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# Víkingur Ólafsson

*Releases a new Mozart album*



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## Q&A: Van-Anh Nguyen, pianist, producer, composer

Photo private album, words Nick Gurov

**4MBS:** Ms Nguyen, a recent study suggests there are shifting musical tastes among young people. They tend to embrace classical music as an escape from the noise of modern life. Do you think that the pandemic made us more aware about the power of classics? What do you find the most important lesson you learned during COVID?

**V.A.N:** *I think the pandemic definitely brought people's attention to music that soothes, instrumental music particularly helped people work, study and relax. During COVID times, I think the first thing I did was try to fill my time up with creating content to connect with my audience, practice, record; essentially do things that I can't normally do when on the road performing and touring. I however also learnt how to switch off and take on some personal time, I'm usually just go-go-go.*

**4MBS:** How did you adapt to the "new normal" having in mind that your touring commitments were postponed and your frequent trips to Los Angeles became difficult?

**V.A.N:** *For the moment, I've just had to shelve the idea of coming back to Los Angeles because of our borders and quarantining rules. I knew I'd be in Australia for longer so I looked within and re-built networks nationally (I had spent the past 7 years focusing on USA. I've been lucky enough that concerts have come back here, however there's still the occasional postponements due to snap lockdowns so I've just learnt to accept it and use that time to write or record instead.*

**4MBS:** Your father Xuan-Anh, taught classical guitar, and your mother, Oanh, was an opera student in Vietnam. You were born in Sydney and your choice was piano. Why?

**V.A.N:** *The piano is the easiest instrument to start off with when you're 13 months old – you don't need to think about tuning or intonation and both my parents play the piano as their 2<sup>nd</sup> instruments.*

**4MBS:** You were accepted into the Young Artists Program at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music at age four. You performed at the Opera House at eight. Were you exposed to a lot of pressure at that tender age, how do you see those days now?

**V.A.N:** *I loved it at the time and I had an incredibly nurturing upbringing, never forced to practice or perform. It was something I wanted to do and was lucky enough to have those opportunities.*

**4MBS:** You currently have 9 albums released on all major digital music platforms. How do you see the future of classical music in the light of tremendous changes of technology?

**V.A.N:** *It's a really exciting time I feel. I love being able to share my love for classical music and bridging genres together to bridge the generations. With so many platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and then of course the streaming platforms, there are more ways to bring your music to everyone globally and truly, no excuses.*

**4MBS:** Your recital schedule since April 2021 contains at least 30 concerts all over Australia. How do you manage to keep such a fre-

netic performance schedule?

**V.A.N:** *Honestly, I live for the stage. Touring has been my life, I'm energized after concerts, after meeting people who have come to the concerts, experiencing different cities and also being able to catch up with friends in those various cities along the way. I'm addicted to it!*

**4MBS:** When it comes to the repertoire your passion for core classics is well documented as well as your strong interest in music for movies. Could you tell us more about this please?

**V.A.N:** *The crux of it comes down to melodies. I love a beautiful melody, I'm a sucker for the romantic era and the power music has to move people, to make them feel. Music does so much for film and composers like Hans Zimmer, Ennio Morricone have transported people and added so much emotion to films.*

**4MBS:** In 2016 you gave concerts in 15 cities through China. What memories do you have from that tour?

**V.A.N:** *It was a gruelling tour because it was 15 cities, 15 concerts over 20 days. There were some phenomenal concert halls we played in like the Forbidden City Concert Hall, the Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre.*

**4MBS:** Other than performing, your work extends to composing, producing and writing. Which of these creative outputs dominates your daily routines now?

**V.A.N:** *Practicing is the first, then probably content creation followed by composing and writing which comes hand in hand. I have an electronic music project which I do concurrently which involves some production work.*

**4MBS:** How would you describe your goal as an artist of the 21<sup>st</sup> century trying to spread and promote classics to the new generations?

**V.A.N:** *My goal is being able to use my relatability to bring classical music to the world. By bringing in fashion, keeping it fun and connecting through my personality via social platforms, I want to bring more people into the world of classical music. At the same time, by taking classical music outside of traditional platforms like concert halls, it allows accessibility and hopefully more people can enjoy and be exposed to it. Classical music has become high-brow and somewhat dividing and I really think more people would love it if they were introduced to it in a way that they felt comfortable with.*

**4MBS:** Who are the artists you admire the most? How do you decide about artistic partnerships?

**V.A.N:** *I admire artists who have a strong purpose and understanding of who they are. Anyone can play a piece well if they practice hard enough but what sets them apart? In this day and age, I truly only want to work with someone who firstly, I get along with (equally on stage and offstage), secondly, challenges me musically, thirdly, has an understanding of how to promote concerts & attract an audience and fourthly, pushes boundaries.*