A Practical Commentary and Survey by Paul Spicer

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

The guide examines over 90 of James MacMillan’s choral works from a practical perspective, describing the choral forces required, the level of difficulty, and the vocal character of each piece.

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MacMillan Choral CD Samplers

Extracts from 37 choral works by James MacMillan can be heard on two Boosey & Hawkes CD samplers, the track numbers of which are referred to throughout this guide.

The CDs are available upon request from your local office:
composers.uk@boosey.com
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For further information about James MacMillan and his music, please visit his website at www.boosey.com/macmillan
James MacMillan
An Introduction

Born in Scotland in 1959, James MacMillan has rapidly established himself as one of the most successful and sought-after of international composers. His oeuvre is unusual among mainstream contemporary composers in including a high proportion of choral pieces. In this it bears a strong resemblance to the output of Benjamin Britten whose choral works are among his best-loved and most performed. MacMillan's scores range from the serene, unaccompanied Child’s Prayer, written in memory of the murdered children of Dunblane Primary School, to the grandeur of his orchestral and choral cantata Quickening commissioned by the BBC for the 1999 Proms.

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 a message of hope enshrined in the work. His Seven Last Words from the Cross is a masterpiece of choral drama which cannot fail to move all who hear it. While his Mass written for the Millennium is liturgically conceived but equally successful as a concert work, his two remarkable sets of Strathclyde Motets perform a similar function and are also highly practical in being singable by a wide range of choirs.

Beyond the Strathclyde Motets project, MacMillan’s works range from complex scores aimed at ambitious choirs like …here in hiding… (ATTB), Màiri (for sixteen voices) and Sun-Dogs (with its extended techniques), to the simple beauty of Changed. There are also several short works which can be used as anthems or in the Anglican liturgy. The Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis will give choir directors a welcome new setting in a contemporary idiom which is easily approachable, while the scale and impact of his Te Deum and Jubilate Deo also make them suitable for programming in a concert context. Like the anthems in the Strathclyde Motets, the highly effective Christus Vincit and A New Song are eminently performable by the full spectrum of choral groups. Seinte Mari Moder Milde, written for the famous Carol Service at King's College, Cambridge, should be taken up widely during the Festive Season.

Over the past decade MacMillan has become established as the Herbert Howells of our age. Churches, cathedrals, collegiate foundations and leading chamber choirs are all competing with themselves to commission their personal piece from James MacMillan just as they did from the 1950s to ’80s with Howells. It is not surprising. Here, at last, is a composer who really understands the voice, who can write practically without losing his musical identity and without singers feeling they are being “written down to” if they are of more limited ability. His affinities with chant and Scottish folk traditions give his music a strong connection both to the past and to musical continuity. But MacMillan also shows in more recent works his ability to write for great ‘state’ occasions in the calendar and make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

His large-scale St John Passion is a remarkable achievement, not least for the originality of its approach to the familiar text. To someone following in the footsteps of Bach, whose sublime settings are a benchmark of civilisation, MacMillan’s music is spiritually and emotionally fulfilling both for its urgent faith and for the freshness of his take on Jesus’ last days. Among very recent works MacMillan has set two movements of the Mass, the Gloria and Credo, as scores with orchestral forces. The Gloria is an impressive setting composed for the 50th anniversary of the consecration of Coventry Cathedral employing tenor solo, boys’ choir and chorus (we can see a link with Britten here) alongside brass, timpani and organ, and the Credo is a large-scale expression of personal faith readily performable by amateur symphony choruses.

While the accompanying CD samplers offer short extracts, it will be appreciated that it is difficult to convey the spirit of even a short piece when some of MacMillan’s great musical moments are conceived over a long span of development. If what you hear whets your appetite I urge you to delve further. This music will richly repay your investment of time and interest.

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The level of difficulty given to each work is on a scale of 

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, with 1 being the easiest and 5 the most complex.
Benedicimus Deum Caeli (2010)
We bless the God of heaven
(The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for Trinity Sunday, for SSATBB a cappella
Text: Tobias 12: 6 (Roman Breviary) (L)
Premiere: 30 May 2010 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir / Alan Tavener

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100049

This is a very effective and beautiful short motet in a chorale-like style with divided sopranos and tenors adding richness to the texture. The text is a simple one of praise and the setting responds with a lovely linear feel but without any of the contrapuntal complexity which MacMillan often uses.

The simple challenges here are of textural balance and voice blend to achieve the richness of vocal sound the music demands.

979-0-060-12288-0 Choral score on sale
○ Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Benedictus Deus (2009)
for mixed voices a cappella
Text: Antiphon from a 15th century Canterbury pontifical (at the installation of an Archbishop) (L)
Premiere: 21 May 2009 Westminster Cathedral
Westminster Cathedral Choir / Martin Baker

Audio clip

A hugely impressive motet written for the enthronement of the Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols. Another extensively contrapuntal work this time using MacMillan’s fingerprint ornamental melodic line. There is a wonderfully contrasting homophonic (chordal) section at the point in the text which reads: ‘Blessed be he who has appointed you to rule on the Archbishop’s throne’. This comes complete with ‘coronation mode’ harmony and a Monteverdi-like sweep upwards at the end of the phrase before the ornamental lines resume. MacMillan writes an extraordinary repeated and ever falling series of phrases around the ‘long years in this life’ – so much so that one wonders if there is an element of humour in his treatment of the text. Whatever the real motivation, it is a genuine contrast to the generally high tessitura of the earlier music.

979-0-060-12219-4 Choral score on sale
○ Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Bring us, O Lord God (2009)
for SATB choir a cappella
Text: John Donne (E)
12 May 2012 St Peter’s Church, Eaton Square, London
Choir of the 21st Century / Howard Williams

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100043

William Harris’s setting of these wonderful words, together with his extraordinary anthem Faire is the Heaven, represent a pinnacle of 20th century a cappella writing. It is a tribute to James MacMillan’s strength of musical personality that he can so completely put aside any remnant of aural reminiscence in his own setting. This is a deeply fervent and moving representation of Donne’s powerful words. There is something of the musical mantra which forms the basis of the first movement of The Seven Last Words from the Cross in the opening musical gesture of this motet. Both are falling cadential figures and the effect in both cases is mesmerizing. In this work the figure is used at key moments in different keys and pitches and, ultimately fragmented, in the series of Amen’s which bring us back to the original key of E flat but in a magical and unexpected progression.

This setting is far from easy and was written for the Schola Cantorum of Oxford, an expert chamber choir of outstanding singers. In writing to their level MacMillan has written a work which will really only be performable by expert amateurs and professional choirs. The tuning is difficult and notes at key points are hard to find for the less experienced singer. This is a work, therefore, which should always be given the most serious treatment and preparation.

