and chamber works, exploiting its capabilities and constantly pushing it to its limits in terms of sounds, colours, and techniques. As a student, he was already experimenting with oboe writing in his wind sextet (1930), way before he flourished as a composer. His later works such as the *Phantasy Quartet* (1933), *Two Insect Pieces* (1935) and *Temporal Variations* (1936), can be attributed to his growing appreciation for the oboe. Furthermore, he was fascinated with the idea of writing for a solo unaccompanied instrument, drawing inspiration from solo works by Telemann, Debussy and Stravinsky. One could speculate that Debussy's *Syrinx* (1913) for solo flute might have been Britten's strongest influence when composing his *Six Metamorphoses*, as he chose the same Ovidian story as Debussy for his first metamorphosis, **Pan**.

The piece begins with the story of **Pan** (Ancient Greek: Πάν). He was the god of Shepherds, hunters and the wilds of nature. He was depicted as part animal, as he had horns, ears, hind legs and tail of a goat. He also bore a goat-like face, making his overall appearance quite unusual. He is commonly known for his insatiable lust and for pursuing beautiful nymphs throughout the woodlands and mountains, usually ending with rejection as they flee from him or change themselves. One day, he saw Syrinx, a wood nymph, and chased her through the forest. Upon reaching a river, Syrinx begged the river nymphs for help to hide from Pan, and they turned her into river reeds. He was confused as to which reed she was, but he heard musical sounds coming from the reeds as a gentle breeze blew by. He then picked up several reeds and crafted a pan flute, which became his iconic trademark.

The music marked *senza misura* (without measure) represents Pan noodling around the pan flute, expressing his love for Syrinx. It is based on a three-note motive, always yearning and flowing.





The next story is about the fate of **Phaeton** (Ancient Greek: Φαέθων). He was the son of Helios, the sun god, but was raised by his mother Clymene, a water nymph. Constantly ridiculed by his peers about his father's identity, Phaeton questioned his mother about it. Still not convinced with the truth, he sets out on a journey to the far east to Helios's palace. When he demanded proof of his parentage, Helios promised to grant him one wish to demonstrate his love for his son. Phaeton then requested the unthinkable: to use the sun god's chariot for a day. At first, Helios was astonished at his request and was against letting him use it. He explained that the treacherous task of driving the Chariot of the Sun was reserved for him only, and that it controlled the amount of light it brought to the world. However, Phaeton was adamant about his wish and did not heed any of his father's warnings. Unable to break his promise, Helios reluctantly gave him his chariot. His endeavour proved to be foolish, as Phaeton found himself utterly powerless to control the fiery horses, and began scorching parts of the earth. Horrified by the widespread devastation, Zeus swiftly struck him with a lightning bolt, tossing his flaming body into the River Eridanos. His sisters, the Heliades, mourned their brother's catastrophic demise and turned into poplar trees.

Britten presents the music with strong quavers, mimicking the sound of galloping horses, exuding robust energy immediately. The short break in between phrases throws the listener off, symbolising the instability of the chariot ride. After a temporary peaceful moment in the second section, the theme returns, this time more agitated and forceful than before. The bar marked *cresc. molto* till the long pause represents the moment Phaeton was struck by the lightning bolt and the chaos that ensued. The last few bars are like his sisters mourning him and changing to trees, as he took his last breath before disappearing underwater.

The tragic story of **Niobe** (Ancient Greek: Νιόβη) follows. She was a queen of Thebes (a Greek city) and she is highly regarded as the woman who challenged her superiority over the gods of Ancient Greece as a result of hubris, a term defined in Greek mythology as excessive pride and arrogance. When she grew up, she married Amphion, king of Thebes. They gave birth to fourteen children, seven sons and seven daughters. One day, there was a ceremony held in honour of Leto, one of Zeus's spouses. She was the mother of the divine twins, Apollo and Artemis. To display her dominance, Niobe bragged to the people of Thebes about being greater than Leto because she had more children than her. Leto's children were infuriated when they received word of Niobe's insults, so they went down to earth to exact



