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A once-troubled teen among finalists for prestigious music competition



By [Garry Maddox](#)

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Emily Sun first became well-known as an anxious teenage violinist in the hit Australian documentary *Mrs Carey's Concert*.

She was 16 when acclaimed music teacher Karen Carey inspired, cajoled and disciplined 1200 girls from MLC, Burwood during 18 turbulent months of preparation for a concert at the Sydney Opera House.



ABC Young Performer Of The Year finalists (from left) Oliver Shermacher (clarinet), Emily Sun (violin) and Kevin Chow (piano) at the Opera House

Photo: Jessica Hromas

Ten years on, Sun is returning to the Opera House as one of three finalists competing to be named ABC Young Performer of the Year tomorrow night.

"Everyone in Australia remembers me as the troubled teenager then there was this transformative concerto performance," she said. "I'm just really grateful that I get to come back 10 years later – I've grown up – and everyone can see this journey I've made in music."

Sun, who has been playing violin since the age of four, has returned from studying at the Royal College of Music in London – and performing as a guest soloist with orchestras in the US, Europe and Asia – to her family home at Concord West.

She is up against Oliver Shermacher, a 23-year-old clarinetist from Marrickville, and Kevin Chow, a 21-year-old pianist from Perth, in the country's most prestigious multi-instrumental competition for young classical musicians, with first prize worth \$80,000.

Shermacher is living inspiration for anyone who learned recorder at school. His musical education began with that humble instrument.

"My kindergarten teacher thought that was something we should all be doing," he said. "I always loved it then changed to clarinet when I was 10 because it looked the most like a recorder."

His advice for anyone starting out on recorder? "Stick with it," he said.

Chow, who started playing at the age of five and practises for up to five hours a day, was a late inclusion in the semi-final after violinist Anna Da Silva Chen broke her wrist when she fell while jogging.

"I've always loved the piano," he said. "The repertoire of piano is insanely huge."

The manager of competition organiser Music and Opera Singers Trust, Amelia Gledhill, said the award has been significant in the music industry for decades.

"If you've won it, it's a real signal that you're probably going to be one of the leading musicians of your generation in Australia," she said.

Past winners include pianist Roger Woodward, whose victory over David Helfgott features in the film *Shine*, pianist Simon Tedeschi, cellist Li-Wei Qin and percussionist Claire Edwardes.

This year's three finalists, who seemed more friends than rivals as they prepared for the competition, agreed that determination, dedication and lots of practice were key to musical excellence.



The young musicians with their instruments: Kevin Chow, Emily Sun and Oliver Shermacher.

Photo: Jessica Hromas

"My friends in the workforce get weekends and they have time off," Sun said. "I don't know what a weekend is."

"I've never gone on holiday without bringing my violin because I'll still want to play a couple of scales every day. I don't know what time off really means."

Added Shermacher: "The whole idea of people being talented or a natural at music, no," he said. "They've just worked well and worked hard."

"I take my instrument everywhere. I've been on cruises – a fun tropical holiday – and I'll still take my clarinet and practise in my cabin."



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