

He Hung His Head and Died: 12 Variations for George Floyd  
for piano four-hands

9:30 minutes

Brooke Joyce (2020)

Premiered by the Unison Piano Duo, December 2020

Program Note: During 2020, our country faced the twin pandemics of the coronavirus and systemic racism. While we saw the advent of multiple vaccines for Covid-19 at the end of the year, the work of addressing racism is a long, arduous and difficult journey. On an individual level, many of us in the arts responded to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many others by creating new work that encouraged us to reflect, react, and ultimately, to work for change. When I learned about George Floyd's murder on May 25, I could think of little else for several days. Ultimately, I was led to create this new work for the Unison Piano Duo (Du Huang and Xiao Hu), "He Hung His Head and Died (12 Variations for George Floyd)." At the heart of the piece is an African-American Spiritual, "He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word," which appears as a set of reverse variations, with the most veiled variation played at the beginning and the actual tune emerging as a coda at the end. The amount of time needed to play the 12 variations is approximately 8 minutes and 45 seconds, the amount of time it took for George Floyd to expire under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer.