James MacMillan’s choral music embraces sacred and secular, ancient and modern, meditative simplicity and rich ornamentation.

**A Practical Commentary and Survey by Paul Spicer**

This guide examines 58 of his choral works from a practical perspective, describing the choral forces required, the level of difficulty, and the vocal character of each piece.

- Unaccompanied choral works page 2
- Choral works with organ page 8
- Choral works with piano or instruments page 11
- Choral works with orchestra page 13

**MacMillan Choral CD Sampler**

Extracts from 17 choral works by James MacMillan can be heard on a Boosey & Hawkes CD sampler, available upon request from composers.uk@boosey.com.

Performers on the disc include the Choir of Westminster Cathedral, Polyphony, The Hilliard Ensemble, the BBC Singers and the BBC Symphony Chorus.

Track numbers are referred to throughout this Guide.

For further information about James MacMillan and his music, please visit his website at www.boosey.com/macmillan
Born in Scotland in 1959, James MacMillan has rapidly established himself as one of the most successful and sought-after of international composers. His output is unusual among mainstream contemporary composers in including a high proportion of choral works, with his chosen genres and subject matter extending over a wide span, from liturgically-based music which could play a part in weekly church services to virtuoso writing for soloistic multi-voiced choirs such as in Màiri. The scale of forces employed also ranges widely from the serene, unaccompanied A Child’s Prayer written in memory of the murdered children of Dunblane Primary School to the grandeur of his orchestral and choral work Quickening premiered at the 1999 BBC Proms. His Strathclyde Motets, a series of communion motets written mostly for specific days of the church’s year, are a wonderful example of MacMillan’s ability to write straightforward music without compromising his deeply personal style. At the other end of the scale his St. John Passion is a hugely complex and dramatic work the like of which has probably not been seen since Britten’s War Requiem.

James MacMillan’s Catholic faith is central to his creativity and brings an added dimension to much of his choral music, whether recapturing a mood of Medieval meditation or reaching towards a state of spiritual ecstasy or contemplative peace. Even when, as in Cantos Sagrados, the words are about political repression, he ensures that there is enshrined in the work a message of hope beyond the earthly struggle. Among his large-scale works the Seven Last Words from the Cross is a masterpiece of choral drama which cannot fail to move all who hear it.

The level of difficulty given to each work is on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the easiest and 5 the most complex.
while his Mass written for the Millennium is liturgically conceived but could be equally successful as a concert work. The composer’s understanding of the rhetorical power of voices gives the ‘mystical coda’ at the end of The Birds of Rhiannon (the only choral section) an extraordinary emotional impact which brings the whole work into focus on another plane.

There are also several short works which can be used as anthems or as part of the liturgy. The Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis will give church and cathedral choir directors a welcome new setting in a contemporary idiom which is easily approachable. His Missa Brevis is also aimed at the average church choir with ambition. Harking back to Elizabethan models its linear writing gives it a beauty and stature rare in contemporary church music. His two great Elizabethan models its linear writing gives it a beauty and stature rare in contemporary church music. His two

*Christus Vincit* (1994) for double choir (SSAATTBB) a cappella, with treble/soprano solo
Text from the Worcester Acclamations (tenth century) (L) Commissioned by the Musicians Benevolent Fund for the 1994 St Cecilia’s Day Service in St Paul’s Cathedral and in memory of Sir Thomas Armstrong. 

**Level 3**  
**CD track 19**  
**Audio clip** www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10791

This imaginative short anthem makes creative use of double choir forces. It starts from the sopranos and works its way to the basses in plainsong-like phrases that are punctuated by moments of silence – or time for a period of reverberation to subside. It contrasts counterpoint with moments of chordal simplicity that are beguilingly beautiful. MacMillan’s love of the vocal cadenza with its melismatic freedom and characteristic ornamentation is here given to a soprano (or treble) solo. The final Alleluias are wonderfully rich, linearly interacting between the voices. This gives way to a soprano solo who ends the anthem on a top B (piano!).

 Though posing some challenges, this anthem is worth the necessary effort put into the learning process. As with all MacMillan’s choral music, it will get under the skin of those performing it.

979-0-060-09761-4 **Choral score on sale**  
**Hyperion CDA 67219** Choir of Westminster Cathedral/Martin Baker

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*Data est mihi omnis potestas* (2007)  
(*The Strathclyde Motets*)  
Communion motet for Ascension Day, for SATB chorus a cappella  
Text: Roman Breviary, Matthew 28:18,19 (L)

**Premiere:** 14 May 2007 St Columba’s Church, Maryhill, Glasgow  
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener  
**Level 4**  
**Audio clip** www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/11889

A highly effective and extremely straightforward setting of a text from an inscription over the door into a Jesuit church in Glasgow. The piece begins with a forceful SATB prayer in English (perhaps inspired by the stone on which the inscription was carved) calling for Saint Aloysius to ‘pray for us’. The second, more reflective section (with tenors divided but in the same rhythm), repeats the prayer in Latin, and the final section is an exact repeat of the first. In its very simplicity lies its spiritual directness and success. The optional organ accompaniment merely doubles the vocal parts if pitch needs to be supported.

979-0-060-09510-8 **Choral score on sale**  
**Signum SIGCD507** The Elysian Singers/Sam Laughton
Dominus dabit benignitatem (2006) 5’
(The Lord will bestow his loving kindness)
(The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for the 1st Sunday in Advent, for SATB chorus a cappella
Text: Roman Breviary, Psalm 84: 13 (L)
Premiere: 3 December 2006 St Columba’s Church, Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener

Level 2

Dominus dabit benignitatem is a hugely impressive motet starting from the simplest of means and often ending phrases with easily managed clusters. As with all these motets a solo line often predominates which is echoed in other parts. The final Amens are as beautiful as they are unexpected (Basses need a low E flat).

979-0-060-11931-6 Choral score on sale
📍 Linn Records CKD 301 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Factus est repente (2005) 2’
(Suddenly, a sound came)
(The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for Pentecost, for SATB chorus a cappella
Text: Roman Breviary, Acts 2: 2,4 (L)
Premiere: 15 May 2005 Strathclyde University Chaplaincy Centre, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener

Level 2

The opening of Factus est repente is set up to sound like an outburst of bagpipe music with drone and highly decorated melody which is much in the style of the other motets in this series. The decorated melismatic writing which follows in other parts needs some careful handling. These moments of choral outburst are beautifully interspersed by more straightforward, gentle music, and the whole motet ends with a sublime ‘alleluia’.

979-0-060-11932-3 Choral score on sale
📍 Linn Records CKD 301 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

…fiat mihi… (2007) 5’
for double chorus SSAATTBB a cappella
Text: Stabat Mater (L) with additional text by the composer (E)
Premiere: 21 March 2008 Wells Cathedral
Bath Camerata conducted by Nigel Perrin

Level 4

This work is related to the 7th movement (Jesus and his Mother) of MacMillan’s St John Passion. He lifts the choral parts out of their original orchestral context to make a starkly moving unaccompanied lament. The piece is structured so that the altos and tenors have interlocking, rhythmically interesting lines whilst the sopranos and basses have longer lines which envelop these swirling motifs. It is not easy, but the challenge is infinitely worthwhile for a disciplined and able choir. One of the challenges for the basses at one point is attempting to produce overtones in the harmonic series from a long pedal point. The final phrase ‘your sacred head is wounded’ quotes the first phrase of Bach’s Passion chorale.

Choral score on hire

The Gallant Weaver (1997) 7’
for SATB choir (with divisi) a cappella
Text by Robert Burns (Scots)
Commissioned by the University of Paisley on the occasion of its centenary in 1997
Premiere: 14 April 1997 Thomas Coats Memorial Church, Paisley
Paisley Abbey Choir conducted by George McPhee

Level 2

CD track 12
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10819

This ideal introduction to MacMillan’s secular choral music is rich in Scottish flavour, appropriate to its Robert Burns text. Characteristic vocal elements are the ornamental inflections drawn from Scottish folk music and Gaelic Psalmody, and the overall mood is one of tranquility. Distinctive colourings of the voice parts are explored through triple divisions of the sopranos and double divisions in the other parts.

979-0-060-10666-8 Choral score on sale
📍 Chansons CHAN 9997 BBC Singers/James MacMillan

Give me Justice (2003) 3’
Introit for the 5th Sunday of Lent, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: Psalm 42 (43) (E-L)

Level 1

A straightforward refrain and verse structure with the refrain built on a pedal point C for the basses (the idea of the ‘drone’ is rarely far from MacMillan’s writing in this style). The verses are beautifully free and set as chant. The moving away from the pedal point also gives them a harmonic freedom which is remarkable given the simplicity of the writing. The clarity of expression gives the words a real prominence. This would make a good starting point for a choir of limited attainments looking to broaden its repertoire.

