

Monday 17 June | 7.30pm | Snape Maltings Concert Hall

**BBC Singers and Castalian String Quartet**Mon  
17**BBC Singers****Sofi Jeannin** conductor**Castalian String Quartet:****Sini Simonen** violin**Daniel Roberts** violin**Natalie Loughran** viola**Steffan Morris** cello**Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)**

String Quartet No.63 in B flat, Op.76 No.4, 'Sunrise' (1797) 23'

- i. *Allegro con spirito*
- ii. *Adagio*
- iii. *Menuet: Allegro – Trio*
- iv. *Finale: Allegro ma non troppo*

**Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)**

Cinq rechants (1948) 20'

text: Olivier Messiaen

- i. *Hayo kapritama la li la li la li la ssaréno*
- ii. *Ma première fois terre terre l'éventail déployé*
- iii. *Ma robe d'amour mon amour ma prison d'amour*
- iv. *Niokhamâ palalan(e)sou-kî mon bouquet tout défait rayonne*
- v. *Mayoma kalimolimo mayoma kalimolimo*

## INTERVAL

**Judith Weir (b.1954)**

blue hills beyond blue hills (2019) 35'

text: haiku and tanka by Alan Spence (b.1947), with Kobayashi Issa and Matsuo Basho

- i. *first warmth of spring*
- ii. *I'm falling up*
- iii. *Middle of the night –*
- iv. *turning back the clocks*
- v. *winter solitude*

**Duration: approx 105'**

including a 20-minute interval

This performance is surtitled  
Translations by Richard Stokes

This performance is being recorded by  
BBC Radio 3 for broadcast at 7.30pm on Tuesday 25 June in  
'Radio 3 in Concert', and will be available afterwards on BBC Sounds



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Joseph **Haydn**'s Op.76 string quartets, dedicated to count Joseph Erdődy, were completed in 1797 and published in 1799. Following his successes in London, Haydn had returned to Vienna a hero, his style notably more public-facing and demonstrative. Coincidentally, his tasks as Kapellmeister at the Esterházy court had become less onerous (Nicolas II demanded only a single mass from him per year), and Haydn chose to use his time to cultivate sacred vocal music and the string quartet. Op.76 No.4, nicknamed the 'Sunrise', presumably in light of its gradual unfurling in the first movement, is, according to music critic Hans Keller, 'amongst the greatest of the great'.

There are certainly some bold stylistic contrasts in the quartet, including within its strongly characterised third movement, a jauntily rustic Minuet and Trio. By contrast, the slow second movement follows what Charles Rosen terms a 'slow-movement sonata form', where an exposition moves almost immediately to the recapitulation. Notably, the main theme is recapitulated in the tonic minor (by this time an archaic device) and continues to develop, almost as a secondary development, moving towards the subdominant – a process Keller refers to as one of 'withdrawal' into a 'state of profound repose'. This contrasts with the structure of the fourth movement, which accelerates steadily through a ternary form with successively faster tempi – a unique example of such a device in Haydn's output.

Extrovert showmanship, not to mention virtuosity, are also on display in Olivier

**Messiaen's** *Cinq rechants* (five refrains) (1948), albeit in a very different musical style, idiom and era from Haydn's quartet.

A 'chant d'amour' for twelve *a cappella* voices, it was composed immediately after his epic *Turangalila* symphony. The decade following the Second World War was fascinating and diverse, perhaps the most polarised moment in music history. On the one hand, there were the achingly melancholic rearguard echoes

of a former *fin-de-siècle* modernism, mellowed into the late autumn harvest of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, also composed in 1948. On the other, there was the emerging avant-garde of Boulez, Stockhausen, Nono and others, spearheading music into an unknown, experimental future, actively led and inspired by Messiaen's famous classes in Paris.

But for all his innovations – in 1949 to 1950 he composed the first work of total serialism, his *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* for piano, in which pitch, duration, attack and dynamics are determined by the integer twelve (the number of pitches in a chromatic scale) – Messiaen arguably represented a bridge from the early modern (Wagner, Debussy, Stravinsky) to the new. The *Cinq rechants*, for example, are the final part of a trilogy of works dedicated to the love between Tristan and Isolde: Messiaen was attracted by the equivalence of the Wagnerian 'love-death' element to the liturgical 'life-death-rebirth' cycle. He devised his own disjunct, often illogical, Surrealist text (following André Breton and Pierre Reverdy), with references to other famous, ill-fated lovers (including Orpheus and Eurydice, and Duke Bluebeard), with wordless French phonemes chosen for their musical qualities, and an invented language based on ancient Peruvian (Quechua) and Sanskrit.

Overall, the work is an invented ritual, its hieratic quality combining the ancient and modern, the Western and (re-)imagined Eastern, the sacred and secular. Each movement elaborates the verse-refrain structures of *Le printemps*, a *chanson* collection by the 16th-century French composer Claude Le Jeune. The opening movement is framed by a solo soprano invocation, between which two contrasting textures are alternated: one, titled 'Rechant' ('Lovers fly away into space' – a reference to Marc Chagall), is a rapid chorus ('Presque vif') moving in textual and rhythmic unison but with changing time signatures, indebted to Indian *tālas*; the other, titled 'Couplet', comprises entirely independent soloistic lines (first two parts, then four) in complementary rhythm at a



Katsushika Hokusai

moderate tempo  
but in a fixed time

This 'opening in closing invocation' template for the work h... Within this shape represents the couplets drive t... in an ecstatic p... counterpoint. T... textual images, darkness, open... end on the expe... 'dans l'avenir' ('that ultimately t... Tristan and Isol... flower garden.



