



# Summer Music in City Churches

## SPIRIT OF ETERNAL SUNSHINE

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2021, 1pm

St Giles Cripplegate EC2Y 8DA

**HAYDN: String Quartet in D major, 'Lark'**

**BEN NOBUTO: 'Skip' (*live premiere performance*)**

**DVORAK: String Quartet in F major, 'American'**

### **Brother Tree Sound Quartet:**

Anna de Bruin, violin

Thea Spiers, violin

Peter Mallinson, viola

Julia Graham, cello

### **Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**

#### **String Quartet in D major, Op. 64 no 5 'Lark'**

At the beginning of 1790 Haydn was visiting Vienna, where, among other delights, he heard a performance of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, and was arranging string quartet parties for his wealthy friend Maria Anna von Genzinger. In February, however, his leave was over and he had to return to isolated Eszterháza Castle, where he was Kapellmeister to the Esterházy court, well-treated by his employers, and as productive – and famous – a composer as the world had ever seen.

But despite the freedom to leave the castle almost at will and with as gifted a contingent of musicians, with close friends among them, as he could want at his disposal, he was still an employee, and he was, quite simply, feeling sorry for himself: he had tasted the greater world and was “back on the job,” 30 years in the same magnificent place. A year later, however, his enlightened employer, Prince Nicolaus, died, whereupon Nicolaus’ troglodytic son, Anton, disbanded the court musical establishment. Haydn was to all intents and purposes a free man. He received a reasonably generous pension, some commissions for masses to be celebrated on the princess’s name day and, most importantly, he didn’t have to wait to display his genius on the widest stage possible. In short order London impresario Johann Peter Salomon commissioned from the 58-year-old composer what would be his crowning orchestral achievement, the 12 so-called “London” Symphonies.

During roughly the same period – beginning at Eszterháza and continuing in Vienna, where he had long kept a pied à terre – Haydn was working on his six Opus 64 Quartets, dedicated, as were his sets of three quartets each, Opp. 54 and 55, to Johann Tost, who had been a violinist in Haydn’s court orchestra. The most celebrated component of these Op. 64 quartets is the Fifth, in D, the so-called “Lark” of which Richard Wigmore in his valuable Pocket Guide to Haydn writes: “The first movement’s unforgettable, winged melody [ergo the “Lark” sobriquet] high on the first violin’s E-string, is played as a soaring descant to the pawky, staccato march for the three lower instruments that had opened the proceedings.” The theme returns in several guises throughout the movement. The slow movement is a poignant meditation, while the wittily danceable minuet is interrupted by one of Haydn’s earthy trios. The finale is a splendidly light-fingered, hectic hubbub that has been likened to the British sailors’ dance, the hornpipe. *Herbert Glass*

## **Ben Nobuto (b.1996)**

### **‘Skip’**

Ben Nobuto is a British/Japanese composer, pianist and producer from Kent, UK. With a style described as ‘postmodern’ by Nonclassical, his music explores themes of attention and fragmentation, often drawing from internet culture and popular idioms in a playful, ironic and surreal manner. More often, his music is concerned with the symbolic nature of sounds rather than the sounds themselves, how memory and meaning are embedded and transmitted sonically.

His works have been performed in both the UK and the US by ensembles such as Ligeti Quartet, Invoke Quartet, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Brother Tree Sound, with upcoming commissions from Manchester Collective and Vanguard New Music. His approach is defined by openness and plurality, leading to collaborations with experimental artists, jazz musicians, poets, rappers, film-makers and video-game developers alike.

Ben graduated from the University of Cambridge in 2019, where he holds a BMus and MPhil in Music. He was the recipient of the 2019 Bliss Prize for composition.

In the composer’s own words: “‘Skip’ means to ‘move along lightly, stepping from one foot to the other with a hop or bounce.’ I like how the word describes physical movement but

also the idea of jumping ahead in the narrative, like skipping a chapter in a book. This piece takes inspiration from both meanings. Sometimes the music skips along in playful grooves, other times it skips ahead out of boredom. Occasionally, the players find themselves stuck in repetitive loops that they wish they could skip. It's up to the players to find a moment of stillness amid all the relentless energy, to take a moment to breathe before skipping again."

## **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

### **String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96 'American'**

The New York socialite Mrs. Jeannette Thurber was a woman of determination and means. When she failed, in 1889, to establish an English-language opera company to compete with the established Metropolitan Opera, she embarked on a new venture (1891): the National Conservatory of Music, which she hoped would rival with Europe's establishments of higher musical education. What better way to attract attention – and pupils – than to choose as its director a European of great artistic renown, with administrative credentials a secondary consideration.