Having outlined how MacMillan avoids any reflection of Harris’s setting, there is no doubt that he is writing within the continuing English choral tradition at its best. He was a composition student of Kenneth Leighton, one of the finest of the 20th century’s choral contrapuntists, and it shows.

979-0-060-12280-4 Choral score on sale
○ Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

The Canticle of Zachariah (2007)
(The Strathclyde Motets)
for SATB choir a cappella
Premiere: 2 December 2007 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100042

The effect of The Canticle of Zachariah is that of harmonized chant. The motet needs that kind of rhythmic freedom which is underlined by the composer who writes constantly shifting bar lengths. As often with MacMillan’s choral music there is a single line of melody with words (in the bass part here) accompanied by the ebb and flow of the other voices singing in support. The Doxology is unusually set to unison chant for all voices.

979-0-060-12026-8 Choral score on sale
○ Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

A Child’s Prayer (1996)
for SATB choir a cappella, with two treble/soprano solos
Dedicated to the dead of the Dunblane tragedy, March 1996
Traditional text, remembered by composer from childhood (E)
Choir of Westminster Abbey / Martin Neary

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10787

This is an extremely touching tribute piece composed following the horrific slaughter of primary school children at Dunblane in Scotland. The words (traditional) are direct in their simplicity and MacMillan includes an alternative final line for more general use than the Communion service to which the original text refers.
Children are a heritage of the Lord (2011) 3’

for SSATB a cappella

Text: Psalm 127 (King James version) (E)

Premiere: 11 September 2011 Hatfield House, Hertfordshire
The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

This is a fairly straightforward setting of verses from Psalm 127 about the blessing of children, written for the Marquess and Marchioness of Salisbury to mark the 400th anniversary of Hatfield House, where the issue of the succession through the generations is obviously of great significance.

MacMillan here writes an essentially chordal setting with double sopranos giving an added richness to the texture. When the text reaches the words “Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord” the soprano parts diverge and the upper line goes its own way with a wholly separate part which feels ornamental over the top of a continuing chorale-like progression for the rest of the choir. The importance of this separate part is taken all the way to the end where it finishes alone. The final nine bars require some agility from these sopranos – agility as a reflection perhaps of the energy of youth.

The challenges in the work are the usual ones of blend and balance in the choral parts, and the clarity, accuracy and sufficient technique to deal with the upper soprano line’s leaps and bounds.

979-0-060-12436-5 Choral score on sale

Christus Vincit (1994) 6’

for double choir (SSAATTBB) a cappella, with treble/soprano solo

Text from the Worcester Ovalizations (tenth century) (L)
The Marquess and Marchioness of Salisbury asked MacMillan to write a work for the 400th anniversary of Hatfield House. The piece is dedicated to their daughter, the Marchioness of Salisbury, and was given to her in 1994.

Premiere: 23 November 1994 St Paul’s Cathedral, London
Joint choirs of Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral and St Paul’s Cathedral / John Scott

Level ❖

CD 1, 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

Data est mihi omnis potestas (2007) 4’

It has been given to me
(The Strathclyde Motets)

Communion motet for Ascension Day, for SATB choir a cappella

Text: Roman Breviary, Matthew 28: 18,19 (L)
Premiere: 14 May 2007 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir / Alan Tavener

Level ❖

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100052

Data est mihi omnis potestas is a richly scored, uplifting, celebratory motet for one of the major feast days of the Christian year. The opening rising interval (a 9th in the first soprano and first tenor, and 7ths and 5ths in the other parts) launches the piece in a heavenward trajectory and the double choir scoring gives it a surround-sound blaze of musical light. It creates a memorable impression.

A second section gives the ATB an accompanying role whilst the sopranos sing Monteverdi-like cadenza passages in falling thirds. Roles are reversed at the end with these passages being given to the T/Bs. A final outburst of three sky-rocketing Alleluias ends the motet. Slightly more challenging than the other motets in the Strathclyde Motets series but still very straightforward in terms of MacMillan’s output. Issues of blend and balance highlighted by the double choir scoring will probably use more rehearsal time than note-learning.

979-0-060-119538 Choral score on sale

Divo Aloysio Sacrum (1991) 7’

for SATB choir and optional organ accompaniment

Text from a church inscription (E/L)
Dedicated to Dan Divers and the Choir of Saint Aloysius’ Church, Garnethill, Glasgow
Premiere: 27 August 1993 St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh
Royal Scottish National Orchestra Chorus / Christopher Bell

Level ❖

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)
The Lord will bestow his loving kindness
(The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for the 1st Sunday in Advent, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: Roman Breviary, Psalm 84: 13 (L)
Premiere: 3 December 2006 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir / Alan Tavener

Level 🌐
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100054

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)
Suddenly, a sound came
(The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for Pentecost, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: Roman Breviary, Acts 2: 2,4 (L)
Premiere: 15 May 2005 Strathclyde University Chaplaincy, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir / Alan Tavener

Level 🌐
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100055

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)
for double choir (SSAATBB) a cappella
Text: Stabat Mater (L) with additional text by the composer (E)
Premiere: 21 March 2008 Wells Cathedral
Bath Camerata / Nigel Perrin

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)
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 / George McPhee

Level 🌐
CD1, 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. Distrinctive 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
👀 Chandos CHAN 9997 BBC Singers/James MacMillan

Give me Justice (2003)
Introit for the 5th Sunday of Lent, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: Psalm 42 (43) (E-L)
Premiere: 10 August 1993 Stevenson Hall, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow
The Hilliard Ensemble

Level 🌐
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100051

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 attainment looking to broaden its repertoire.

979-0-060-12017-6 Choral score on sale
👀 Linn Records CKD 301 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

...here in hiding... (1993)
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 🌐
CD1, 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 cadenza 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

In splendoribus sanctorum (2005)
Amidst the splendours of the heavenly sanctuary (The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for Nativity Midnight Mass, for SATB choir and obbligato trumpet or organ

Text : Roman Breviary, Psalm 109: 3 (L)
Premiere: 24 December 2006 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow
St Columba’s Church Choir
Level 1
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100050

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 double SATB choir a cappella
Text: Karol Wojtyla, trans Jerzy Peterkiewicz (E)
Premiere: 11 July 2006 Tewkesbury Abbey
Oriel Singers / Tim Morris
Level 3
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100058

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 altos introduce them. The double choir resource 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
Regent REGCD348 Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir/Paul Spicer

Lux æterna
Eternal Light
(The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for SATB unaccompanied
Text: from the Requiem Mass (L)
Premiere: 2 November 2008 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir / Alan Tavener
Level 3
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100041

Lassie, wad ye loe me? (2010)
for mixed voices unaccompanied
4'
This is a prime example of MacMillan’s outstanding contrapuntal writing. Not difficult – again writing for an average choir but writing a piece which when sung by the best can become positively luminous. The music is a seemingly unending flow of interacting lines which, at points, momentarily look over the shoulder at his familiar ornamental melodies – like a fleeting smile of recognition. The whole piece is built on a cantus firmus which the altos sing throughout and the other lines move in and around.