979-0-060-12017-6 Choral score on sale

...here in hiding... (1993) 13’
Motet for mixed choir (ATTB) or four male voices with tenor solo
Words from ‘Adoro te devote’ by St Thomas Aquinas and from its English translation by Gerard Manley Hopkins (L/E)
Commissioned by The Hilliard Ensemble
Premiere: 10 August 1993 Stevenson Hall, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow
The Hilliard Ensemble

Level 4 - 5

CD track 16
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10792

This is one of MacMillan’s most ambitious unaccompanied works. It is challenging, as always, but well within the grasp of a good choral group who have good ears, an ability to pitch slightly awkward intervals and to sing fast chromatic passages with the characteristic ‘quick-turn’ MacMillan ornamentation. The sheer scale of this motet makes it a major undertaking, especially if sung by solo voices.

The work has a medieval feel and sound, with the plainsong melody ‘Adore te devote’ being woven into the texture unobtrusively. It is essentially simple in structure and is very atmospheric. There is a major cadence for tenor solo some two thirds of the way through the work that ends with warmly expressive music and a fade-out which is highly effective.

979-0-060-11458-8 Choral score on sale
📍 Naxos 8.570719 Dmitri Ensemble/Graham Ross

...fiat mihi...
In splendoribus sanctorum (2005)  
(Amids the splendours of the heavenly sanctuary)  
(The Strathclyde Motets)

Communion motet for Nativity Midnight Mass, for SATB chorus and obbligato trumpet or organ
Text : Roman Breviary, Psalm 109: 3 (L)
Premiere: 24 December 2006  St Columba’s Church, Maryhill, Glasgow  
St Columba’s Church Choir
Level 3

In splendoribus sanctorum is a motet of pure simplicity written in short sections which are interspersed with trumpet (or organ) obbligato passages. As the piece progresses through a number of repetitions the trumpet uses its part more freely which creates a feeling of development and progression even though the choral parts remain unvaried. It is hugely effective writing and demonstrates the fact that simple means can often deliver the strongest message. Basses with an easily produced low F are needed.

979-0-060-11933-0  Choral score on sale

Linn Records CKD 301  Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Invocation (2006)

for SATB double chorus a cappella
Text: Karol Wojtyla, trans Jerzy Peterkiewicz (E)
Premiere: 11 July 2006  Tewkesbury Abbey  
Oriel Singers/Tim Morris
Level 3

This is beautifully written for absolute clarity of words and a reflection of their obvious power for the composer. It is richly scored for double SATB and begins recitative-like, hesitantly, with hummed ‘accompaniment’ to the words when altoe introduce them. The double choir arrangement is used both for antiphonal drama and for its sonorous possibilities. This is a short, passionate work and MacMillan takes us on a far greater journey than its mere six minute duration would imply.

Choral score on hire

Laudi alla Vergine Maria (2004)

for SSAATTBB chorus a cappella
Text: Dante (l)
Premiere: 6 October 2004  St Janskerk, Gouda  
Netherlands Chamber Choir conducted by Stephen Layton
Level 3

A dramatic, challenging, and ultimately beautiful unaccompanied choral work aimed at top level choirs (it was commissioned by the Netherlands Chamber Choir and Winchester Cathedral). A refrain begins the work and returns at key moments, reminiscent of the outbursts which characterise the second movement of MacMillan’s extraordinary Seven Last Words from the Cross. For those who are familiar with MacMillan’s choral writing there will be no surprises here. Solo voices taking highly decorated phrases, contrasts, beautifully lyrical passages, richly scored divisi writing, and phrases to be sung freely and independently of other singers within a certain time frame, all characterise this work. The ending brings into focus another MacMillan fingerprint which he seems to be developing more recently, the unexpectedly beautiful cadential resolution which is a curiously British trait. This is an exciting and enormously worthwhile work for the high achievers amongst choirs.

979-0-060-11680-3  Choral score on sale

Màiri (1994)

for 16 part a cappella choir
Words by Evan MacColl (tr. James MacMillan) (E)
Commissioned by the BBC for the 70th anniversary of the BBC Singers
Premiere: 19 May 1995  St John’s Smith Square, London  
BBC Singers conducted by Bo Holten
Level 3

CD track 9

audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10817

This beautiful unaccompanied work adapts the translated text of a Gaelic elegy by the 19th century poet Evan MacColl. The words ‘She has gone’ dominate the piece (they begin each verse) and underline its sense of desolation. MacMillan stretches his vocal forces to their limits with basses droning pedal points as low as C sharp and sopranos being led up to top E flats which diminuendo! The piece ends with a piano top C sharp for sopranos. This is not a work for the faint-hearted, and yet, as always, there is so much here beyond these practical challenges. It is a beautiful, mesmerizing, atmospheric work which contrasts the stillness of slow-moving voices interspersed with bursts of frenetic activity generated by florid ornamentation. The composer points to ‘pentatonic harmonies and a certain shaping of melodic line (which) suggests a perceptible influence of ancient Celtic music’. It is the almost atavistic nature of this music that draws one into its world and induces a kind of trance-like state. Excellent choirs with a sense of ambition and professional groups will want to explore this work. Having done so it will stay with them.

979-0-060-11459-5  Choral score on sale

Chandos CHAN 9997  BBC Singers/James MacMillan

Missa Brevis (1977)

Kyrie; Gloria; Sanctus; Agnus Dei; At the conclusion
for SATB chorus a cappella
Text: Latin Mass
Premiere (complete): 22 November 2007  Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh  
Cappella Nova conducted by Alan Tavener
Level 3

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/11963

This short Mass setting was written when the composer was aged 17 and released for publication thirty years later in 2007. The style is imbued with the Renaissance and Baroque choral works that MacMillan was discovering with his school choir, as well as music by Britten and Kenneth Leighton with whom he started composition lessons around this time. The Kyrie seems to grow out of the world of the Byrd Four Part Mass, with beautifully interweaving parts creating that same sense of peaceful flow. The Gloria is slightly more challenging. More choral in texture with Gabrieli-like antiphonal writing throwing the phrases between upper and lower voices. The harmony is quite rich, and reminds one strongly of Frank Martin’s glorious double choir Mass. The whole effect of this Mass is music to aid contemplation and devotion. In its simplicity of means it speaks very directly to the listener. Vocally, it is not as simple as all that. There are some hurdles to leap in terms of reading, but the real challenge is in achieving the music line which so much of this music demands. This beautiful work should be very widely used.

979-0-060-11926-2  Choral score on sale

Linn Records CKD 301  Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener
Mitte manum tuam (2006) (Stretch forth your hand) (The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for the 2nd Sunday of Easter, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: Roman Breviary, John 20: 27 (L)
Premiere: 23 April 2006 St Columba’s Church, Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener

Level 🕉
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12635

MacMillan himself described the mood of these pieces as ‘having a kind of suspended animation about them.’ Mitte manum tuam has that timeless beauty which connects it with a distant musical past through the chant-like opening bass melody, the later floating triads, and the haunting alleluia. This is a special, atmospheric piece which will move singers and audiences alike.

979-0-060-11934-7 Choral score on sale

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Nemo te condemnavit (2005) for SATB chorus a cappella
Text: Gospel according to St John, chapter 8, verses 10-11 (L)
Premiere: 18 November 2005 Woolsey Hall, Yale University, New Haven Yale Glee Club conducted by Jeffrey Douma

Level 🕉

Written for the Yale Glee Club, the opening tenor and bass section is unusually based on the actual plainsong melody to which these words were sung. An extended soprano and alto duet frees the voices from any such straightjacket as they play on rising intervals and ornamental devices familiar from other MacMillan works. The plainsong returns with the lower voices. The piece then develops towards another sublimely peaceful end.

As with other such MacMillan works, the biggest challenge in this piece is getting the ornamental, quasi-improvisatory music together. The rhythms, whilst not difficult, will need real choral discipline so that all the voices in one part sound as one.

979-0-051-47747-0 Choral score on sale

Offers.

