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A “virtual” Coffee Concert recorded at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Sunday April 11, 2021 at 11:15

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Virtual Coffee Concerts are pre-recorded at the Holywell Music Room in Oxford and are streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings. (These recordings are available for a limited time after release but, of course, there will be more to come.)

Philharmonia Orchestra Players

**Benjamin Marquise Gilmore (violin), Rebecca Chan (violin),
Yukiko Ogura (viola), Richard Birchall (cello) and Tim Gibbs (double bass)**

- **Dvořák: String Quintet in G major, op 77, B 49**
- **Dvořák: Intermezzo (“Andante Religioso”)**

Benjamin Marquise Gilmore (violin)

Philharmonia concert master Benjamin Marquise Gilmore grew up in England and studied with Natalia Boyarskaya at the Yehudi Menuhin School and Pavel Vernikov at the Vienna Conservatory, as well as with Julian Rachlin, Miriam Fried, and members of the Artis Quartet and Altenberg Trio.

Benjamin was awarded first prize at the Oskar Back violin competition in Amsterdam, and was a prizewinner at the Joseph Joachim competition in Hannover and the Mozart competition in Salzburg. As a soloist, he has performed with the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, the NDR Hannover, the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the Munich Chamber Orchestra.

A member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe from 2011, Benjamin was appointed leader of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in 2016. He performed with the SCO as soloist and director on several occasions and was also involved in the its chamber music series at the Queen’s Hall in Edinburgh. He has appeared as guest leader with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and as leader and director with the Camerata Salzburg.

Rebecca Chan (violin)

Philharmonia associate leader Rebecca Chan was born in Melbourne and studied violin with Alice Waten at the Australian National Academy of Music and Sydney

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Conservatorium and with William Hennessy at Melbourne University. She has played as soloist with many of Australia's major orchestras, including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra; Adelaide, Tasmanian and Canberra Symphony Orchestras; Orchestra Victoria; Melbourne Chamber Orchestra; and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. She has been the winner of the string section, and Nelly Apt Scholarship in the ABC Young Performers Awards, the ANAM concerto competition and the Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition, and was a prize winner at the International Citta di Brescia Violin Competition.

As a chamber musician, Rebecca has toured Australia, Europe and Asia, and has played in numerous festivals around the world. She is a member of the Australia Piano Quartet and the Hamer Quartet (winners of the first prize, the audience prize and Musica Viva award in the 2009 Asia Pacific Chamber Music Competition).

Yukiko Ogura (viola)

Principal viola with the Philharmonia Yukiko Ogura was born in Nara in western Japan. Having studied the violin at Kyoto City University of the Arts, Yukiko won a position as a member of the Kobe City Chamber Orchestra, which specialises in string repertoire.

Encouraged by Nobuko Imai, Yukiko became more interested in the viola, eventually giving up the violin completely in order to study with Mazumi Tanamura in Tokyo. She emigrated to the USA in 2000 and continued her studies there with Li-Kuo Chang at Roosevelt University in Chicago. She became the violist of the Eusia String Quartet, which subsequently won the gold medal at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition in 2001. In the same year,

Yukiko was appointed a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Richard Birchall (cello)

Philharmonia cellist Richard Birchall read Music at Cambridge University and studied as a postgraduate cellist at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London under Louise Hopkins. He later completed studies in film music composition at Goldsmiths College.

Richard pursues a varied and colourful career as cellist, composer, arranger and orchestrator. As a member of the Philharmonia Orchestra, he performs regularly in the great concert halls of the world. He has appeared as guest principal cello with the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, Northern Sinfonia and Irish Chamber Orchestra, and as concertmaster of the London Cello Orchestra. Richard's solo and chamber work has ranged from Wigmore Hall to the catwalk at London Fashion Week. He is a founder member of cello octet Cellophony – now firmly established as the UK's leading cello ensemble – and cellist of the Minerva Piano Trio.