She narrowed her list of candidates to two: the young Sibelius and the older Dvořák. The latter emerged as the man for the job: not only did he respond (Sibelius seemingly did not, if indeed he was ever approached) but accepted, after some hesitancy about leaving his teaching job at the Prague Conservatory. Mrs. Thurber had made him an offer he couldn't refuse: exceedingly generous remuneration, duties that were hardly onerous, and four months paid vacation per year.

In reading through Dvořák's correspondence and the comments of his friends during the three years he spent in America, we get the impression that the composer was most happy there. It was thoughts of the old country, more than direct experiences of the New World, that fuelled his creative fires. His minimal duties at the Conservatory gave him ample time to compose. The music he started or wrote in its entirety during his stint as titular director of the Conservatory includes some of his most intensely, insistently Czech music: the last and most imposing of his string quartets, Opp. 96, 105, 106; the String Quintet, Op. 97; the E-minor Symphony ("From the New World"); the Te Deum; and the Cello Concerto.

A lasting and productive experience of the American stay was, in fact, Czech – that is, his visit in the summer of 1893 to the Bohemian colony of Spillville, Iowa. It was there that he wrote much of his "New World" Symphony and the entirety of the present quartet, begun three days after his arrival and completed in a mere two weeks, along with the Op. 97 Quintet. This F-major Quartet "reflects," in the words of Dvořák scholar Jaroslav Holecěk, "the happy, restful moments and the magic of the beautiful countryside that the composer would walk every day of his stay there, usually beginning shortly after sunrise." Dvořák himself said of piece: "I wanted to write something for once that was very melodious and straightforward, and dear Papa Haydn kept appearing before my eyes, and that is why it all turned out so simply. And it's good that it did." After the first two public performances, in Boston and New York in 1894, an unnamed reviewer described the work as having "the spirit of eternal sunshine" which is "the soul of Mozart's music". *Herbert Glass*

## Brother Tree Sound

Brother Tree Sound is a string quartet dedicated to encouraging new ways of listening through collectively interpreting the landscape and language of classical music in 21st century.

Together, the group have released two successfully received EPs, played together at poetry events with free improvisation, been given airtime on BBC Radio 3, performed at various venues and music festivals throughout the UK and have given first performances of many new works since forming three years ago.

During this past year the quartet have been found playing Mendelssohn outdoors for courtyard cafes, new music and Brahms at local churches for a festival they organised and releasing their second EP, *Interstices*, which has been streamed hundreds of thousands of times across various music platforms. A chance meeting with emerging composer Ben Nobuto led them to collaborate with him in his video project 'Bento Beats' recording the music and videos separately at home during lockdown.

The group were recently chosen by the Watford Palace Theatre to take part in their Freelance Season making a series of short videos of music with emotive titles. They commissioned Ben Nobuto to write *Skip* for this project. Future projects include a recording with pianist Kit Downes for the Resonus record label.

Review of *Interstices* by Planet Hugill (2020)

"This feeling of the texture of the sound seems to be of primary importance to the players... These are performances where I was conscious of the magical physicality of the sound."

***Kestrel Music is grateful to everyone who has generously supported Summer Music in City Churches, including The John Ireland Trust, CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang LLP and the Worshipful Company of Grocers***

**Summer Music in City Churches** is a fledgling festival, founded in 2018, presenting beautiful music to engage, divert and inspire, in ancient and architecturally stunning churches in London's Square Mile. Standing cheek by jowl with modern blocks and skyscrapers, these churches are glorious settings in which to listen and reflect: oases of history, beauty and peace amidst the 24-7 of 21<sup>st</sup> century City life.

The theme for our third festival in June 2021 is **SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN**: a week and a half of music to lift the spirits, celebrating the longed-for return of live concerts after a year and more of pandemic and lockdown.

Exceptionally this year, for coronavirus-related reasons, concerts are presented in just two churches. We look forward to returning to the others as soon as possible.

If you have enjoyed today's concert, please have a look at our [programme](#) for the rest of the week and come back to St Giles for more! For example...

- Wednesday, 7pm – pianist Lucy Parham's acclaimed composer portrait, *I, Clara* with Joanna David as Clara Schumann
- Thursday, 1pm – Mark Bebbington and principals from leading London orchestras, recreating their highly praised performances of sparkling music by Poulenc for piano, flute, oboe and bassoon