O bone Jesu (2002) for SS (with occasional divisi a 3) AATTBB choir a cappella
Text identical to Robert Carver’s 19-part motet of the same name (L)
Commissioned for Harry Christophers and The Sixteen for a tour of UK cathedrals in the autumn of 2002
Premiere: 10 October 2002 Southwark Cathedral, London
The Sixteen conducted by Harry Christophers

Level 🕉
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12642

This reflective work has the challenging nature relished by professional choirs, but is without the extreme demands of a score like Māri. The emphasis here is on textures. These are solo lines, duets and more developed contrapuntal textures interspersed by rich, quiet choral phrases emphasizing the spiritually ecstatic nature of the text. MacMillan has an uncanny ability to extract the essence of words and translate this into musical terms that both clarify and amplify the text. Right from the start the lyrical lines in this work possess an ancient feel which summons memories of chant, of medieval secular music, of renaissance polyphony and other sources which well up through the music. This is a grateful score for singers and audiences alike and the composer’s religious conviction adds a commanding weight to the work.

979-0-060-11495-3 Choral score on sale

O Radiant Dawn (2007) (The Strathclyde Motets)
Advent antiphon for 21 December, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: (E)
Premiere: 2 December 2007 St Columba’s, Maryhill, Glasgow
St Columba’s Church Choir

Level 🕉

O Radiant Dawn is built from simple separated phrases, and is particularly effective because of its straightforward nature which delivers its message unambiguously. A beautiful, rocking Amen concludes this lovely piece. Another entry level piece which will make an effective communion motet or short concert item.

979-0-060-12027-5 Choral score on sale

Pascha nostrum immolatus est (2008) (Our passover is sacrificed) (The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for Easter Day, for SATB chorus a cappella
Text : Liturgical (L)
Premiere: 23 March 2008 St Columba’s Church Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener

Level 🕉

Pascha nostrum immolatus est is a joyful, celebratory motet for one of the church’s great Feasts. I sometimes wonder if James MacMillan has set the word ‘alleluia’ more than any other composer! Here, too, after the initial paean of praise, floating alleluia pass between all parts in a kind of spiritual ecstasy. A solo soprano furthers the idea of hovering angels a little later and of a sense of improvisation over a static accompaniment. Beautiful, timeless music.

979-0-060-12025-1 Choral score on sale

Sedebit Dominus Rex (2005) (The Lord will sit on his throne) (The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for the feast of Christ the King, for SATB chorus a cappella
Text: Roman Breviary, Psalm 28: 10b,11b (L-E)
Premiere: 20 November 2005 Strathclyde University Chaplaincy Centre, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener

Level 🕉

MacMillan’s use of simple means in these Strathclyde Motets accentuates the atmospheres or moods he sets up. These in turn wonderfully highlight the words he is setting. In Sedebit Dominus Rex, a motet for a major Feast Day, the joy of the opening is achieved principally through the “decorated” soprano line which, so often in his music, harks back to the influence of ancient Celtic music. It is the marriage of ancient and modern in MacMillan’s music which is part of what makes it so irresistible. The quite end before the da capo is particularly effective because of its straightforward nature which delivers its message unambiguously. A beautiful, rocking Amen concludes this lovely piece. Another entry level piece which will make an effective communion motet or short concert item.

979-0-060-11935-4 Choral score on sale

Offers.

O Radiant Dawn (2007) (The Strathclyde Motets)
Advent antiphon for 21 December, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: (E)
Premiere: 2 December 2007 St Columba’s, Maryhill, Glasgow
St Columba’s Church Choir

Level 🕉

O Radiant Dawn is built from simple separated phrases, and is particularly effective because of its straightforward nature which delivers its message unambiguously. A beautiful, rocking Amen concludes this lovely piece. Another entry level piece which will make an effective communion motet or short concert item.

979-0-060-12027-5 Choral score on sale

Pascha nostrum immolatus est (2008) (Our passover is sacrificed) (The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for Easter Day, for SATB chorus a cappella
Text : Liturgical (L)
Premiere: 23 March 2008 St Columba’s Church Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener

Level 🕉

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979-0-060-11935-4 Choral score on sale

Offers.
So Deep (1992)
for SSAATTBB chorus and optional oboe and viola solos
see Choral works with piano or instruments

The Strathclyde Motets

In writing the Strathclyde Motets MacMillan set out to write a series of communion motets of only moderate difficulty, which would be of real and lasting use for average church or concert choirs. Aware that much of his choral music to date could be too challenging for average use, these new motets provide a very welcome opportunity for almost any choir of reasonable attainment and ambition to sing some contemporary music of real value.

See individual titles:
The Canticle of Zachariah
Data est mihi omnis potestas
Dominus dabit benignitatem
Factus est repente
In splendorisibus sanctorum
Mitte manum tuam
O Radiant Dawn
Pascha nostrum immolatus est
Sedebit Dominus Rex
Videns Dominus

Success (2006)
for SATB chorus a cappella
Text: Bessie Stanley (E)
Level 1

This straightforward piece dedicated to Helen Millar on her 75th birthday was written as a tribute to a close friend of the composer. It is a text of appreciation of someone wonderful, intended to cross the generations. A list of attributes concludes “This is to have succeeded” which is repeated four times at the end starting fortissimo, reducing to piano and growing to the final fortissimo phrase. MacMillan is full of surprises. Who would have thought that a setting of these words would feature in his oeuvre? But on reflection, this is precisely what his faith and obvious humanity leads him to celebrate. The music here is easy, and so anyone can present this piece in honour of someone they love, respect or simply appreciate.

979-0-060-11930-9 Choral score on sale

Sun-Dogs (2006)
for SATB chorus a cappella (with multiple divisi)
Text: Michael Symmons Roberts ‘Sun Dogs’ (E); Latin from the Roman Missal; English trad.
Premiere: 6 August 2006 Auer Hall, Bloomington, Indiana
Indiana University Contemporary Vocal Ensemble conducted by Carmen Téllez
Level 7

Sun-Dogs is a major concert work in five movements lasting some 18 minutes. It is certainly not for the faint-hearted and needs not only a choir of extensive resources but a conductor with confidence and ability. The singers are divided into a main choir and a chamber choir. There are multiple solos and a group of whistlers in the last two movements who have an important role (the effect feels similar to that in Britten’s Spring Symphony at first). The music involves singing in free rhythm often within an overall pulse structure. In the 4th movement (a strongly effective and affecting movement), however, the free Latin chanting is continuous under a chamber choir singing harmonised chant and whistlers whistling metrically. The fade-out at the end of the work has to be carefully managed as some twelve soloists (MacMillan does not state an exact number) freely wind down using a familiar melismatic, ornamented figure, and the whistlers use an echo of the music they had sung in the previous movement.

MacMillan sets a remarkable and highly unusual text where feral ‘sun’ dogs become the unlikely metaphor for outcasts whose bread ‘part chewed with soft saliva’, and punctured orange, ‘sweet spittle matting on the soft hair round its muzzle’ become our ‘manna’ and ‘nectar’. Another powerfully religious message made more powerful by its unlikely subject matter. This is an inspired work well worth the effort of surmounting its challenges by a skilful and ambitious choir.

Vocal score on hire
BIS recording in preparation

TenEBrae Responsories (2006) 20'
for chorus a cappella, with divisi up to SSAATTBB
Text: from the Roman Breviary (L)
Premiere: 4 April 2007 St. Andrews in the Square, Glasgow
Cappella Nova conducted by Alan Tavener
Level 3
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/11965

Written in 2006 for Cappella Nova (who have recorded the work, a number of the Strathclyde Motets and the Missa Brevis on one CD). In three movements, all of which represent different challenges. This is certainly a work for a professional choir, and one with a very secure sense of pitch. The first movement provides the ultimate challenge of multiple chromatic scales – often a nightmare for accurate tuning. But here is another work which is so deeply moving, so effective and affecting through a strong and committed sense of performance that these heights are beyond doubt worth scaling. MacMillan acknowledges a debt to the great Renaissance masters, Gesualdo and Victoria who set these texts and Gesualdo, in particular, is an obvious influence, as, curiously, is Wagner in the chromatic working out of the initial phrase in the 1st movement which returns at key points. MacMillan loves his choral outbursts as we see in a number of his works, and both the second and third movements begin with three such declamatory figures. The third movement is also characterised by long pedal points.

There is a great deal of ornamentation which is a fundamental characteristic of his style and which needs singers of confidence to put across clearly. There are challenging new notes to find across silences in wholly different chords from previous ones. These are issues professionals are used to dealing with, and yet I would hope that there would be many outstanding amateur choirs out there who would try these wonderful pieces. Rehearsal over a longer period of time would add depth and substance to the understanding and interpretation of what are remarkable representations of textual imagery in music.