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Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849): Umezawa Manor in Sagami Province (Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji, 1830–31)

moderate tempo, each part with its own text but in a fixed time signature (2/4).

This 'opening invocation–refrain/couplet–closing invocation' structure provides a template for the remaining four movements, so that the work has a timeless, circular quality. Within this shape the central third movement represents the apex, although here the couplets drive the music forward, culminating in an ecstatic passage of twelve-part counterpoint. There are a number of recurrent textual images, including contrasts of light and darkness, open and confined spaces, but we end on the expansive – the eternal, open-ended 'dans l'avenir' ('in the future') – reminding us that ultimately these are love songs inspired by Tristan and Isolde's Act II love duet, sung in a flower garden.

A later pupil of Messiaen's, who attended his classes at Tanglewood in the summer of 1975, was **Judith Weir**, whose *blue hills beyond blue hills* (2019) combines the two forces we have heard so far this evening. Premiered by the BBC Singers (who perform it here), for whom she was associate composer from 2015–19, and the Ligeti Quartet, this 'oratorio for choir and string quartet', as Weir describes it, 'sets to music around 55 brief poems by the Scottish poet Alan Spence, mostly haiku, with occasional *tanka* (another, slightly longer, Japanese form)' with 'a couple of quotations from the historical Japanese poets Issa and Basho.' Weir selected poems from three of Spence's collections, arranging them into a five-movement cycle that approximates to the passing of a year, starting in Spring and ending 'with a hymn to the New Year'. The primary role of the quartet is to punctuate the singers' statements, rather than accompany them, and 'to provide moments of repose and reflection'.



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**Matsuo Bashō** (1644–1694): painting from 'Oku no Hosomichi' ('The Narrow Road to the Deep North', published 1702)

Weir's piece therefore shares with Messiaen's *Cinq rechants* the tracing of moods and themes. Although clearly more comprehensible than Messiaen's text – Weir has developed an acute ear for choral writing, setting multiple texts and, more recently, composing many choral works in her role as Master of the Queen's/King's Music – *blue hills* also uses phonemes, here added to the source texts for variety and shade, introducing rhythmic, percussive and timbral effects that sometimes evoke the sounds of nature. The quartet, too, is sometimes used to evoke the natural world, for example in its skittering 'Insect Dance' near the end of the first movement, in anticipation of a few lines by Kobayashi Issa regarding insects on a log floating downriver.

Ironically, given Weir's penchant in the 1980s and early 1990s for fragmented textures – as heard in the opera *Blond Eckbert* – and despite the lapidary nature of haiku verse, Weir achieves a remarkable sense of fluidity and continuity, whilst enabling each haiku to retain its own identity within the flow. Here the quartet often has an important role to play in linking separate verses – for example, in the first movement it underpins 'Suddenly spring', then 'sun after rain', then 'blue hills beyond blue hills', with continued triplet quavers that in no

way detract from the distinct, contrasted vocal settings of these verses, but assist in the production of a quasi-narrative within the movement.

The central third movement, depicting autumn, is a *tour-de-force* of vocal effects, employing half-sung, spoken and whispered declamation to conjure a range of sonic images, including mice behind the skirting boards and a gate that bangs 'all night'. Here, as elsewhere, Weir is relaxed about repeating lines and overlapping them (which happens more in the final two movements, where the parts assume greater independence), as a necessary part of translating the haiku verses into musical expression. Regarding repetition, a case in point is the final line, as the New Year is ushered in: 'Let it all go'. Precisely because it does not deny the chill of the cold, dark nights, this clearly resonates with the end of Messiaen's *Cinq rechants*, and perhaps also Haydn's 'Sunrise': looking to the future with tenderness, forgiveness, and bright anticipation.

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See also:

'Blue Hills Beyond: The Way of Haiku' by Alan Spence, p.228

Tuesday 18 June | 11am

## Britten Pe

**Lindsey Reynolds** soprano  
**Jonathan Evers** baritone  
**Emily Hoh** piano

**Sally Beamish** (b.1956)  
Four Songs from Hafez

1. *Nightingale*

text: Divan e Hafez, translated

**Benjamin Britten** (1913–1992)  
Tit for Tat (1968)

1. *A Song of Enchantment*

3. *Silver*

4. *Vigil*

text: Walter de la Mare (1873–1956)

**Douglas Lilburn** (1915–2000)  
Sings Harry (1953)

*Song I* ('These songs')

*Song III* ('When I am')

*Once the Days*

*The Casual Man*

*The Flowers of the Sea*

*I Remember*

text: Denis Glover (1912–1997)

**Benjamin Britten**  
Night Piece (Notturmo)

**Douglas Lilburn**  
Holiday Piece (1946)

text: Denis Glover (1912–1997)

**Gareth Farr** (b.1968)  
Ornithological Anecdotes

1. *Dotterel*

4. *Kiwi*

text: Bill Manhire (b.1946)