

Bittersweet & Fleeting



Reynard Ardian Simanjuntak, Oboe

Matthew Mak, Piano

Evelyn Kuo Chan, Gongs

Programme Notes

Georg Friedrich Händel

Sonata for Oboe and Basso Continuo in C minor, HWV366

- I. Largo
- II. Allegro
- III. Adagio
- IV. Bourrée anglaise - Allegro

A single, expressive note blooms from the oboe, a note that starts both the sonata and Reynard's journey as a student in YST Conservatory. As it blooms more and more, the bass descends further into lamentation, a unifying motif that Händel masterfully incorporated in all the movements of the sonata. Surprising to hear that these two simple ideas would, in the second movement, combine into a chromatic sounding imitative counterpoint, stated proudly by the oboe. What started off as a theme of sorrow turned into a spiraling interplay between the two voices, frantically trying to find a middle ground amidst the chromatic chaos.

The third movement inverts this descending line, turning it into a moment of hope. What a fragile hope it was, however, as it ultimately ends in the same, dark, phrygian half cadence that ended the first movement. The sonata then continued to a Bourée movement, starting again with the oh-so-familiar descending motif that was heard in the first movement. A dance it is, as one can hear in this movement, the dactyl rhythm that defines the form.

Bohuslav Martinů

Oboe Concerto, H. 353

- I. Moderato
- II. Poco andante
- III. Poco allegro

The concerto starts off as "Martinů" as it can be, painting the scene as a stage filled with a circus of his most prominent influences. At one side, a Czech folk dancer, at another a character from a Stravinsky ballet, somewhere behind, a pianist jams out a groovy rhythm influenced by jazz. The main showman, however, is clearly the oboist. He stops the prelude somewhat preemptively, starting the main show of the night where you will see him breathe fire, jump through hoops, and juggle dynamite for the next 15 minutes.

Whatever front the showman put up for the circus is completely stripped in the second movement. We get to see a side of him that is so fragile and troubled, laid bare for all to see. The piano shivers with anxiety or perhaps a cold wave of loneliness as he says his mind. Hope, however, is still within reach, and perhaps the same circus of misfits is also his salvation from whatever trouble he has.

Indeed, the stage is where a showman could truly feel joy. Every moment on stage with the circus exuberant, as he dances as free as he can be. However, any moment he is left alone, like in the cadenzas, we could again peek into the troubled soul that he has deep down. The second cadenza, in particular, is more secretive than the first as it is a cadenza that was absent in the first version of the piece. The piece ends in a fantastical crescendo that goes on until the roof physically can't hold the energy anymore. A concert D is its culmination, ringing with every bit of joy that the members of the circus poured onto the stage.

Antonio Pasculli

Omaggio a Bellini for English Horn and Piano

Imogene steps into the scene together with the English horn. Delirious, she weeps as she needs to confront the reality that her former lover, a pirate, had just killed her husband. She starts to descend into insanity, with any fleeting sight of hope being a twisted hallucination of what reality could be, although it is anything but that.

The curtain closes on this opera and the scene shifts to another. *Amina* had somehow sleepwalked her way into the Count's home. Furious, her fiancée questioned her faithfulness to him, "I feel anguish from loving you, this cry of my heart." And to that, she answered "Thoughtfully and expressively, I truly never thought of another. If you have such doubt in me, leave my heart to ache alone."

The scene once again changes, this time playful and carefree. It builds up to the finale of the piece, a finale as grand as that of a three-hour Bellini opera; the soloist certainly feels like he just played a three-hour opera, too.

Reynard Ardian Simanjuntak

Bittersweet & Fleeting, Op. 18

Concerto for Oboe with Double Reed Septet and Orchestra

Arranged for Oboe and Piano by **Jellal Koay**

Revised for Oboe, Piano, and Gongs by Reynard Ardian Simanjuntak

- I. Allegro scherzando
- II. Tranquillo
- III. Allegro

Gongs are the foundation of Indonesian gamelan music, its sound being a signifier of change in the musical form. Its role in this piece is exactly that, but perhaps as seen through my personal lens. I feel that a lot of the times change doesn't happen as we expect it, leaving us in the mercy of the literal and figurative gong player, whatever that may mean to you: be it fate, the physical inevitability of particles in motion, or higher spiritual being(s). Consequently, in this piece, every time the gong is struck, the ensemble has no choice but to change the scene and move on.

In a sense, this piece invites you to see the beauty and excitement in the act of change itself. Although it is based on a very standard form often seen in classical period oboe concertos: fast - slow - fast (Rondo), this piece fragments and rearranges the movements cyclically similar to how gamelan music would. Before the section could culminate, it would change into the next, shorter fragment. Every instance of the movements' fragments after that never feels the same, reaffirming the fact that one can only look at the past bittersweetly and embrace the incoming change wholeheartedly.

This homage to the gamelan extends to the instrumentation as well. The original orchestration utilizes a double reed septet in place of the woodwind section to emulate the sonorities of the gamelan, as well as traditional way of singing in Javanese culture (*Sindhen*). Reduced masterfully by Jellal Koay for piano, this arrangement of the piece utilizes the natural percussiveness of the piano instead, paying tribute to the gamelan in its own way.