979-0-060-11954-5 Vocal score on sale
Linn Records CKD 301 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

My Successor (2002)
for SATB chorus a cappella
Text: George Herbert (E)
Premiere: 27 February 2003 Canterbury Cathedral
Choir of Canterbury Cathedral conducted by David Flood
Level 2

Written for the enthronement of Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury in 2003. A straightforward, lyrical motet beginning with overlapping Alleluias, building to a passionate climax for the third repetition of “be good to the poor” and ending with a single alto line of quietly fading Alleluias. Easily manageable by most choirs. The basses need to be able to sing warmly and quietly low Fs and Es at the beginning and end.

979-0-060-11549-3 Choral score on sale
Tremunt videntes angeli (2002) 8'
for SSAATTBB choir a cappella
Text from the 5th century hymn 'Aeternus rex altissime' (L)
Commissioned for the dedication service of the Millennium window by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi in the Resurrection Chapel of St Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh
Premiere: 9 May 2002 (Ascension Day) St Mary’s Cathedral, Edinburgh Choir of St Mary’s Cathedral conducted by Matthew Owens
Level 3
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/11890
This short meditative motet is in a style that will be familiar to MacMillan devotees. Basses with low Ds are required and reasonably fleet-footed singers whose sense of ensemble is good for the rhythmic elements of the melismatic phrases which characterize the piece. These almost improvisatory elements turn into actual improvisation in the second half where the altos, tenors and basses make their own, individual ways to an Alleluia (with a suggested template) whilst two soprano parts carry the text forward with notated parts. The whole work ends with rich chords that fade away to a single upper voice minor third.
979-0-060-11437-3 Choral score on sale
Signum SIGCD507 The Elysian Singers/Sam Laughton

Videns Dominus (2005) 5'
(When the Lord saw)
(The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for the 5th Sunday in Lent, for SATB chorus a cappella
Text : Roman Breviary, John II: 33,35,43,44,39 (L)
Premiere: 13 March 2005 Strathclyde University Chaplaincy Centre, Glasgow Strathclyde University Chamber Choir conducted by Alan Tavener
Level 1
Videns Dominus is scored for SATB voices with divided tenors and basses at one point. Starting canonically with the decorated melody between sopranos and tenors the motet continues in a fragmented progress of short statements which includes one short tenor solo. The motet continues the general theme of these atmospheric works.
979-0-060-11936-1 Choral score on sale
Linn Records CKD 301 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Cantos Sagrados (1989, orch.1997) 22'
for mixed chorus and organ or orchestra
Poems by Ariel Dorfman (tr. Edie Grossman) and Ana Maria Mendoza (tr. Gilbert Markus o.p) with Latin sacred texts (E/L)
Commissioned by the Scottish Chamber Choir
Premiere: 10 February 1990 Old St Paul’s Church, Edinburgh Scottish Chamber Choir, organist John Young, conducted by Colin Tilley
Premiere (orchestral version): 21 March 1998 Glasgow Cathedral Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Christopher Bell for scoring of orchestral version see Choral works with orchestra
Level 4 5
CD track 4
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10785

As MacMillan states in his preface to the score ‘the title Sacred Songs is...slightly misleading as the three poems are concerned with political repression in Latin America and are deliberately coupled with traditional religious texts to emphasise a deeper solidarity with the poor of that subcontinent’.
This is a powerfully effective work that is not very difficult for the singers (the organ part is quite virtuosic and needs an accomplished player) although there are, as usual, points in the work that present some challenges. The second movement is unaccompanied for a substantial part of the first section that could lead to pitch problems when the organ/orchestra eventually joins. The third movement (in which a political prisoner is shot and his executioner begs him for forgiveness) uses MacMillan’s effective chorale-like vocal parts (with Latin words) which are interspersed by increasingly neurotic interventions from sopranos and then other voices which build to a huge climax as the shots are fired, gradually subsiding to a whispered “forgive me companiero” at the end.
979-0-060-09872-7 Choral score on sale
Parts for orchestral version on hire
Signum SIGCD507 The Elysian Singers/Sam Laughton

Chosen (2003) 7'
for SAATTB choir and organ
Text: Michael Symmons Roberts (E)
Premiere: 24 December 2003 Paisley Abbey, Glasgow Oliver Rundell, organ / Choir of Paisley Abbey / George McPhee
Level 2
Written in 2003 for George McPhee’s 40th anniversary as Director of Music at Paisley Abbey in Scotland, this piece sets another unusual text by Michael Symmons Roberts with whom MacMillan has collaborated extensively. Most of the piece is extremely simple and uses melodic and ornamental figures with which we have become familiar in other MacMillan works. There is a turning point roughly halfway when the full choir is employed for the first time and, as so often, in his music, it appears like a moment of revelation. The fortissimo cries of ‘The world is rich and full’ lead to the open-ended question “Why was my chosen one chosen?” Both choral and organ parts are straightforward (there is a brief division of altos and tenors) and this work makes another effective entry point for choirs looking to begin their investigation of MacMillan’s music.
979-0-060-11640-7 Choral score on sale

The Company of Heaven (1999)
for children’s voices (younger and older with separate parts), organ and with ad lib sections for wind band and carnyx solo
see Choral works with piano or instruments

Divo Aloysio Sacrum (1991)
for SATTB and optional organ accompaniment
see Unaccompanied choral works
The Galloway Mass (1996) 15’
for congregation and either cantor (if there is no choir) or SATB choir
Texts in modern translations (E)
Premiere: 25 March 1997 Good Shepherd Cathedral, Ayr
Level 1
The movements set are Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Benedictus (together), Acclamation and Agnus Dei. With the inclusion of a Gloria this is a more extended setting than the St Anne’s Mass, and the cantor or choir have an integral part which alternates with the congregational part. Sometimes this involves singing the congregation’s piece before they sing it themselves. In the Gloria, MacMillan cleverly gives the congregation only one phrase to sing throughout, which is the initial one repeated at key points. It is a novel way of setting the Gloria and it is certainly effective, underlining the joyful nature of the text. The choral parts are simple (only the Kyrie and Gloria have harmony). The Sanctus and Benedictus, Acclamations and Agnus Dei are all in unison until the very end where MacMillan writes a brief choral ending for the Dona nobis pacem (which is given in English first).
979-0-060-10634-7 Choral score on sale
979-0-060-10635-4 Congregational parts (pack of 10) on sale

The Lamb has come for us from the House of David (1979) 3’
for SATB choir and organ
Text: St. Ephraihm (E)
Premiere: 9 June 1979 St Peter’s, Edinburgh
Schola Sancti Alberti conducted by James MacMillan
Level 1
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12625
A very straightforward setting which opens with unison voices over a flowing organ part. The climax with short choral phrases interspersed with short full organ interludes are powerful, and the piece subsides, through a short treble solo, to a quiet ending. Another beautifully effective entry-level piece.
979-0-060-11925-5 Choral score on sale
Coro COR 16071 The Sixteen/Harry Christophers

Magnificat (1999) and Nunc DIMITTIS (2000) 18’-20’
for chorus (SATB) and organ or orchestra
Texts from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (E)
The Magnificat was commissioned by the BBC for the first Choral Evensong of the new Millennium and the Nunc DIMITTIS by Winchester Cathedral
Premiere (Magnificat): 5 January 2000 Wells Cathedral
BBC Philharmonic and the Chorus of Wells Cathedral and St John’s College Cambridge conducted by James MacMillan
Premiere (Nunc DIMITTIS): 15 July 2000 (St Swthin’s Day) Winchester Cathedral Choir of Winchester Cathedral, with organist Philip Scriven, conducted by David Hill for scoring of orchestral version see Choral works with orchestra
Level 3
CD tracks 17 and 18
Audio clip Magnificat www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10822
Audio clip Nunc DIMITTIS www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10823
MacMillan’s large-scale festival settings of the Magnificat was commissioned by the BBC for the first Choral Evensong of the new Millennium. The choral style is simple and often homophonic (unusual for the composer) as in the celebratory Gloria. Much of the elaboration of the textual imagery occurs in the introspective, Messiaen-tinged non-choral episodes, evoking evening and birdsong.
The Magnificat is a large-scale work which is genuinely straightforward to sing. It lasts some 12 minutes, although when the organ accompanied version is used liturgically this reduces to about ten minutes as MacMillan has authorized a major cut from the introduction. The contrast between the colourful orchestral/organ interludes and the simple homophonic statements from the choir is marked. As so often in MacMillan’s music it all leads somewhere, however, and the build up towards the Gloria becomes intensely contrapuntal before the Gloria returns to the stark statements of earlier, but this time fortissimo. The work subsides to a meditative end.
The Nunc DIMITTIS, lasting eight minutes, shares some musical material with the Magnificat and starts wonderfully with very low bass notes portraying the elderly Simeon. It builds to a huge and exciting climax and ends with the basses’ low notes once more.
979-0-060-11927-3 Choral score on sale
Parts for orchestral version on hire
Chandos CHAN 9997 BBC Singers/BBC Philharmonic/James MacMillan