Beautiful timeless music which simply needs to be sung with sensitivity and musicality.

979-0-060-12055-8 Choral score on sale
Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Máiri (1994) 11’ 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 1996 St John’s Smith Square, London
BBC Singers / Bo Holten
Level 5
CD1, 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 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 unending flow of interacting lines which, at points, momentarily look over the shoulder at his familiar ornamental melodies – like a fleeting smile of recognition. Excellent choirs 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

Miserere (2009) 10’ for mixed voices unaccompanied
Text: Psalm 51 vv 3-21 (L)
Premiere: 29 August 2009 Carolus-Borromeuskerk Antwerp
The Sixteen / Harry Christophers
Level 4
CD2, track 15
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/13254

This is a big piece and intended for a high achieving group (the premiere was given by The Sixteen). The psalm MacMillan sets in Latin is the same as that set by Allegri which has become so popular; ‘Have mercy upon me, O God, according to they great mercy’.

MacMillan’s beautiful setting mirrors the words in all their variety and colour with great drama at one end and melting beauty at the other. He also has a section of free chant (in harmony) which divides the work in two and provides an extraordinary aural shift before bringing back the opening material in a different key and different voices but with the same ‘desolate and cold’ expression marking. The ending, coming out of more chant but this time with ‘wistful’ soprano, alto and bass solos seemingly ruminating on what has just been sung, is wonderfully effective, building to a huge slow climax and winding its way down again to a beautiful E major cadence.

The notes are not particularly difficult to master in this work, but the overall conception needs a sophisticated approach, expert handling of the chant sections, good soloists, choirs capable of divisi work with good blend and balance, and a real mastery of MacMillan’s trademark melodic approach.

979-0-060-12220-0 Choral score on sale

Missa Brevis (1977) 16’
Kyrie; Gloria; Sanctus; Agnus Dei; At the conclusion for SATB choir a cappella
Text: Latin Mass
Premiere (complete): 22 November 2007 Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh
Cappella Nova / Alan Tavener
Level 3
CD2, track 14
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 chordal 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

Missa Dunelmi (2010) 16’
Kyrie; Gloria; Sanctus/Benedictus; Agnus Dei for SSAATTBB choir unaccompanied

This is a major, serious work with some very challenging music for a choir to master. Big cluster chords (the first chord of the Agnus Dei is a challenge in itself), complex progressions and familiar ornamental details in melodic
lines which are still difficult to sing accurately, rhythmically and with good ensemble, blend and balance. Some of the music is "borrowed" from earlier works. The Sanctus, for instance, uses material from one of the early Strathclyde Motets, Data est mihi omnis potestas to great effect. Such borrowing was commonplace in the Baroque period (Bach and Handel recycled constantly) and this seems to reinforce the feeling that MacMillan’s music is a true continuation of a choral tradition which stems back centuries. He is inspired by Palestrina and Monteverdi, by Bach and Handel, even by Parry and Elgar in his vocal textures and interactions, and more recently by Britten, Tippett and his own teacher, Kenneth Leighton. There are many others of course, and not least those who have inspired his use of ornament. But the essential point here is that all these inspirational composers have given him the multi-faceted language to create his own personal style which is instantly recognizable.

The Missa Dunelmi is a complex, difficult work which will be approached by expert cathedral/collegiate choirs, professional ensembles and a few top-end amateur groups. It is important that MacMillan feels free to write music which is only attainable by such groups but, unlike many other contemporary composers, he has also written highly effective music for every other level of choir.

The Kyrie is essentially straightforward. The opening figure for divided sopranos works its way, slightly changed, gradually through the altos and then the tenors for Kyrie/Christe/ Kyrie working towards a hummed cluster chord at the end which reduces and hangs in the air. The Gloria straight away introduces MacMillan’s trademark ornamental chant-like melodic lines which form the basis of the whole movement. The texture moves between four and eight part choir always as SSAATTBB and not antiphonal double choir. The Sanctus opens with a quiet cluster like the resonance of a dying bell and builds into rich harmony. There is big-scale, strong and characterful setting of these words here with further ornamental writing. The Pleni is quietly reminiscent of (but not the same as) the opening, and the Hosanna bursts out with the remembered music from Data est mihi. The Benedictus follows as part of the movement - a soprano line in octaves over ATB in thick clusters, and its Hosanna recalls the previous one. The Agnus Dei is a very slow, reflective and beautiful movement with long spaces between phrases. This movement is difficult and has to sound easy. The Dona nobis pacem is ravishing and highly effective.

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

○ Priory Records release in 2012

**Mitte manum tuam** (2006)

**Stretch forth your hand**

(The Strathclyde Motets)

Communion motet for the 2nd Sunday of Easter, for SATB choir a cappella

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

○ Priory Records release in 2012

**Nemo te condemnnavit** (2005)

Text: Gospel according to St John, chapter 8, verses 10-11 (L)

Premiere: 18 November 2005 Woolsey Hall, Yale University

Yale Glee Club / Jeffrey Douma

Level 2


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 sublime 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

○ Naxos 8.570719 Dmitri Ensemble/Graham Ross

**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 / Harry Christophers

Level 3

CD2, track 19


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 chordal 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

○ Coro COR 16069 The Sixteen/Harry Christophers
O Radiant Dawn (2007)  
(The Strathclyde Motets)  
Advent antiphon for 21 December, for SATB choir a cappella

3'

Text: (E)  
Premiere: 2 December 2007 St Columba's Maryhill, Glasgow  
St Columba's Church Choir  
Level 1  
CD2, track 13  
Audio clip [link]

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  
Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Pascha nostrum immolatus est (2008)  
(2008)  
3'

Our passover is sacrificed  
(The Strathclyde Motets)  
Communion motet for Easter Day, for SATB choir a cappella  
Text : Liturgical (L)  
Premiere: 23 March 2008 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow  
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir / Alan Tavener  
Level 2  
Audio clip [link]

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 alleluias pass between all parts in a kind of spiritual ecstasy. A solo soprano furthers the idea of hovering angels which die away to a serene A major cadence. 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, as 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 simply magical and a choir master’s energies are going to be focused much more on quality of sound than problems of note-learning.

