

Vieux Amis



St George & St John Church, Whakatane

Sunday 8th August

Presented by
Music Whakatane

in association with

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Chamber Music
New Zealand

Arvo PÄRT (1935—) | *Für Alina* (1976)

Born in Estonia in 1935, Arvo Pärt is one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary classical music. He is best known for his 'tintinnabuli' style (literally, 'like the ringing of bells'), where his music is characterised by simple harmonies, often single unadorned notes, or triad chords. A deeply spiritual man, Pärt's music has been described as having "a beauty at once austere and sensuous that seems to be hardly of our time."

For solo piano, *Für Alina* is one of the most petite, yet one of the most significant works in all of Pärt's output. Written in 1976, it was the first work to be written after a prolonged creative crisis, and also the first to be written in the tintinnabuli style. The writing is clear, simple and spacious, with silence just as important as the actual notes. As a hint for the pianist, the composer has noted that the piece be played "in calm, uplifted manner, listening to one's inner self".

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685–1750) | *Viola da Gamba Sonata in D major, BWV 1028* (c.1740)

1. Adagio – 2. Allegro – 3. Andante – 4. Allegro

Starting from his time as Kapellmeister at the court of Cöthen during the late 1710s and early 1720s, Bach composed several sets of instrumental sonatas to be played with harpsichord, including three for viola da gamba, and six for violin. What makes these sonatas particularly striking is that the keyboard part was fully written out on two staves, rather than as figured bass—thus promoting the harpsichord to a truly equal partner to the 'solo' instrument.

The Sonata in D major is the most often performed of the 3 works for da gamba. The opening stately Adagio gives way to a fast-paced Allegro, which is virtuosic for both instruments. The third movement Andante (written in the relative key of b minor) provides welcome respite from the previous busy-ness, before diving back into a glittering, energetic finale.

Arvo PÄRT | *mozart-adagio* (1992, rev 1997)

mozart-adagio is an arrangement of the second movement of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Sonata in F minor, K 280. While the basic structure of the original has been left intact, Pärt has coloured key phrases and harmonies, explored new sonorities and textures between the strings and piano, resulting in a piece which is a truly unique blend of styles from across the centuries.

Johann Sebastian BACH | *Violin Sonata in E major, BWV 1016* (c.1720)

1. Adagio – 2 Allegro – 3. Adagio ma non tanto – 4. Allegro

Like the da gamba sonata earlier in this programme, the four movements of Bach's E major violin sonata follow the same basic pattern of the typical Corelli or Handel sonata da chiesa: slow-fast-slow-fast. The first movement contains much Italian-style, decorative melodic writing, yet is a richly sonorous and expressive opening. The movement which follows is joyful and elegant, with the melody passed around in fugal style. The emotional heart of the sonata is without a doubt the third movement, with the passacaglia bass line setting up a romantic, somewhat sombre mood. An exciting conclusion follows with the Allegro finale—joyful semiquaver passages are tossed between the instruments, briefly contrasted by a more poised triplet section.

Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975) | Prelude and Fugue in E minor, op 87 no 4

(1950)

Dmitri Shostakovich was a Soviet and Russian composer and pianist, who is regarded as one of the great composers of the 20th century. He wrote numerous symphonies, concerti, various chamber works, and solo piano pieces, and achieved fame throughout his lifetime—all this in spite of the troubled times in which he lived, and the complex and difficult relationship he had with the Stalin regime.

Shostakovich's set of 24 Preludes and Fugues, written 200 years after the death of JS Bach, were most certainly inspired by Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier—although the musical language is entirely that of the Russian composer. It has been often noted that in their vast range of textures, figurations, rhythmic devices, characterizations, compositional procedures and moods, Shostakovich's set rank as one of the monuments of twentieth-century piano literature.

A mood of despair and sorrow permeates the stately Prelude, which is written in a three-part texture: a majestic bass of octaves in the lower depths of the piano supports a continuous falling quaver line in the middle register, with a slower-moving melodic line that includes numerous 'sighs'. The four-voice meditative Fugue is in fact a double fugue—two separate subjects are introduced (the second in a slightly faster tempo), then are combined as the fugue gradually accumulates power and passion, culminating in a towering fortissimo in E major.

Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH | Piano Trio no 2 in E minor, op 67 (1944)

1. Allegro - Moderato – 2. Allegro con brio – 3. Largo – 4. Allegretto - Adagio

Written as the Second World War was drawing to a close, and in response to the unexpected death of his close friend and mentor Ivan Sollertinsky, Shostakovich's second piano trio is one of his most renowned works, and in fact one of the greatest trios of the twentieth-century—despite the fact that he apparently found the task of writing chamber music somewhat daunting: "chamber music demands of a composer the most impeccable technique and depth of thought... to write a chamber work is much harder than to write an orchestral one".

The journey through this work is a highly emotional one, as we are presented with varying scenes of grief, rage, hysteria, and—perhaps—resignation. Starkly simple contrapuntal lines appear throughout, and while the textures are often dissonant, there is always clarity in the voicing. The first movement, featuring solo cello playing harmonics to start with, is elegiac in mood, but moves on to more cheerful memories. The second movement is a somewhat manic scherzo, an energetic peasant-like dance with a waltz trio section. This is followed by a sombre, profound lament, written in the form of a Baroque passacaglia. An eight-bar chordal progression in the piano is repeated six times, above which the strings weave a haunting theme. The Allegretto finale is emotionally complex—is it simply a klezmer-inflected, Jewish-sounding dance, or is there a more sinister aspect at play, with the music bringing to mind the cruel accounts of Jewish wartime prisoners being forced to dance on their own graves before they were killed. Either way, the movement builds in intensity throughout, culminating in the reappearance of earlier themes—the glassy harmonics of the work's opening, and finally the solemn chords of the passacaglia.

Vieux Amis ("Old Friends") brings together 3 friends, neighbours, and long-standing colleagues. Violinist **Justine Cormack**, cellist **James Bush**, and pianist **Sarah Watkins** all grew up together in Christchurch, and their bonds run deep.

Growing up across the street from each other, James and Justine have known each other their whole lives, learning music together at the Christchurch School of Instrumental Music. The two have remained friends throughout their diverse careers. Ever the innovator, Justine dedicated her energies to nurturing and promoting the best of New Zealand arts and music through her performances with NZTrio. James on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction, as his fascination with the freedom and energy of baroque performance practice led him to work with many of Europe's top baroque orchestras and ensembles.

Sarah first teamed up with Justine when they were both at high school in Christchurch, playing chamber music together through the CSIM. Their careers have been tightly intertwined ever since, most recently as founding members of NZTrio. Sarah and James have also performed together throughout their careers—their first outings for CMNZ was as a duo in 1996—and all three musicians gave their first concerts as a trio the following year.

Needless to say, they are thrilled to be back playing together for this very special tour.