Mass (2000) 22’-35’
for SATB chorus (often divisi) and organ
Text in modern translations, Acclamations from the Roman Missal (E)
Commissioned by the Choir of Westminster Cathedral, London for the Millennium Year of Jubilee
Choir of Westminster Cathedral, organist Andrew Reid, conducted by Martin Baker
Level 3 (Agnus Dei Level 2)
CD tracks 2 and 3
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10784
The Mass includes Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei. In addition there are settings only for liturgical use of the Alleluia, Sursum Corda, Preface and the Eucharistic Prayer right through to the Great Amen. The congregation may join in with the Memorial Acclamations and part of the Great Amen.
In its devotional spirit this Mass reflects MacMillan’s own faith, and his conviction comes strongly off the pages of this effective and original work. MacMillan likes to create atmosphere in his music and knows how the mystical can interact with the music to make a powerful impression on the listener, especially in the context of a great religious building. His organ parts are often repeated ‘flygée’ figures which create a background ‘wash’ of sound, as in the Kyrie here (and A New Song). The contrapuntal writing in the Kyrie is wonderful and creates a true sense of forward motion. The power of the choral passages which come later is then put in proper relief. The final Kyrie is more difficult than the earlier sections, with angular intervals for the trebles/sopranos to negotiate.
The Gloria begins with a strong statement for upper voices including a top B (MacMillan likes to use extreme range in the outer voices of his music generally). This movement makes much use of melismas which feel as if they grow out of plainsong melodies, having a similar feel of rhythmic freedom. There is a wonderful ATB section (We give you thanks…) which really needs singers who can sustain lyrical lines.
The Sanctus is a real tour de force, being a very extended crescendo which starts very low (F sharps) with basses pianissimo and builds up to a very massive climax. The Hosanna needs an agile organist and includes more of MacMillan’s vocal ornamentation referred to above. The Benedictus follows segue and is slow moving, eventually building to another huge Hosanna which subsides again into the dark abyss from which the Sanctus began.
The Agnus Dei is more difficult than the other movements and in finding its way to a kind of resolution in its ‘grant us peace’ MacMillan acknowledges that the music reflects ‘the doubts and fears which characterize our time’. The final repetitions of the word ‘peace’ are punctuated by low clusters on the organ which sound like distant explosions. It is wonderfully effective music.
979-0-060-11929-7 Choral score on sale
Hyperion CDA 67219 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/Andrew Reid/Martin Baker
for unison trebles or solo voice and organ  
Text: from The Prophet by Khalil Gibran (E)  
Premiere: 18 August 1984 Chapel of St Albert the Great, Edinburgh  
Barbara Kelly and James MacMillan  
Level 1

A beautifully lyrical piece written as a wedding gift. The text is an apt homily on love, and MacMillan sets it in a style which will be familiar to all his devotees. A simple but effective organ part provides not only support but the means of intensifying the message as it progresses to its climax right at the end. A straightforward and effective anthem.

979-0-060-11927-9 Vocal score on sale

On the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin (1997)  
for SSATB chorus and organ  
Text by Jeremy Taylor (E)  
Written for the choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge  
Premiere: 27 April 1997 Caius Chapel, Cambridge  
Choir of Gonville and Caius College, organist Andrew Arthur, conducted by Geoffrey Webber  
Level 2

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12626

This work sets a wonderfully colourful poem (described as a ‘Festival Hymn’) by Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667). It is written in a simple and evocative fashion which makes it easily performable by most mixed choirs. The organ part is also less demanding than many of MacMillan’s other works. A highly effective and approachable anthem, it is equally appropriate for liturgical use at the Feast of the Annunciation or more generally for concert performance.

The lovely sense of forward motion (and yet also an almost mesmerising sense of stillness) in this piece is obvious, and the grateful linear writing is rather less angular than in some of MacMillan’s other choral works. Everything leads to the climax on the first Alleluia, after which the piece imaginatively winds down through a repeated figure of three-part contrapuntal Alleluias (without basses) against which is set a giocoso organ solo part that dances its way to a quiet conclusion, long after the voices have faded out.

979-0-060-10667-5 Choral score on sale  
Coro COR 16071 The Sixteen/Harry Christophers

Patre Pio’s Prayer (2008)  
for SATB chorus and organ  
Text: James MacMillan version of prayer attributed to Padre Pio (E)  
Premiere: 3 June 2008 Westminster Cathedral, London  
The Sixteen conducted by Harry Christophers  
Level 3

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12624

Not dissimilar to The Song of the Lamb in some respects, and of a similar level of challenge both for choir and organist. The deeply felt prayer is given subtle nuance with each new phrase as MacMillan mirrors Padre Pio’s nickname of ‘the patron saint of stress relief’ following his well-known advice to supplicants that they should ‘pray, hope and don’t worry!’ Rather unusually MacMillan sometimes gives a phrase a character: ‘ecstatic’, ‘anxiously’, ‘playfully’, ‘gently’, ‘luminoso’ etc. A beautiful piece suitable for church or concert use.

979-0-060-12035-0 Choral score on sale  
Coro COR 16071 The Sixteen/Christopher Glynn/Harry Christophers

Seinte Mari moder milde (1995)  
for SATB chorus (with multiple divisions) and organ  
Text from a thirteenth-century manuscript in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge (E)  
Commissioned by King’s College, Cambridge for the 1995 Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols  
Premiere: 24 December 1995 King’s College Chapel, Cambridge  
Choir of King’s College conducted by Stephen Cleobury  
Level 3

CD track 7

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10786

This is a dramatic carol for the famous annual service at King’s College Cambridge. There is an organ accompaniment with echoes of Messiaen, choral unison outbursts, and low chords for basses in three parts. The MacMillan-ornamented alto duet in the central part leads the whole choir to take on similar figures in divisi parts (sopranos and tenors are divided into three). The final section has a huge cry of Precaritis! accompanied on full organ out of which a tenor soloist appears. The ending has fragmented phrases for two solo sopranos (or trebles) infants!

This work shows MacMillan’s instinctive feeling for vocal sonority, for the creation of atmosphere and for presenting a challenge which is perfectly surmountable by amateur groups.

979-0-060-10371-1 Choral score on sale  
Coro COR 16071 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/ Andrew Reid/Martin Baker

The Song of the Lamb (2008)  
for SATB chorus and organ  
Text: Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Revelation 15: 2-4 (E)  
Premiere: 9 March 2008 House of Hope Presbyterian Church, St Paul, Minnesota  
Nancy Lancaster (organ) and the Motet Choir of The House of Hope Presbyterian Church, St. Paul, Minnesota conducted by Andrew Altenbach  
Level 3

An atmospheric piece which is straightforward but a little more challenging than some of MacMillan’s ‘entry level’ choral pieces (the alto divide for a short passage). The composer is a natural dramatist and this is another example of a work which will paint pictures in the mind of the attentive listener and create a lasting impression. It needs a competent organist and preferably an instrument with fair-sized resources to do the piece justice.

Choral score on hire
St Anne’s Mass (1985, rev.1996)
for unison voices (congregation) and organ with optional SATB choir
Texts use modern translations (E)
Level 1
This is a simple setting that a congregation could be taught quickly and easily. The work consists only of the Kyrie, Sanctus and Benedictus (together), Acclamation and Agnus Dei. The ever-practical MacMillan has even included a transposition of the organ parts in case people find it too high. The Sanctus and Benedictus and the Acclamation (which has the same melody) have a very Scottish traditional feel to the melody including a Scotch Snap.
979-0-060-10632-3 Choral score on sale
979-0-060-10633-0 Congregational parts (pack of 10) on sale

Te Deum (2001)
for SATB chorus (multiple divisions) and organ
Text in modern translation (E)
Composed for the choir of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London, on the occasion of the Queen’s Golden Jubilee, 2002
Premiere: 3 February 2002 HM Tower of London
Choir of the Chapel Royal, Her Majesty’s Tower of London, organist Colin Carey, conducted by Stephen Tilton
Level 2
MacMillan approaches this well-known text in a refreshingly original way. As so often in his choral music, he requires basses with very low notes (bottom D). The work also needs an agile soprano soloist at the beginning and a group of soprano soloists later. MacMillan’s predilection for melismatic writing is effectively set against syllabic word setting in the lower parts at the beginning.