979-0-060-11935-4 Choral score on sale  
Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Sonnet (2010)  
(2010)  
3'

for 2-part upper voices or SS soli, unaccompanied  
Text: Shakespeare Sonnet 116 (E)  
Premiere: 5 June 2010 The Drummond Hotel Perthshire  
Catherine and Clare MacMillan  
Level 1  
Audio clip [link]

Written for the wedding of friend and first sung by the composer’s daughters this effective short piece for upper voices is very straightforward providing that perfect fifths can be sung in tune! Very bare-looking on the printed page, this song packs a far greater emotional punch than might at first be apparent. This is a perfect antidote to greater complexities elsewhere and would act as a beautifully contrasting concert item.

979-0-060-12290-3 Choral score on sale

"This is a much bigger-scale motet than many of the other Strathclyde Motets. Like Lux aeterna it is built on a cantus firmus begun by the basses and continued for the last part of the motet by the altos. The tenors enter in the fourth bar with the imitative dotted figure which is used extensively. After the dotted rhythms there is a short passage of even notes which are picked up and developed as the piece progresses. The short extract from Psalm 1 says simply: ‘He who meditates day and night on the law of the Lord shall bring forth his fruit in due season’. The ending grows around the continuing cantus firmus and has strongly repetitious chords (‘in due season’) which die away to a serene A major cadence.

The issues for the choir in this motet are the evenness of the bass and alto cantus firmus and its balance against the rest of the choir, and MacMillan’s leggiero direction for the dotted rhythms which will be a challenge to some choirs. Be careful not to make the semiquaver (16th note) lumpy and always feel the forward direction of the phrase, being careful that this does not lead to speeding up and a resulting untidiness between parts singing the same rhythm.

979-0-060-12277-4 Choral score on sale  
Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener
St Patrick’s Magnificat (2011)\textsuperscript{5}'

for SATB unaccompanied

Text: Liturgical (L)

Premiere: 31 May 2011 St Patrick’s Church Soho, London

Choir of St Patrick’s Church, Soho

Level \textsuperscript{2}

This work was commissioned for the re-opening of St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic church in Soho, London in May 2011. It sets the Latin text of these familiar words. The work holds few terrors for a competent choir and displays all the familiar grace notes and ornamental melodic lines which MacMillan has made his own. It is an effective and economical setting which many choirs could programme as a concert item.

979-0-060-12432-7 Choral score on sale

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:

Benedicimus Deum Caeli
he Canticle of Zachariah
Data est mihi omnis potestas
Dominus dabit benigntatem
Factus est repente
In splendoribus sanctorum
Lux aeterna
Mitte manum tuam
O Radiant Dawn
Os Mutorum
Pascha nostrum immolatus est
Qui meditabitur
Sedebit Dominus Rex
Videns Dominus

Success (2006)\textsuperscript{2}'

for SATB choir a cappella

Text: Bessie Stanley (E)

Level \textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{18'}

for SATB choir 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 / Carmen Téllez

Level \textsuperscript{6}

CD2, track 18

Audio clip \textbf{www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/13028}

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.

979-0-060-12221-7 Choral score on sale

\textbullet\ BIS SACD 1719 Netherlands Radio Choir/Celso Antunes

Tenebrae Responsories (2006)\textsuperscript{20'}

for SATB choir a cappella (divisi up to SSAATTBB)

Text: from the Roman Breviary (L)

Premiere: 4 April 2007 St. Andrews in the Square, Glasgow

Cappella Nova /Alan Tavenier

Level \textsuperscript{5}

CD2, track 11

Audio clip \textbf{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 the CD listed below). 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. Gesualdo, in particular, is an obvious influence, as, curiously, is Wagner in the chromatic working out of the initial phrase in the first 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 Choral score on sale
Linn Records CKD 301 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

**Think of how God loves you** (2011) 3’
for SATB unaccompanied
Text: 22 August 2010 St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow
Choir of St Columba’s Maryhill, Glasgow / James MacMillan


Written for MacMillan’s grand-daughter’s baptism service. Very simple, beautifully effective and easily translatable into other liturgical and non-liturgical musical contexts.

979-0-060-12325-2 Choral score on sale
Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

**To My Successor** (2002) 3’
for SATB choir a cappella
Text: George Herbert
Premiere: 27 February 2003 Canterbury Cathedral
Choir of Canterbury Cathedral / David Flood


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
Linn Records CKD 301 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

**Videns Dominus** (2005) 5’
*When the Lord saw* (The Strathclyde Motets)
Communion motet for the 5th Sunday in Lent, for SATB choir a cappella
Text: Roman Breviary, John II: 33,35,43,44,39 (L)
Premiere: 13 March 2005 Strathclyde University Chaplaincy, Glasgow
Strathclyde University Chamber Choir / Alan Tavener


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
Advent Antiphons (2011) for Cantor, unison voices (congregation), TB choir and organ
Text: Liturgical (E-L)
Level 1 (choir/congregation); Level 2 (Cantor)
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100045

James MacMillan is a standard-bearer for a resurgence in standards of church music that is often too pedestrian. He is a very hands-on composer who directs the music at his local church in Glasgow. He understands the problems but despair at some of the church's attitudes and what he has described as the 'liturgical police force… watching your every move'.

Here, in the Advent Antiphons he provides the congregation with a simple but memorable melody to sing as their opening chant and response to the cantor's more florid style. The tenors and basses sing a long pedal point unusually reminiscent of John Tavener's characteristic deep long-held bass notes. What MacMillan does over his pedal point is very different however, and the whole work is entirely reflective of MacMillan's idiom. Easy, approachable and practical.

979-0-060-12519-5 Choral score on sale
● Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Ave Maria (2010) for mixed voices and organ
Text: Traditional Catholic Prayer (L)
Premiere: 27 July 2010 St George’s Chapel, Windsor Boys, Girls and Men of All Saints Northampton / Lee Dunleavy
Level 2 (organ: Level 3)
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100057

One of the most telling characteristics of James MacMillan’s music when setting a very well-known text is his ability to free himself from the shackles of other composers’ musical ideas. This text is so familiar and could be easy prey for our new-age 'spiritual sentimentalists'. MacMillan could do that with the best of them if he wanted: there are good examples in other hands-on composer who directs the music at his local church in Glasgow. He understands the problems but despair at some of the church's attitudes and what he has described as the 'liturgical police force… watching your every move'.

The tenors and basses sing a long pedal point unusually reminiscent of John Tavener's characteristic deep long-held bass notes. What MacMillan does over his pedal point is very different however, and the whole work is entirely reflective of MacMillan's idiom. Easy, approachable and practical.

