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## James MacMillan

### *The Sacrifice* opera premiere by WNO

#### **The Sacrifice** *(world premiere)*

22 September 2007, 7.15 pm  
26 September / 6 October  
Millennium Centre, Cardiff

16 October, 7.15 pm  
Empire Theatre, Liverpool

24 October, 7.15 pm  
The Mayflower, Southampton

31 October, 7.15 pm  
Venue Cymru, Llandudno

7 November, 7.15 pm  
Hippodrome, Bristol

14 November, 7.15 pm  
New Theatre, Oxford

21 November, 7.15 pm  
Hippodrome, Birmingham

26 November, 7.30 pm  
Sadler's Wells, London

BBC Wales TV documentary  
6 October

BBC Radio 3 broadcast  
13 October



Image: © WNO

James MacMillan's *The Sacrifice* receives its premiere by Welsh National Opera in Cardiff on 22 September, followed by a tour to seven UK theatres, arriving at Sadler's Wells in London on 26 November.

The opera's libretto by award-winning poet and novelist Michael Symmons Roberts is the latest in a series of collaborations with the composer. Drawing on *The Mabinogion*, the ancient collection of Welsh folktales, the new opera tells of a ruler's ultimate sacrifice to safeguard the future of his war-torn, faction-ridden country. The performances are conducted by MacMillan and directed by Katie Mitchell, who has worked closely with the creative team through a series of workshops as the opera has developed into its final form.

*The Sacrifice* was commissioned by Welsh National Opera with funding provided by the Peter Moores Foundation, The Performing Right Society Foundation, The Britten-Pears Foundation, Arts Council England, Mr Bryan Davies and by a generous gift from Peter and Veronica Lofthouse. It is MacMillan's second full-length opera, following *Inès de Castro*, premiered by Scottish Opera at the Edinburgh Festival in 1996, revived in 1999 and 2001, toured to Portugal and broadcast on BBC Television.

James MacMillan writes of how he and Michael Symmons Roberts discovered the sources for the new opera: "We were aware that *The Mabinogion* is one of the great mythic tales of these isles, kept alive by the Welsh but generally unknown outside Wales. I suppose I have always been on the lookout for parallel mythic tales other than the famous Greco-Roman canon, so discovering such a rich seam of narrative and mystery here was a great revelation. The *Tale of Branwen* has a timeless quality which resonates with the King Arthur story, the Fisher-King myth, and *Tristan*. There is a common source to all of these tales but, because the heart of this story examines core issues of love and communal conflict, we found certain universals which are as contemporary as they are eternal."

### *The Sacrifice: Three Interludes* BBC Philharmonic premiere

#### **The Sacrifice:** **Three Interludes** *(world premiere)*

22 February 2008  
Bridgewater Hall,  
Manchester

The orchestra plays a major role in MacMillan's opera, particularly in the interludes which provide reflection points during the narrative. The composer has extracted three of these interludes to form a 20-minute symphonic suite which will receive its premiere at Bridgewater Hall in Manchester on 22 February with the BBC Philharmonic conducted by the composer.

Further MacMillan premieres in 2008 include the full-evening *St John Passion* performed by the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus under Colin Davis (27 April), and a new work for the Takacs Quartet to be premiered at the South Bank Centre (21 May).

*Continued...*

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# James MacMillan

## *The Sacrifice* (2005-06)

Opera in three acts

Libretto by Michael Symmons Roberts based on *The Mabinogion*

Duration: 2 hours 5 minutes

<b>Cast</b>	Sian	Lisa Milne
	Evan	Leigh Melrose
	General	Christopher Purves
	Megan	Sarah Tynan
	Mal	Peter Hoare

Welsh National Opera

Conductor	James MacMillan
Director	Katie Mitchell
Designer	Vicki Mortimer

### Synopsis

#### ACT ONE

A nation torn apart by civil war. The General (leader of one side) has arranged a marriage between his daughter Sian and Mal (leader of the other side) to try to end the bloodshed. Evan (General's right-hand-man and Sian's ex-lover) is bitterly against this. Evan tries – without success – to dissuade Sian. The night before the wedding Sian has an uneasy meeting with Mal in her hotel room. He wants some declaration of love or desire, but for Sian this is necessity, duty. Sian's sister Megan is anxious and against marriage too. The wedding takes place in a once grand war-damaged hotel. At the wedding reception General and Mal make speeches, but old enmities and jealousies resurface and erupt into violence.

#### ACT TWO

It is seven years later, and the eve of the investiture of Sian and Mal's elder son Gwyn as leader of a unified nation, but peace is still fragile. Mal is furious that Evan is invited to the investiture, and in a row with Sian he hits her. The marriage – already in crisis – is over. Evan tries to seduce Sian again, and she is tempted, but holds out for the sake of Gwyn's investiture and the prospect of lasting peace. The investiture is marked by a big party. Mal makes an emotional speech about his son, and attempts a public gesture of reconciliation and healing, but this again erupts into violence.

#### ACT THREE

The two sides are at loggerheads again. All hope of peace is lost. General pleads with Sian to forgive him for trying to engineer peace through her marriage, and for the disastrous consequences of that but Sian cannot forgive him. General is desperate. What now can break the cycle of violence? He hatches a plot to try to break the deadlock, but there is a heavy price. One final act of violence, this time engineered by General. Now, Sian pleads for a final end to the blood feud. Elis (Sian and Mal's younger son) is brought in as the new figurehead, a last throw at a peaceful future.

*Michael Symmons Roberts, 2007*

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