The work then continues with a mixture of these elements and a marvellous contrapuntal passage leading to a climax at ‘thine honourable, true and only Son’. The organ part is not difficult but requires a keen rhythmic sense and includes passages of MacMillan’s often-used ‘filigree’ figuration.

This is a highly effective and approachable work that would be easily performable by a competent choir looking for a fresh approach to a familiar liturgical text.
979-0-060-11426-7 Choral score on sale
Hyperion CDA 67460 Polyphony/James Vivian/Stephen Layton

The Company of Heaven (1999)
for children’s voices (younger and older with separate parts), organ and with ad lib sections for wind band and carnyx solo
(he carnyx is an ancient war-horn used in Scotland at the time of Christ)
Text by John Bell (with part from the Book of Revelation) (E)
The work was written as a Millennium celebration piece for churches and community organizations in the Partick area of Glasgow
Level 2
This is another example of MacMillan responding imaginatively to the needs of the community. This gebrauchs-musik element in MacMillan’s output is critical to his function as a composer and is part of what makes him so valuable, and such a particular asset to his community in Scotland. The ability to write well for young people – not to ‘write down’ or patronize them, is a rare one. Britten had a genius for it and MacMillan also demonstrates intuitive skill. Company of Heaven is fun for the performers with the additional colours of wind instruments and the carnyx who all enter after the piece has started and gradually take over the central part of the work. The voices re-emerge and all join together for loud Hosannas. Soon afterwards, the band and carnyx leave the hall again and the work ends by the older voices singing a text based on the title words and then the serene singing of an Alleluia by the younger voices.

An ideal, straightforward project for a community group looking for something slightly unusual but with drama and newsworthiness.

Choral score and instrumental parts on hire

Dutch Carol (2001)
for unison upper voices (children) and piano
Traditional text of ‘A child is born in Bethlehem’ (E/L)
Written for the choir of St Aloysius’ Junior School, Glasgow
Level 1

This is a simple carol which is given a colourful piano part to enhance its sense of progress. Easy for children to pick up and attractive to listen to. It would obviously also work well for adult sopranos in a Christmas carol concert where a piano was being used.

979-0-060-11436-6 Choral score on sale

Choral works
with piano and instruments

Changed (1997)
for mixed chorus (SATB) with accompaniment of organ, harp, string trio or any three like instruments.
Words from ‘The Man with the Blue Guitar’ by Wallace Stevens (E)
Composed for the Cunningham Chamber Choir and dedicated to its conductor, Dorothy Howden
Premiere: 12 December 1998 Walker Hall, Kilbirnie
Cunningham Chamber Choir and members of the North Ayrshire Youth Silver Band conducted by Dorothy Howden
Level 2
CD track 15
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10789

A beautiful, straightforward and imaginative piece which is highly effective. The instrument/s sets up a ground bass that is imitated by the other instrumental parts over which the choir sings colourful phrases including “blue” coloured chords. There is a lovely sense of stylistic cross-over in this piece. As with so much MacMillan, the ambiguity of meaning within the words lends ambiguity to the musical style that gives it a sense of mystery way beyond the scale of a little piece. It is one of the fascinating elements of MacMillan’s style that the effect, the atmosphere, the ephemeral spirit remains with the listener long after the performance has ended.

This is another starter-level piece well worth investigating as an introduction to MacMillan’s style.
979-0-060-11207-2 Choral score on sale
Hyperion CDA 67219 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/ Andrew Reid/Martin Baker

Dutch Carol (2001)
for unison upper voices (children) and piano
Traditional text of ‘A child is born in Bethlehem’ (E/L)
Written for the choir of St Aloysius’ Junior School, Glasgow
Level 1

This is a simple carol which is given a colourful piano part to enhance its sense of progress. Easy for children to pick up and attractive to listen to. It would obviously also work well for adult sopranos in a Christmas carol concert where a piano was being used.

979-0-060-11436-6 Choral score on sale

Choral works
with piano and instruments

Changed (1997)
for mixed chorus (SATB) with accompaniment of organ, harp, string trio or any three like instruments.
Words from ‘The Man with the Blue Guitar’ by Wallace Stevens (E)
Composed for the Cunningham Chamber Choir and dedicated to its conductor, Dorothy Howden
Premiere: 12 December 1998 Walker Hall, Kilbirnie
Cunningham Chamber Choir and members of the North Ayrshire Youth Silver Band conducted by Dorothy Howden
Level 2
CD track 15
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10789
The Halie Speerit’s Dauncers (1996) 6’
for unison voices and piano or harp accompaniment
Text by James McGonigal (Scots)
Premiere: 28 April 1997  Corpus Christi Primary School, Glasgow
Level 1

This is another work that demonstrates James MacMillan’s commitment to being ‘useful’ as a composer. Not for him the ‘ivory tower’ from which his music would be destined just for professional choirs and orchestras. MacMillan’s music is to be sung by church choirs, choral societies, yes, professional forces, but also, as here, children’s voices in unison.

A wonderful Scottish poem (so Scottish, most English-language performers would regard it as foreign!) by James McGonigal is given a romping dance-like treatment by MacMillan. It’s irresistible and it’s huge fun for the children.

979-0-051-47182-9 Choral score on sale
(including English translation and pronunciation guide)

Heyoka Te Deum (1999) 5’
for unison (beginners) voices, three part treble voices, flute, tubular bells and piano
Text taken from the Latin Te Deum and a traditional Lakota Chant (E)
Commissioned by Dianne Berkun for the Brooklyn Youth Chorus ‘Let The Children Sing’ Festival 2000
Premiere (concert): 3 May 2001  Great Hall of Cooper Union, New York
Brooklyn Youth Choir conducted by Dianne Berkun
Level 2
CD track 13
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10820

This enterprising work imaginatively gives the Latin Te Deum words to a choir of beginner singers and the Lakota chant is given to a three part choir of treble voices. The flute and bells support the vocal parts without merely doubling, and the piano part provides colourful accompaniment that often echoes the vocal parts. MacMillan’s often-used vocal ornamentation is much in evidence here and the piece is challenging but not difficult. It is an ideal vehicle for young singers who will enjoy working through the rhythmic groupings and getting to grips with singing quick scales and tuning triadic passages. The beginners (who are also given simpler forms of the ornament) will also find the involvement with their more experienced counterparts exciting and motivating.

It is possible that a conductor of a youth choir might look at the score, see a lot of demi-semi-quavers and think it too difficult to contemplate. They should look further, however, and see that the opening material is re-used at the start of every section (at different pitches) and so that feeling of homecoming each time will help anchor the piece in the children’s minds. It is very cleverly conceived and wonderful to see a composer writing music for children which makes demands which can be met rather than writing down to an imaginary ‘children’s’ level.

There are very helpful notes by Doreen Rao (editor of the Choral Music Experience) in the front of the score which give hints about how to approach teaching this music to young singers in an imaginative and enjoyable way.

979-0-051-33100-0 Choral score on sale (including parts for flute and bells)

The Prophecy (1997) 8’
for school choir (or high solo voice) and ensemble consisting of flute; clarinet (E flat); trombone; percussion (glockenspiel/2 tom-toms/bass drum/suspended cymbal); piano; violin; cello
Text is anonymous from the ninth century (E)
Commissioned by Royal Festival Hall Performing Arts Education
Premiere: 11 October 1997  Queen Elizabeth Hall, London
Children from Haringey schools and musicians from the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by James MacMillan, Nicholas Wilks and John Cooley
Level 3 for the voices

The text is taken from The Story of Deirdriu, described by MacMillan as an Irish mythological adventure tale. Yet again, he proves his ability in writing for young people in a way that will stimulate their imaginations and yet be entirely within their grasp as performers. The instrumental ensemble should ideally be a professional group, and its strongly dramatic writing contrasts with the straightforward story telling of the vocal parts.