979-0-060-12519-5 Choral score on sale
● Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

Beatus Andreas (2011) for SATB and organ
Text: Versicle at Matins on the Feast of St Andrew and a prayer attributed to St Andrew (L)
Premiere: 2 June 2011 St Andrew’s Cathedral, Glasgow Choir of St Aloysius Church / Dan Divers
Level 1 - 2
An effective setting exuding a timeless spiritual quality which many choirs will find irresistible. Whilst it is obviously appropriate for any St Andrew’s Day service, it was first performed on Ascension Day and, as always, it could find a special place in the right context outside a liturgical situation.

Any competent choir can sing this music which needs to be expressive and to observe the dynamic scheme which helps give the work its shape and contrast. The second part of the Versicle follows the prayer as an ornamented chant for soprano solo, semi-chorus or tutti before the first section is repeated.

979-0-060-12433-4 Choral score on sale

Cantos Sagrados (1989, orch. 1997) for SATB choir 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 Colin Tipple for orchestral version see Choral works with orchestra, page 21
Level 1 - 5
CD1, 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 compañero’ 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

Changed (1997) for SATB choir with accompaniment of organ, harp, string trio, or any three like instruments
see Choral works with piano or instruments, page 18

The motet was commissioned by the Friends of All Saints’ Music, Northampton in thanksgiving for the stewardship of its choral tradition by its incumbent priest, The Reverend Canon Simon Godfrey, and first performed by the choir in St. George’s Chapel, Windsor Castle in July 2010.

979-0-060-12283-5 Choral score on sale
● Regent ASNCDO01 Choirs of All Saints Northampton/ Lee Dunleavy
Chosen (2003)
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 half-way 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 (ad lib sections for wind band and carnyx solo)
see Choral works with piano or instruments, page 19

Divo Aloysio Sacrum (1991)
for SAATTB and optional organ accompaniment
see Unaccompanied choral works, page 5

The Edinburgh Te Deum (1978)
for SSATBB and organ
Text: Liturgical (L)
Westminster Cathedral Choir
Level 3

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100020

This is an early work which MacMillan has only recently sanctioned for publication and it received its first performance in Westminster Cathedral in November 2011. It is a big setting but intended for liturgical use (although it would also make an excellent concert work). The whole of the first section is given to sopranos in one or two parts and often in thirds. The next section, ‘Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus’ is given dramatic block chords and a punctuating organ part. A lengthy organ interlude joins to an angular pp phrase which is almost fugato like in its progress from bass up to soprano. ‘Tu Rex gloriae’ brings more choral drama and a feeling of the previous angular choral motif now in the organ pedals. A slow bass solo for ‘Te ergo qu aesumus’ is maintained after the choir has joined contrapuntally, and the final part is gentle with sopranos returning by themselves as at the beginning (‘Dignare, Domine’) and a soprano solo brings the work to its gentle conclusion.

A fine work well within most good choirs’ capabilities and fascinating to see this earlier music of MacMillan’s put alongside more recent music.

979-0-060-12321-4 Choral score on sale

The Galloway Mass (1906)
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
Congregation of Good Shepherd Cathedral

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 phrase 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 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

Jubilate Deo (2009)
for mixed voices and organ
Text: Psalm 100 (Book of Common Prayer, 1662) (E)
Premiere: 17 May 2009 Wells Cathedral
Wells Cathedral Choir / Matthew Owens
Level 3 (organ: Level 5)

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/13154

This dramatic setting was written for Wells Cathedral and premiered in 2009. You need to change any preconceptions you may have about this being a joyful psalm. We are used to light-hearted or upbeat settings like Britten’s C major or Stanford’s B flat and many others. MacMillan’s is extremely dark-hued and only reflects a sense of rugged joy through its highly virtuoso organ part which swirls from the bottom of the pedal board to the top of the manuals in a hurricane-like swirling derish. It requires no mean organist to play this score effectively (and correctly) and the choir needs to be just as responsive to the challenges MacMillan sets.

The reason for the dark nature of the music is a man called Willie Pondexter (the dedicatee of the piece) with whom MacMillan forged a highly unusual friendship. Pondexter was convicted of killing an elderly woman during a robbery in Clerksville, Texas in 1993. MacMillan visited him on death row and even now says he has never quite got over Pondexter’s execution in 2009.
This Jubilate Deo reflects MacMillan’s ‘hands-on’ approach to so many of the things he truly believes in. To know this story is to understand much of how to perform this extraordinary short work. The tiny moment of pure musical line in the Gloria at ‘is now and ever shall be’ feels like a benediction on Pondexter’s hereafter and ours by reflection. You don’t have to condone a heinous crime but you can still believe in redemption.

979-0-060-12222-4 Choral score on sale

Hyperion CDA 67867 Wells Cathedral Choir/Jonathan Vaughn/Matthew Owens

The Lamb has come for us from the House of David (1979) 3’ for SATB choir and organ

Text: St Ephraim (E)
Premiere: 9 June 1979 St Peter’s, Edinburgh
Schola Sancti Alberti / James MacMillan

Level ①

CD2, track 17

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 Sixteens/Harry Christophers

Magnificat (1999) and Nunc Dimittis (2000) 18’-20’ for SATB choir 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 Choirs of Wells Cathedral and St John’s College Cambridge / James MacMillan  
Premiere (Nunc Dimittis): 15 July 2000 (St Swithin’s Day)
Winchester Cathedral, Choir of Winchester Cathedral, organist Philip Scriven / David Hill

for scoring of orchestral version see Choral works with orchestra

Level ② ③

CD1, tracks 17 and 18


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.

979-0-060-11297-3 Choral score on sale

Parts for orchestral version on hire

Chandos CHAN 9997 BBC Singers/BBC Philharmonic / James MacMillan

Mass (2000) 22’-35’

Kyrie; Gloria; Sanctus; Benedictus; Agnus Dei for SATB choir (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 / Martin Baker

Level ① (Agnus Dei Level ②)

CD1, 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 ‘filigree’ 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 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.

979-0-060-11299-7 Choral score on sale

Hyperion CDA 67219 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/ Andrew Reid/Martin Baker

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.
Kyrie; Gloria; Sanctus; Acclamations; Agnus Dei
for unison voices (congregation), optional SATB choir and organ

This work proved controversial when it was first written and exposed the deep divisions within the Catholic church about its music and delivery. Much has been written on this subject and people interested can access the relevant blogs. MacMillan set the new words of the English translation of the Roman Missal which were about to come into general usage. He declared himself very pleased with the changes to the text set 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.

[Audio clip](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100028)

Text: Liturgical (E)
Premiere: 16 September 2010 Bellahouston Park, Glasgow
The Congregation of Bellahouston Park

Level 1
CD2, track 4
Audio clip [www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100028]

On the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin (1997) 8’
Text: from The Prophet by Khalil Gibran (E)
Written for the choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
Premiere: 27 April 1997 Caius Chapel, Cambridge
Choir of Gonville and Caius College / Geoffrey Webber

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 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.

