

## Solem Lates: From Lockdown

### About the programme

***Ca the Yowes* is a traditional Scottish song originating from a poem by Isabel Pagan. It is more commonly attributed to Robert Burns, who adapted and popularised it. The poem tells the story of a shepherdess calling across the hills of Ayrshire to her lover, a fellow shepherd. Steph's arrangement borrows from versions by Maurice Jacobson and the popular arrangement by Vaughan Williams.**

Cassandra Miller (b. 1976) wrote *Warblework* in 2011, using the birdsong of the Pacific coast as the basis of her melodies. Her intonation requirements - slightly off how a string quartet would normally tune - and generally low dynamics create a wonderfully surreal soundworld that evokes the birdlife she had in mind, but also has a strangely human quality about it, almost like hazy chatter heard from a distance.

**William Byrd (1543-1623) wrote his Mass for Four Voices, in 1592, having become a Catholic at a time when England was newly Protestant under Elizabeth I. The punishment for engaging in Catholicism could be as severe as a death sentence, so Byrd had to compose in secret, and the first editions of his Masses were printed without title pages or reference to the composer, in case they were discovered. His work could no longer be performed in public, instead only in the private houses of a small clandestine group of fellow Catholics.**

More than four centuries later, Thomas Adès (b. 1971) wrote his second string quartet, *The Four Quarters*. We were really privileged to study with Mr Adès at IMS Prussia Cove two years ago and work in depth on this piece with him. The movement we're playing in this concert is called *Days*; it has a one-note motif heard right from the beginning that gets repeated throughout, creating an unsettling sense of timelessness.

**Schumann (1810-1856) spent the last two years of his life in isolation, having been committed to an asylum with what is now suspected to have been a combination of schizophrenia and mercury poisoning. Tragically, he was forbidden from seeing his beloved wife Clara, and was unable to compose. Will has transcribed the hauntingly beautiful theme from the last piece he wrote before going into isolation, *The Ghost Variations*, originally for solo piano.**

The last piece in this section of the programme is *O Magnum Mysterium* by Gabrieli (1557-1612), originally for two antiphonal choirs. Normally one choir would stand on each side of the stalls at the front of the church, but Gabrieli was writing for the cathedral of St Marks' in Venice, and had the choirs at opposite ends of the vast space. We recorded both of the choir parts separately and added them together in post-production (a new lockdown skill!).

**Florence Price (1887-1953) was an African-American composer and organist who wrote an enormous amount of music, much of which has been lost or only discovered recently. Her style bears the influences of both European and American classical music, reflecting her education, although she also often drew on spirituals and religious sources. Her tender version of the traditional song *Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes* comes from her string quartet, *Five Folksongs in Counterpoint*.**

Bartok's (1881-1945) *Transylvanian Dances* were originally for piano, only later orchestrated by the composer. It makes sense to play it on string instruments as the melodies used all come from folk tunes he collected while in Romania, mostly played by peasant violinists. The three very short character movements are called *Dudások* (Bagpipes), *Medvetánc* (Bear Dance) and *Finale*.