Choral score and instrumental parts on hire

So Deep (1992) 7’
for SSAATTBB chorus and optional oboe and viola solos
Text by Robert Burns (Scots)
Written as a wedding gift for two friends
Premiere: 13 June 1992
Level 3
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/11891

A superbly imaginative arrangement of Robert Burns’s ‘O my love’s like a red, red rose’ (Burns wrote both words and melody). The melody winds its way through this arrangement supported by a variety of drones (bagpipe-like at times). A little later the accompanying voices repeat the words ‘so deep’ in their own times to create what MacMillan describes as ‘the ebb and flow of a large, gentle wave’. Close to the end of the vocal parts the oboe begins, soon followed by the viola and they bring the piece to a fading conclusion.

A straightforward and colourful work that would make an effective short concert piece perhaps in a group of unusual folksong arrangements.

979-0-060-09287-9 Choral score on sale
(including oboe and viola parts)
Signum SIGCD507 The Elysian Singers/Sam Laughton

O (2008)
Advent antiphon for 21 December, for 3-part treble choir, trumpet and strings or organ
Text: Liturgical (E)
Premiere: 23 June 2008  Queen’s Hall, Edinburgh
St Mary’s Music School
Level 2

Another spiritual journey here but always with something fresh to say. A mostly very straightforward piece with almost Lotti Crucifixus-like suspensions in its early and latter phrases. The string parts are mostly sustained or pizzicato and there is a quietly luminous moment for the strings at ‘a light has shone’ which is where the trumpet makes its first appearance. The middle section (purely set to the letter ‘O’) is marginally more challenging mostly because of the slightly more complex rhythm. The final section sees a return of the opening choral material accompanied differently. A successful performance needs a balanced group of upper voices, a confident trumpeter and a fair number of strings as the music divides at one point into 14 parts.

979-0-060-12023-7 Choral score on sale
The Birds of Rhiannon (2001) 24'

Tone poem for orchestra and mixed chorus
2.picc.2.corA.2.bcl.dbcl.ssax.2.dbn—4.3.3.1—timp.perc(4)—harp—strings

Words by Michael Symmons Roberts (E)
Commissioned by the BBC for the 2001 Proms season with funds from the Performing Right Society
The Sixteen and the BBC Philharmonic conducted by James MacMillan

CD track 14
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10821

This is a mainly orchestral work of great power based on a Welsh myth. The Birds of Rhiannon are mystical, angelic presences who appear and sing on the death of Bran – a Fisher King-type figure who sacrifices his life for the sake of peace between two warring peoples. MacMillan describes the work as being ‘a dramatic concerto for orchestra with a mystical coda for choir’.

There is a dramatic first section, a meditative second section building to a huge climax. An Andante third section featuring a battery of unusual percussion uses a chorale-like motif (also a feature of Quickening) and leads to a final section that employs the choir for the first time, lasting some seven minutes. This is scored as SSAATTBB (and is not for the faint-hearted!). This final music is very beautiful indeed and although MacMillan has written an alternative ending for when there is no chorus available, to my mind, this is what makes this work. It is big, passionate choral writing (with something of the elemental feeling of Britten’s Grimes), with the choir in the foreground and spectral memories of orchestral events hovering in the distant background. This declamatory opening winds down to a peaceful and easier central section and this then builds again to wonderfully wide-spaced culminatory chords of G major, repeated several times, topped by a short orchestral coda.

More straightforward (and shorter) than Quickening and, for a conductor looking for a MacMillan choral/orchestral work to cut his/her teeth on, this is an ideal starting point.

Choral score and orchestral parts on hire

Chandos CHAN 9997 BBC Singers/BBC Philharmonic/James MacMillan

Catherine’s Lullabies (1990) 20'

for SATB choir, brass and percussion
3tpt.2trbn.Btrbn—perc(2)

Text from the Creed and Magnificat, and from a mother of the Plaza de Mayo; Isaiah 61:1-2; Ecclesiasticus 4; Litany of the Saints (L/E)
Written to celebrate the birth of MacMillan’s daughter, Catherine, on 22 September 1990
Premiere: 10 February 1991 Glasgow
John Currie Singers

As always, MacMillan looks freshly at his forms, here the idea of a ‘lullaby’. This work has nothing to do with traditional lullabies, but is a ‘manifesto of spiritual and social liberation’. The texts MacMillan has chosen for the work are biblically focussed and reflect his belief in social justice and equality which he then describes as ‘the finest lullabies for our children – effective endearments, seeds of hope and freedom to blossom in the future’.

The work is quite hard-hitting and besides the setting of the main texts includes, in the final section, the singers playing a child-like, nonsensical word association game which builds to a huge climax and sudden stop. This has resonances with his major choral/orchestral work Quickening which includes a nonsense text. But where that was loosely based on old Aramaic, this is based on words plucked from the air having associations with faith, the liturgy and love. The whole effect is powerful and persuasive.

Choral score and orchestral parts on hire

Magnificat (1999) and Nunc Dimittis (2000)

for SATB chorus and orchestra or organ
2(picc).2.corA.2.bcl.—4.3.3.1—timp.perc(2)—harp—organ(ad lib)—strings

for further information see Choral works with organ

Cantos Sagrados (1989, orch.1997)

for mixed chorus and orchestra or organ
3[III=aff-picc].2.corA.2.bcl.[III=dbn]—4.3.3.1—timp.perc(3);vib/metal bar/cyms/sizzle cym/t.bells/SD/susp.cym/2tuned gongs(B,D)/BD/tam-t—harp—pf(t=cel)—strings

for further information see Choral works with organ
Quickening (1999) 48'

for soloists (ATTB), children's chorus, mixed chorus and orchestra

2.picc.3.(II=corA).3.(II=bc1).2.dbn—4.4.3.1—tmp.perc(4)—harp—
ptf(=cel)—chamber org—grand org or synth(ad lib)—strings

Text by Michael Symmons Roberts (E)
Commissioned by the BBC for the 1999 season of BBC Promenade Concerts, and by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Wolfgang Sawallisch, music director, as part of its Centennial
Premiere: 5 September 1999 Royal Albert Hall, London
The Hilliard Ensemble, Boys of Westminster Cathedral Choir, BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Sir Andrew Davis

Level 4 5

CD tracks 10 and 11
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10818

Quickening is a large-scale, complex work that is fascinating in its conception and is undoubtedly a major challenge to any group wanting to perform it. MacMillan has stated that "I have specifically written this piece so that it will continue to be performed by amateur choirs. I suppose, in that sense, it should not be technically demanding, although there are things asked of the singers that are quite unusual like the Glossalalia, like the very free, rhythmical approach to singing like that with a strange text, a kind of nonsense text, though it is based on a kind of adaptation of old Aramaic":

The work is about birth, new life, new impulses, but, as MacMillan says, it also has its dark side out of which hope is glimpsed. It is powerfully imaginative and is laid out over four movements, deploying three distinct vocal layers: a small ensemble of soloists and a symphonic chorus on the stage, plus a boys choir with chamber organ support ideally spatially disembodied from the other performers.

A choir has to be confident to take on the kind of challenges posed by this work. The difficulty isn’t always the actual notes but rather the context in which they are placed. However, given the large-scale nature of the work and the orchestral resources required (including a large percussion section with an exotic array of instruments) it is likely that any group taking it on will have the necessary expertise. In all the performances to date it has proved to be approachable and rewarding.

Demands include low-range basses who are divisi à 4 in the second movement. Mac—a low D flat drone (flat B flat drone) (together) for several pages. The “Glossalalia” (nonsense texts) take some absorbing (and rehearsal) but add a major mystical dimension to the work. Detailed attention is needed on some cluster effects, though these are assembled melodically, then sustained. There is also some exciting unpitched (approximate pitch) rhythmic singing in the last movement, though some of the dancing patterns are doubled within the orchestra and are not as difficult to co-ordinate in performance as might appear.