[Audio clip](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12626)

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 2
CD2, track 6
Audio clip [www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12626]

A New Song (1997) 4’
for SATB choir and organ
Words from Psalm 96 (E) Commissioned by Nicholas Russell for the choir of St Bride’s Episcopal Church, Glasgow in memory of his mother and to celebrate his father’s 70th birthday
Premiere: 1 March 1998 St Bride’s Episcopal Church, Glasgow
The Choir of St Bride’s Episcopal Church / Robert Marshall

This short and effective anthem combines a number of stylistic elements including inflections of both Scottish ballads and plainsong. It is simply constructed in AABABA form with a wonderfully positive organ postlude that ideally needs an instrument with sizeable resources to be properly effective. It has Taveneresque pedal points that are also reminiscent of bagpipe drones. The vocal parts in the imitative B sections include MacMillan’s favourite kind of vocal ornamentation - a notated quick-fire turn with varying numbers of notes.

[979-0-060-11208-9 Choral score on sale](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)
[Hyperion CDA 67219 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/ Andrew Reid/Martin Baker](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)

On Love (1984) 5’
for unison trebles or solo voice and organ

This short and effective anthem combines a number of stylistic elements including inflections of both Scottish ballads and plainsong. It is simply constructed in AABABA form with a wonderfully positive organ postlude that ideally needs an instrument with sizeable resources to be properly effective. It has Taveneresque pedal points that are also reminiscent of bagpipe drones. The vocal parts in the imitative B sections include MacMillan’s favourite kind of vocal ornamentation - a notated quick-fire turn with varying numbers of notes.

[979-0-060-11927-9 Vocal score on sale](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)
[Hyperion CDA 67867 Wells Cathedral Choir/Jonathan Vaughn/Matthew Owens](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)

On Love (1984) 5’
for unison trebles or solo voice and organ

This short and effective anthem combines a number of stylistic elements including inflections of both Scottish ballads and plainsong. It is simply constructed in AABABA form with a wonderfully positive organ postlude that ideally needs an instrument with sizeable resources to be properly effective. It has Taveneresque pedal points that are also reminiscent of bagpipe drones. The vocal parts in the imitative B sections include MacMillan’s favourite kind of vocal ornamentation - a notated quick-fire turn with varying numbers of notes.

[979-0-060-10667-5 Choral score on sale](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)
[Coro COR 16071 The Sixteen/Harry Christophers](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)

A New Song (1997) 4’
for SATB choir and organ
Words from Psalm 96 (E) Commissioned by Nicholas Russell for the choir of St Bride’s Episcopal Church, Glasgow in memory of his mother and to celebrate his father’s 70th birthday
Premiere: 1 March 1998 St Bride’s Episcopal Church, Glasgow
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This short and effective anthem combines a number of stylistic elements including inflections of both Scottish ballads and plainsong. It is simply constructed in AABABA form with a wonderfully positive organ postlude that ideally needs an instrument with sizeable resources to be properly effective. It has Taveneresque pedal points that are also reminiscent of bagpipe drones. The vocal parts in the imitative B sections include MacMillan’s favourite kind of vocal ornamentation - a notated quick-fire turn with varying numbers of notes.

[979-0-060-11208-9 Choral score on sale](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)
[Hyperion CDA 67219 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/ Andrew Reid/Martin Baker](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)

On Love (1984) 5’
for unison trebles or solo voice and organ

This short and effective anthem combines a number of stylistic elements including inflections of both Scottish ballads and plainsong. It is simply constructed in AABABA form with a wonderfully positive organ postlude that ideally needs an instrument with sizeable resources to be properly effective. It has Taveneresque pedal points that are also reminiscent of bagpipe drones. The vocal parts in the imitative B sections include MacMillan’s favourite kind of vocal ornamentation - a notated quick-fire turn with varying numbers of notes.

[979-0-060-11927-9 Vocal score on sale](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)
[Hyperion CDA 67867 Wells Cathedral Choir/Jonathan Vaughn/Matthew Owens](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)

On Love (1984) 5’
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This short and effective anthem combines a number of stylistic elements including inflections of both Scottish ballads and plainsong. It is simply constructed in AABABA form with a wonderfully positive organ postlude that ideally needs an instrument with sizeable resources to be properly effective. It has Taveneresque pedal points that are also reminiscent of bagpipe drones. The vocal parts in the imitative B sections include MacMillan’s favourite kind of vocal ornamentation - a notated quick-fire turn with varying numbers of notes.

[979-0-060-10667-5 Choral score on sale](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)
[Coro COR 16071 The Sixteen/Harry Christophers](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10783)
Padre Pio’s Prayer (2008) 5’
Padre Pio prayer setting for SATB choir and organ
Text: James MacMillan version of prayer attributed to Padre Pio (E)
Premiere: 3 June 2008 Westminster Cathedral, London
The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Level 3
CD2, track 2
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.

979-0-060-12305-0 Choral score on sale
○Coro COR 16071 The Sixteen/Christopher Glynn/ Harry Christophers

Seinte Mari moder milde (1995) 6’
for SATB choir (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, Cambridge / Stephen Cleobury

Level 3
CD1, 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 ‘precantis!’ 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
○Hyperion CDA 67219 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/ Andrew Reid/Martin Baker

Serenity (2009) 6’
for mixed voices and organ
Latin Text by St Thomas Aquinas; English text attrib. Reinhold Niebuhr

Level 1
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100060

This lovely piece was written for the 150th anniversary of St Aloysius College, Glasgow, the school which MacMillan’s children attended. Both the texts are well-known: O Salutaris Hostia made especially famous by Rossini’s beautiful setting, and Serenity, the well-known text: ‘God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.’

The setting is entirely straightforward and is another example of MacMillan’s enviable ability to write music which is approachable in every way to a less experienced group but without sacrificing any of his inimitable musical style. The first section is hymn-like and in four parts, the second (the Serenity text) is a soprano verse over a long held pedal note with simple organ chords (the piece is designed so that it can be played on the manuals alone). This includes MacMillan’s characteristic ornamentation. The following section is a reprise of the first and the next another soprano verse continuing the English text. The final section has the sopranos descanting the English words over the hymn-like harmony from the beginning and building to a strong ending.

This is a very effective and affecting piece which any choir would enjoy adding to its repertoire.

