

Press Release

295 Regent Street
London W1B 2JH

Telephone 020-7580 2060 Fax 020-7637 3490
Website www.boosey.com

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MacMillan's new symphony at BBC Proms *Symphony No.3: 'Silence'* travels from Japan to Europe

James MacMillan
Symphony No.3: 'Silence'
(European premiere)
Royal Albert Hall, London
24 July 2003, 7.30 pm
Pre-Prom Talk 6.00 pm
Live on BBC4 TV and Radio 3

James MacMillan conducts the BBC Philharmonic in the European premiere of his **Symphony No.3: 'Silence'** at the BBC Proms on 24 July. The work was co-commissioned by the NHK Symphony and the BBC Philharmonic, and the world premiere took place in Tokyo in April conducted by Charles Dutoit. Further performances are scheduled by the BBC Philharmonic at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam (22 November) and by the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague (11 June 2004), both under the baton of the composer. Plans are also underway for the work's US premiere by the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Charles Dutoit in 2005.

...inspiration from
Shusaku Endo's
novel **Silence**...

The subtitle of the new symphony is drawn from the novel **Silence** by the Japanese writer Shusaku Endo (1923-96), which examines the collision of cultures and religions in early 17th century Japan. Knowing that his new symphony was to be premiered in Tokyo, MacMillan was inspired by the way in which Endo's writings tried to bridge the seeming divide between the Western and Eastern traditions, and tackled head-on issues of faith. Central to **Silence** is the challenging question that has resonated for two millennia: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Yet for Endo the silence, rather than proving the absence of God, was a real and testing presence. His description of divine silence as accompaniment rather than 'nihil', one of the author's many examples of musical imagery, provided MacMillan with a metaphorical starting point for his symphony.

...silence as presence,
not absence...

...musical birth
out of silence...

Set in a continuous 35-minute movement, the symphony grows organically from and returns to silence. The fragile birth and extinction of sound recurs progressively throughout the work, symbolising the struggle for new life, both physical and spiritual. More complex and urgent developments of the thematic material precipitate the work's crisis-point, signalled by a prolonged silence, out of which a scherzo episode emerges. This dancing energy collapses into a barren landscape of desolation, where growth seems impossible, yet even here musical life can re-emerge from the depths and darkness, leading the work via a gentle string threnody to a final dissolution.

...eastern inflections...

The symphony's special sonic flavour derives partly from the influence of the shakuhachi, the Japanese flute whose soundworld MacMillan has explored in recent works - a development that the composer interprets as an extension of his interest in Scottish folk music. The shakuhachi is not itself used in the symphony, but microtonal melodic inflections abound within the orchestra, and together with an emphasis on delicate chamber-music scoring, create an audible musical bridge to the east.

future commissions

MacMillan's future plans include the premiere in May 2004 at Lincoln Center of his **Piano Concerto No.2**, commissioned by New York City Ballet for choreography by Christopher Wheeldon. Current commissions include a new work for Thomas Trotter on the organ of Birmingham Symphony Hall, orchestral scores for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Minnesota Orchestra, and a stagework for Welsh National Opera.

For further information on James MacMillan, including an interview about the genesis of *Symphony No.3: 'Silence'*, visit www.boosey.com/macmillan, or contact:

David Allenby (Publicist): tel +44 (0)20 7291 7210, email david.allenby@boosey.com

Muireann Smyth (Publicity Assistant): tel +44 (0)20 7291 7226, muireann.smyth@boosey.com

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