Overall, MacMillan’s ear for sonority (choral and orchestral) makes this work more practical to rehearse than it looks to be in the score. The 3rd movement is a good example where voice parts are well led by the orchestra and are genuinely straightforward (even though the boys’ choir is given some high tessitura singing). The triumphant, chorale-like conclusion of the last movement is thrilling and is some of the most celebratory in MacMillan’s choral output, before a fade out with distant conclusion of the last movement is thrilling and is some of the most

Chandos CHSA 5072
The Hilliard Ensemble/City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus and Youth Chorus/BBC Philharmonic/
James MacMillan

Four Last Words from the Cross (1993) 45'

Cantata for choir and string orchestra

The traditional text of the Four Last Words from the Cross is based on a compilation from all four gospels to form a sequential presentation of the last seven sentences uttered by Christ (E/L)
Commissioned by BBC Television and broadcast in seven nightly episodes during Holy Week of 1994
Premiere (concert): 30 March 1994 St Aloysius Church, Glasgow
Cappella Nova and the Scottish Ensemble conducted by Allan Tawener

Level 4 5

CD tracks 5 and 6
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/38

This is rightly regarded as MacMillan’s masterpiece. It is not easy – none of MacMillan’s music really is - but what riches there are for those who scale these heights. MacMillan’s conviction in this music, stemming from his deep faith, is passionately obvious and could not leave anyone unmoved by this experience. One of the great features of this work is the way MacMillan uses silence – and the effect it creates is as powerful as symphony orchestras of sound. How few composers know about silence, and how afraid of it we are in contemporary society. The string writing is wonderful and draws resonances from the whole distinguished line of 20th century composers who have written so brilliantly for the medium, here in particular bringing to mind Tippett’s Concerto for Double String Orchestra.

There are so many extraordinary and powerful effects in this work that it is invidious to single any out, but the final sighs from the violins at the end of the orchestral postlude with which the work ends actually bring to life the last breaths of the dying Christ. It is mesmerizing and deeply, deeply moving. The plain-speaking (but increasingly dissonant) choral outbursts at the start of the second movement are juxtaposed with huge balancing passages of silence. The mantra-like utterances of the beautiful but pathetic cadential figure (taken from MacMillan’s Clarinet Quintet Tuireadh – Lament) treads its way through the whole of the first movement.

This work is well within the reach of good choral groups and it should be taken up widely. Conductors are urged to look carefully at this work.

Cappella Nova and the Scottish Ensemble conducted by Allan Tawener

Hyperion CDA 67460 Polyphony/Britten Sinfonia/
Stephen Layton

St John Passion (2007) 87'

for solo baritone, chorus and orchestra

Baritone solo, small chorus(“narrator”), larger chorus (professional chorus minimum 80 voices, amateur chorus minimum 120 voices)

Text: Revised Standard Version of The Bible (E); the Vulgate (L)
Premiere: 27 April 2008 Barbican Hall, London
Christopher Maltman (baritone) and the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Colin Davis

Level 3

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12535

This work is a major achievement and as fundamental an addition to the choral repertory as, say, Britten’s War Requiem. It was written for Sir Colin Davis’ 80th birthday. To follow in Bach’s footsteps in creating a work which shares a title with one of his great works rather than calling it something new and trendy shows another aspect of the fundamental nature of this work. It is huge, lasting nearly an hour and half. Its forces are modest on one level – only one soloist, Christus, a baritone. He needs to be a force to be reckoned with and have real staying power up on top G flats. A ‘narrator’ chorus (SATB) takes the role of the Evangelist. This is a refreshing and original change to our perception of this role. However, such is the nature of the writing for this group that a small professional ensemble is probably needed both for security and projection. In practical terms this, then, balances the economic benefit of having only one professional solo role.

Chandos CHSA 5072
The Hilliard Ensemble/City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus and Youth Chorus/BBC Philharmonic/
James MacMillan
The ‘large’ choir takes the other ‘personality’ roles such as Pilate and Peter, and of course takes the role of the turbae - the crowd. This group needs to be sizeable as the orchestra is large and is used fully. There are many fortissimo passages in this work. It is a dramatic story and is dealt with as such.

This Passion would stretch many amateur choral societies. The writing is dense and complex in places, the rhythmic interaction between choir and orchestra often difficult, and tuning could be a real issue in those (absolutely beautiful) passages which MacMillan leaves unaccompanied for several minutes before bringing the orchestra back in again (movements three and four). Anyone who has sung Bruckner’s E minor Mass will recognise the issue. The choir’s soprano’s are also asked to hum top C flats pianissimo amongst other effects. There is a sizeable passage of cluster singing which will challenge some choirs. One could go on listing such things, but the point is made. This is a work for professionals or for amateur choirs used to working at professional standards – the symphonic choral with a generous rehearsal schedule. It should be taken up as a ‘standard’ by the Three Choirs Festival and similar choral focused organisations. It would be impossible to mount a performance of this Passion safely with a normal ‘on the day’ three-hour rehearsal, so many singers may experience this important work in the audience rather than on the platform.

The originality of the St John Passion lies in MacMillan’s ability to mix old with new, rather in the manner of Bach in his day. There are passages of sumptuous polyphony, there is a new look at the text where passages of Latin are interspersed with the Gospel story in English. After Peter’s denials MacMillan inspirationally gives the choir the Latin text Tu es Petrus to sing, redeeming Peter with Jesus’ words of affirmation rather than having him break down into tears. Later, in movement seven (Jesus and his Mother), MacMillan introduces not only part of the Stabat Mater but also his own words in the manner of a Christmas carol Lully, lullia, my dear darling. At the end of the work, in the final movement which is purely orchestral, a kind of via doloroso march, he introduces a Scots lament over quite brass chords. The string writing here, and especially the elegiac ‘cello lines are deeply reminiscent of the early 20th English school. These points stick out as personal markers in a work which deserves world-wide performance. This should be the War Requiem of the 21st century.

Full score, vocal score and parts on hire
- BIS recording in preparation
- LSO Live 0671 Christopher Maltman/London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus/Colin Davis

**Visitatio Sepulchri** (1992-93)  
for 7-part choir (SSATTB,male speaker (Sprechstimme)) or 7 solo singers and chamber orchestra

40’

Premiere: 20 May 1993  Tramway, Glasgow

Soloists and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Ivor Bolton, in a staging directed by Francisco Negrin

This work is one of a number by MacMillan that can be presented in a number of formats: fully staged as at its premiere, in a music theatre style with simple lighting, or as a purely concert work. Originally performed with solo voices, MacMillan recast the work for seven-part choir, each choral section taking one of the solo parts. Visitatio Sepulchri dates from the time the composer first burst onto the musical scene with works such as The Confession of Isobel Gowdie and Veni, Emmanuel, and shares their blending of energy, passion and reflection.

In biblical terms it moves on from where his St John Passion ends as it is concerned with the women’s visit to the sepulchre where Jesus’ body has been laid following his crucifixion. Scene One is a purely orchestral, powerfully moving scene-setter mirroring the drama of the crucifixion. Scene Two introduces three angels (TTB), the three women (SSA) and a male Cantor section which sings/speaks/shouts un-notated, approximate pitch throughout (rather like sprechstimme). The extreme contrasts between the still, reflective meditations of the singers and the dramatic brass-dominated interjections from the orchestra seem to reflect an outward prayerfulness and inward turbulence following the Angels’ confirmation of Jesus’ resurrection.

Scene Three follows without a break and is a setting of the Te Deum. This is complex and incredibly energised. The winding-down process sees a statement of the plainsong Te Deum melody used effectively in long notes against a still hyperactive orchestra. At the end of the text, ‘let me never be confounded’, the music moves into an extraordinarily different mode – almost cinematic in its triumph and consolation which might follow the successful resolution of the plot of a thriller. The voices whisper a fade-out.

This remarkable score is complex and needs highly skilled singers with, in some cases, fairly extreme ranges: the 1st tenors have to touch a top D flat at one point and the 3rd Angel (basses) begins the second scene on low Es. The orchestral writing is often virtuoso and the whole work will, of course, need to generate theatrical electricity whether performed staged or in concert. MacMillan’s deep feeling for religious drama is one of the things which sets him apart from almost all his composer colleagues working at this level.

Full score, vocal score and parts on hire
- BIS recording in preparation
Further information on MacMillan’s works can be found on our website at www.boosey.com/macmillan
including a collection of his programme notes, a range of soundclips, news of premieres, details of forthcoming performances, and links to purchase recordings.

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UK/Europe/Far East/Australasia
Boosey & Hawkes
Aldwych House
71-91 Aldwych
London WC2B 4HN
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)20 7580 2060
Fax: +44 (0)20 7637 3490
Email: composers.uk@boosey.com

North & South America
Boosey & Hawkes Inc
35 East 21st Street
New York NY 10010 6212
USA
Tel: +1 212 358 5300
Fax: +1 212 358 5306
Email: composers.us@boosey.com

Germany/Austria/Switzerland
Boosey & Hawkes/Bote & Bock
GmbH&Co
Lützowufer 26
D-10787 Berlin
Germany
Tel: +49 (0)30 2500 1300
Fax: +49 (0)30 2500 1399
Email: composers.germany@boosey.com

For trade enquiries please contact:

UK/Europe/Far East
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