979-0-060-12218-7 Choral score on sale
○Hyperion CDA 67867 Wells Cathedral Choir/Jonathan Vaughn/Matthew Owens

The Song of the Lamb (2008) 5’
for SATB choir and organ
Text: Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Revelation 15: 2-4 (E)
Premiere: 9 March 2008 House of Hope Church, Minnesota
Choir of The House of Hope Presbyterian Church / Andrew Altenbach

Level 3
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100060

An atmospheric piece which is straightforward but a little more challenging than some of MacMillan’s ‘entry level’ choral pieces (the altos 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
○Regent RECGD348 Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir/Paul Spicer

St Anne’s Mass (1985, rev. 1996) 5’
Kyrie; Gloria; Sanctus/Benedictus; Acclamation; Agnus Dei
for unison voices (congregation) and organ with optional SATB choir

Text: Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Revelation 15: 2-4 (E)
Premiere: 24 December 1995 King’s College Chapel, Cambridge
The Holy Lamb and the Lamb of God, mixed voices and organ

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

This work was composed for the Edinburgh Festival in 1985 and has undergone several revisions and developments. It is a straightforward piece which will be easily taught and sung by both congregation and soloists and will create a lasting impression. It needs a competent organist and preferably an instrument with fair-sized resources to do the piece justice.

979-0-060-12356-6 Choral score on sale
○Hyperion CDA 67867 Choir of Westminster Cathedral/ Andrew Reid/Martin Baker

979-0-060-12357-3 Congregational parts (x 10) on sale
○Hyperion release in 2013
**Te Deum** (2001)
for SATB choir (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 / Stephen Tilton

Level 3
CD2, track 3

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

**Tota pulchra es** (2010)
for mixed voices and organ

Text: Antiphon at second vespers on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (L)
Premiere: 8 July 2010 Basilica of the National Shrine, Washington DC
Choir of the Basilica of the National Shrine

Level 3
CD2, track 20
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100027

This piece has real ‘wow’ factor. It was written for the American Guild of Organists’ National Convention, commissioned by the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and dedicated to the Very Rev. Dennis Corrado on the 40th anniversary of his ordination. So the text is wholly appropriate, but its setting is far removed from the unctuous, often sentimental/emotional settings from past generations. MacMillan’s setting here is incredibly rhythmic (in a way we don’t often see in his shorter works), dramatic and forceful. Here is MacMillan rejoicing in the beauty of Mary and allowing his fervour its reflection in an outpouring of joy.

The scheme is a) tutti, b) soprano verse in his familiar chant-like mode, c) tutti, d) tenors singing the chant-like section and e) tutti ending with full organ. A simple scheme but not always such simple chords to sing. The challenges here are: 1) absolute rhythmic accuracy as the tutti sections stand or fall by the incisive, edgy rhythm; 2) the notes themselves: this is another piece like Alpha and Omega which looks simpler on paper than it actually is, so be prepared to allow enough rehearsal time to master the unexpected chord progressions and the rapid leaps and bounds; 3) the demands of the ‘chant’ sections: absolute unanimity of grace notes (always on the beat), triplet semiquavers (16th notes) and demisemiquaver (32nd note) turns. Look, as well, at MacMillan’s careful articulation markings. The more reverberant your acoustic, the more these need to be worked on.

This piece would make a great opener or closing item in a concert.

979-0-060-12284-2 Choral score on sale
Linn Records CKD 383 Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

**Changed** (1997)
for SATB choir 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, Kilburnie
Cunningham Chamber Choir and members of the North Ayrshire Youth Silver Band / Dorothy Howden

Level 3
CD1, track 15
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10789

A beautiful, straightforward and imaginative piece which is highly effective. The instruments set 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

**A Child is Born in Bethlehem** (1978)
for ATB (soli or choir) and oboe

Text: Dutch traditional translated by R C Trevelyan (E-L)
Premiere: 21 January 2012 St John’s College, Cambridge
Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha

Level 3

An unusual and lovely carol first performed in the St John’s College Epiphany carol service. MacMillan originally wrote this carol when he was nineteen and, along with other early works (like parts of Who are these angels?), has recently been rediscovering what he might call into service for his more recent works.

The atmosphere set up by the opening oboe soliloquy is magical and it could almost be singing the opening words as the first two phrases fit them beautifully. A tenor voice takes over the melodic line seamlessly. The trio of voices then sings a short contrapuntal passage and is joined by the oboe. Varied scoring, contrasting dynamics, and a mixture of counterpoint and chordal writing leading to a revisiting of the opening material at the end makes for an effective and memorable experience. The challenge here is taking up the oboe’s lyricism in the vocal parts and matching its expressiveness.

979-0-060-12324-5 Score and parts on sale
The Company of Heaven (1999) 30’
for children’s voices (younger and older with separate parts),
organ, and with ad lib sections for wind band and camyx solo
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
Premiere: 12 September 2000 Vale of Glamorgan Festival
Children from Vale of Glamorgan schools / John Kenny

Level 1 2

This is another example of MacMillan responding imaginatively
to the needs of the community. This gebruchsmusik 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 camyx 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 camyx 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) 4’
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
and community organizations in the Partick area of Glasgow

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: 16 June 2000, ‘Let The Children Sing’ Festival, Brooklyn
Brooklyn Youth Choir / Doreen Rao

Level 2

CD1, 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 tunning 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)

979-0-060-10820 For unison voices and piano or harp accompanies
Text by James McGonigal (Scots)
Premiere: 28 April 1997 Corpus Christi Primary School, Glasgow
Children of Corpus Christi Primary School / James MacMillan

Level

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)

Ecce Sacerdos Magnus (2011) 3’
for unison voices, two trumpets and organ
Text: Antiphon for a Bishop (L)
15 August 2011 Aberdeen Cathedral
Aberdeen Cathedral Choir

Level 1

This impressive piece was written for the consecration of
the Bishop of Aberdeen in Aberdeen Cathedral. The text (in Latin) is highly appropriate: ‘Behold the great priest who in
his days pleased God.’ It is extremely simple but is given an
added sense of occasion by the pair of trumpets which begin
the work with a chant-like fanfare in octaves. There are three
verses, all the same except for the slight alteration which the
different word underlay necessitates. The piece ends with a
Gloria Patri.

979-0-060-12435-8 Choral score with trumpet parts
in preparation

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
Children of Corpus Christi Primary School / James MacMillan

Level

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
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and see that the opening material is re-used at the start of
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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)

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: 16 June 2000, ‘Let The Children Sing’ Festival, Brooklyn
Brooklyn Youth Choir / Doreen Rao

Level 2

CD1, track 13
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/10820

This enterprising work imaginatively gives the Latin Te Deum
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Choral Music Experience) in the front of the score which give
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singers in an imaginative and enjoyable way.