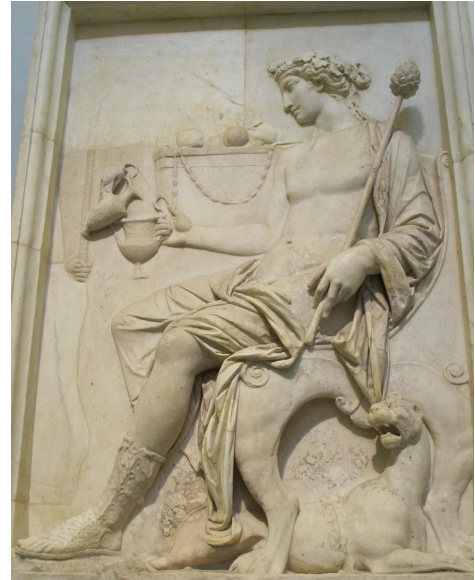
revenge by killing all of her fourteen children with powerful arrows. Having witnessed the massacre, Amphion committed suicide, leaving Niobe alone. Overwhelmed by the loss of her entire family, Niobe collapsed over her dead children and wept bitterly. Her incessant crying turned her into stone, and a mighty wind blew her to the top of Mount Sipylus, where she would lament for eternity. Today, a faint image of Niobe can be seen as a natural rock formation atop the mountain in Turkey, where water seeps out of the porous rocks to signify endless tears.



To accentuate Niobe's despair, Britten uses falling phrases with accents on the first note of each one to mimic the effect of wailing. The deaths of all fourteen children are somewhat reiterated in the last bar of the first section, as there are fourteen notes in the phrase, one for every child. The next section represents the uncontrollable outpour of emotion, moving around in large intervals, and then winding down to a long pause. After a short recollection of the theme, the last few bars

marked *senza express.* (without expression) are where Niobe becomes the mountain.

Then comes the story of Dionysus or **Bacchus** (Ancient Greek: Βάκχος), as referred to by the Romans. Bacchus was the god of wine, fertility and festivity. He was responsible for the invention of wine. Therefore, he was depicted as having grapes in his hair, always holding a cup of wine and holding a thrysus, a staff covered with vine leaves and topped with a pine cone. He shared his discovery with humanity, teaching them about grape cultivation and the fermentation process, which is crucial to wine production. Wine then became the norm at feasts and celebrations.



In this movement, Britten captured the essence of drunkenness and the noises coming from a typical social event with three distinct motives. Structured in a quasi rondo form, the first motive is made up of heavy dotted rhythms and short semiquavers trailing off the ends of phrases, symbolising the staggering movement of highly intoxicated guests. The strict quaver-semiquaver patterns in the second motive represent “shouting of the boys”, as they run around playing to their hearts content. The third motive is full of rapid semiquavers, symbolising the “noise of giggling women’s tattling tongues”, as they huddle together in small groups away from the crowded, occupied with gossip.



The story of **Narcissus** (Ancient Greek: Νάρκισσος) is why we have the word "narcissism," which is a self-obsessed and self-centred personality. When he was born, a seer warned his mother that her son would live a long life, but only if he never really knew himself. He was a stunningly handsome man who attracted many admirers of all genders, only to leave a trail of broken hearts as all who were in love with him were quickly rejected. One day, he headed towards a pond to drink some water. He noticed a reflection of a gorgeous, charming young man in the water. Never before had he seen himself with such clarity. He instantly fell in love with himself, caressing his reflection as if it were real. Narcissus spent so much time gazing at himself that he finally understood the agony of unrequited love and died of starvation

and thirst. His corpse turned into a flower, with white and gold pedals bending towards its reflection in the water, known as “Narcissus poeticus”.

In the score, Britten expresses the interaction between Narcissus and his reflection by writing motives with upward stems to represent the reflected image of Narcissus, and those with downward stems to represent Narcissus himself. This gives the player the liberty to make decisions on the approach to demonstrate the contrast between both parts.

The piece concludes with the story of **Arethusa** (Ancient Greek: Ἀρέθουσα). One day, she came across a clear stream and began bathing, unaware that it was the river god, Alpheus, in water form. Alpheus fell in love with her, but knowing his intentions, she fled hastily. In a desperate attempt to escape, she turned into a spring and flowed across the sea from Peloponnese to the island of Ortygia near Sicily. But he followed her and in the end, reached her and mingled with her waters. It is known today as the “Fountain of Arethusa”.

To paint an image of this ordeal for the listener, Britten cleverly presents two sections. The first section consists of Bach-like arpeggios that evoke the fluidity of water. The second section is more restless and disturbing, with frantic trills and chromatic semiquavers representing Arethusa’s fear and Alpheus’s pursuit of finding her.

