

## CityMusic Cleveland: a conversation with cellist Sophie Benn

by Mike Telin



If you're not quite ready to immerse yourself in concerts totally dedicated to music of the holiday season, you're in luck. Beginning on Wednesday, December 9 at 7:30 pm at St. Noel Church in Willoughby Hills, guest conductor Stefan Willich will lead CityMusic Cleveland in the first of five concerts that will feature Cleveland Orchestra first violinist Miho Hashizume as soloist in both Piazzolla's "Spring" from *The Four Seasons of*

*Buenos Aires* and Vivaldi's "Winter" from *The Four Seasons*. Mozart's *Symphony No. 41*, K. 551 ("Jupiter") will round out the performances. Check our [concert listings](#) page for additional days and times.

The concerts will also include Haydn's joyful *Sinfonia Concertante*, Op. 84 for violin, cello, oboe, and bassoon. "I'm looking forward to playing the Haydn," CityMusic's principal cello Sophie Benn said during a telephone conversation. "I've played both of his cello concertos, but this piece is very different from either one."

Filling out the solo quartet duties will be violinist Miho Hashizume, oboist Eric Ohlsson, and bassoonist Laura Koepke. "Having four very different voices taking the lead makes for an interesting dynamic," Benn pointed out. "Haydn is known for being a witty composer — he plays a lot of jokes on the audience — and that is definitely true here. The dialogue among the soloists, and between the soloists and the orchestra, produces some really funny moments."

Although the four soloists will not come together as a quartet until rehearsals begin this week, Benn and Hashizume have met to talk over bowings and articulations. "It's obvious when the violin and cello don't agree on things because our instruments are in

the same family, so we need to make sure that we have a unified vision of the piece. We'll put it together later with the other soloists to make sure that everything works."

Benn said that finding the best edition of Haydn's work was important. "There are many editions and they vary greatly, especially in the cello part. When I was learning it I had to make many choices, such as whether or not to play certain passages up an octave to match the violin, or to play them lower in the cello's tenor range. I was able to make it more my own than I would have been able to if it were the Dvořák concerto.

"We are using the Urtext edition, so it is pretty faithful to the original. I have looked at other editions out of curiosity just to see what is different and what is possible to do with the piece. Some editions seem to be interested in showing off virtuosity by adding additional passagework. But in the end, the most important thing is for the solo quartet to agree on what to do."

Benn is excited to have the opportunity to perform the work five times. She's also certain that it will sound a little different in each space. "Every church is so different acoustically, but as the nights go on and we become more comfortable with the piece, we'll find little nuggets of exciting moments. I hope that we will be able to bring something different to each performance."

After the performance of the Haydn, Benn looks forward to taking a break and listening to the Piazzolla. "I have such a fondness for his music. It's so different from a lot of things we get to play. It's so witty, and he's able to seamlessly blend the styles of tango and classical in a very interesting way. I think this piece really presents that, and I'm looking forward to what Miho is going to do with it."

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