Tim Gibbs (double bass)

Only the fourth principal double bass in the Philharmonia Orchestra's history, Tim Gibbs regularly appears as a guest principal with a variety of ensembles and symphony orchestras in the UK and has also spent considerable time in Japan as guest principal double bass with the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa. Tim was the first double bassist to be invited to study at the Yehudi Menuhin School and has since appeared regularly as a soloist and recitalist throughout Europe.

As an avid chamber musician, Tim has performed at Southbank Centre's

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International Chamber Music Series and at the BBC Proms. Significant collaborations include projects with guitarist John Williams, the

Aronovitz Ensemble, trumpeter Alison Balsom, the London Conchord Ensemble and recordings with the Doric and Sacconi quartets. He has also broadcast live on Classical FM radio, BBC Radio 3 and BBC Digital Interactive.

String Quintet in G major, op 77, B 49 by Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

1. Allegro con fuoco; 2. Scherzo. Allegro vivace; 3. Poco andante; 4. Finale. Allegro assai.

1875 was Dvořák's breakthrough year. In February he received news that he had won the Austrian State Music Prize, an annual award for impoverished musicians. At the same time, he was finding his individual voice as a composer, finally leaving behind Wagner's influence (though this would reappear to some extent in the series of symphonic poems he composed in the 1890s). Together, the two sets of circumstances marked a major turning-point in his career, reflected in a burst of creativity that produced, among other things, his Serenade for Strings and his first fully mature symphony, No 5 in F, as well as this Quintet.

When the stipend was awarded, Dvořák was part-way through composing it, for a chamber music competition promoted by the Artistic Circle of Prague. It was unanimously voted the winner and was performed at a concert organised by the Circle in March 1876. Dvořák had given it the opus number 18, but when Fritz Simrock issued the score in 1888, he ignored the composer's wishes, as he so often did, giving it a high opus number to suggest it was a more recent work than it really was.

The addition of a double-bass to the standard string quartet, instead of a second viola or cello, is probably unique, although Dvořák may have taken his cue from Schubert's

'Trout' Quintet, which includes a double bass alongside violin, viola, cello and piano. The instrument's presence freed the cello from the bass of the ensemble, allowing it a greater share of the melodic interest. Dvořák makes full use of the opportunity, but he did not repeat the experiment: his E flat Quintet of 1893 (which we heard in an earlier concert in this series) reverts to the more usual string quintet line-up, with two violas.

The opening allegro begins rather hesitantly, but quickly gathers confidence for the main part of the movement, with its bold, almost orchestral sonorities, vigorous rhythmic style and down-to-earth good humour (the Intermezzo originally followed at this point).

The boisterous scherzo is full of energetic, stamping rhythms, while the music of the central trio section is more smoothly flowing. It is followed by the beautiful, song-like andante which forms the heart of the work, with its radiantly soaring melodies for the first violin and the cello, and gently pulsing inner parts.

The exhilarating finale is based on two ideas, a rhythmically altered version of the scherzo's main theme, and a slowed-down variant of this. Although Dvořák knows how and when to vary the pace, the music's bubbling good humour remains unclouded right to the exhilarating final flourish.

Intermezzo (“Andante Religioso”) by Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

As first conceived, Dvořák's String Quintet in G major had five movements, of which this Intermezzo was the second. It had already formed part of his then unpublished E minor String Quartet of 1870. He later removed it from the Quintet, revised it, and published it separately as his Nocturne for String Orchestra, op 40.

Dvořák's stated explanation was that one slow movement was enough, though some writers have suspected the interfering hand of his Vienna-based publisher, Fritz Simrock. Another reason may be the chromatic harmonies which suggest that he had not yet fully shaken off the influence of his early enthusiasm for Wagner.

This may have contributed to his feeling that the movement did not fit with the rest of the work. In any case, Wagner was, as Dvořák's biographer, John Clapham, tersely commented, “hardly the ideal model for a composer of chamber music”.

Following an introspective unison introduction for the lower strings, it proceeds over a gently undulating accompaniment, with a quicker section marked by more impulsive syncopated figures. The piece ends with an ethereal, high-lying reminder of the preceding music.

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