979-0-051-33100-0 Choral score on sale (including parts for
flute and bells)
Advent antiphon for 21 December, for 3-part treble choir, trumpet and strings or organ

Premiere: 23 June 2008 Queen’s Hall, Edinburgh
St Mary’s Music School

So Deep

(1992)

7’

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)

Premiere: 13 June 1992 Queen Elizabeth Hall, London
Children from Haringey schools and musicians from the Philharmonia Orchestra / James MacMillan, Nicholas Wilks and John Cooney

The Prophecy

(1997)

8’

for SSAATTBB choir and optional oboe and viola solos

Text: Liturgical (E)

Premiere: 11 October 1997 Queen Elizabeth Hall, London
Children from Haringey schools and musicians from the Philharmonia Orchestra / James MacMillan, Nicholas Wilks and John Cooney

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 trumpet 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

Challenge Classics CC72554 Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic / James MacMillan

Mouth of the Dumb

(The Strathclyde Motets)

(2006)

4’

4’

for 2-part upper voices and harp

Text: Medieval chant from the Inchcolm Antiphoner (L)

Premiere: 22 June 2008 St Columba’s Church, Maryhill, Glasgow
Canty / William Taylor

So Deep

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/11891

A superbly imaginative arrangement of Robert Burns’s O my luve’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.

Choral score and instrumental parts on hire

Vocal parts the oboe begins, soon followed by the viola and 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 and instrumental parts on sale

Linn Records CKD 4’

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

Domone non secundum peccata nostrae

(2010)

6’

for SSATTBB and violin

Text: Tract for Ash Wednesday: Psalm 102 vv 10, 78, 8, 9 (L)

Premiere: 9 March 2011 St John’s College, Cambridge
Margaret Faultless / Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha

So Deep

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100026

This Latin motet for the feast of St Columba is a hauntingly beautiful piece for upper voices, whether employing girls, boys or an adult female group. The two-parts largely move in parallel with spread chords in the accompaniment, before launching into rapturous canons in the Alleluia section. The accompaniment was originally written for clàrsach – a traditional Gaelic harp – but is equally suitable for modern trumpeter and a fair number of strings as the music divides at one point into 14 parts.

979-0-060-12076-3 Choral score on sale

Linn Records CKD Canty/William Taylor

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 (incorporating oboe and viola parts)

Signum SIGCD507 The Elysian Singers/Sam Laughton

Another unusual combination of solo instrument with choir as with A Child is born also written for (or first performed by) St John’s Cambridge. The mood is perfect for the start of Lent, serious, thoughtful and thought-provoking. The violin’s different roles – background arpeggiando figures, foreground strong pizzicato chords and longer solo leading into the final repeat of the first section gives the piece a sense of development through its rondo shape but ultimately leaving the choir with the last word.

The choral writing here is undemanding although the singers need to be well-prepared for the start of the final reprise following the violin’s solo. But ending on a D and the first chord being an open D-A-D chord the problems are more of confidence than of a lack of aural information.

Stylistically, there are no surprises here and devotees of MacMillan’s music will recognize the familiar fingerprints (grace notes, chant, ornamentation) and know how they are dealt with.

979-0-060-12323-8 Choral score and violin part on sale
Who are these angels? (2009) 6’
for SATBB and string quartet, or male voices (TTBB) and string quartet
Latin text anon, attributed to St Augustine. English text anon
Premiere: 28 April 2009 Laurenskerk Rotterdam
DoelenKwartet / Ensemble Amarcord

Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/100047

This beautiful, atmospheric work stems from MacMillan’s schooldays when, aged seventeen, he wrote the Latin setting which is almost pure Renaissance polyphony and contributes to the work’s timeless quality. MacMillan’s recent expansion of the work into its present form is linked to his opera Clemency which uses the “Who are these angels?” idea. MacMillan has said that in the opera its meaning is clear but it gives the later work a mysterious quality as the words seemingly come from nowhere.

The two versions mirror each other exactly with the sopranos/altos taking the “Who are these angels?” where T1/Baritones did in the male voice version. The setting is very straightforward and for a change, it is a viola some way into the piece which is given his characteristic ornamental “chant” to play. The ending is extraordinary. Unpitched “soft, little glissandi…like cooing doves or whale song, descending to the lowest registers” from all the string players gives a completely other worldly feel – what MacMillan also describes as the ‘unknowability of God. It is not dissimilar from the dying string sighs at the end of The Seven Last Words from the Cross.

While the notes in this work are straightforward, it is the tonal blend which needs real care. The top tenor part is exposed and needs some confident voices who are capable of well-produced top As. The usual grace note/ornament challenges are all here as well.

Choral score and instrumental parts on hire
• Linn Records CKD 383 Edinburgh Quartet/Cappella Nova/Alan Tavener

The Birds of Rhiannon (2001) 24’
Tone poem for orchestra and SATB choir
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 / James MacMillan

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 culminating 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

Cantos Sagrados (1989, orch.1997)
for SATB choir and orchestra or organ
3(III=alt/picc).2.corA.2.bcl.dbcl.ssax.2.dbn—4.3.3.1—timp.
cym/2tuned gongs(B,D)/BD/tam-t—harp—pft(=cel)—strings
Premiere: 21 March 1998 Glasgow Cathedral
Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Chorus / Christopher Bell

for further information see Choral works with organ, page 13
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
Level 3

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 bibliically 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

Credo (2012) 25'
for SATB choir and orchestra
2.1.corA.2.2(II=dbn)—2.2.0.0—timp—strings
Text from the Mass (L)
Premiere: 7 August 2012 Royal Albert Hall, London
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Juanjo Mena
Level 5

This is a large-scale work but using a fairly economical orchestra. Perhaps surprisingly it is also MacMillan's first setting of the Creed. As he has pointed out, musical settings of the Creed in a liturgical setting are no longer viable and so this work is conceived as a concert piece. As MacMillan's programme note details, the Credo is cast in three movements reflecting the Trinitarian nature of the text:

1) Pater
The short first movement begins with a high intonation, evoking liturgical practice. Most of the choral writing here is syllabic and homophonic with orchestral interjections that are busier or fanfare-like.

2) Filius
The more substantial middle movement begins with a festal theme in layers of different tonalities and pulses. Some of the choral writing is now more ornamented and florid, and that is taken up by the instruments too. In the central section, at the holiest words et incarnatus est and thereafter, the choir is accompanied by three high solo violas. The opening fanfare motif returns in different colours towards the end.

3) Spiritus Sanctus
The final movement is the longest, beginning with mysterious buzzing chords, first on wind and then on strings. The historical hinterlands of plainsong, motet and cantus firmus are the inspirations behind much of this music. After the final Amen, there is a brief joyous coda for the orchestra.

As MacMillan has continued to change and develop over recent years he has also done what few composers of his stature have bothered with and that is to realize that a choral work will stand far more chance of repeated performances by a variety of choirs through making his demands on them reasonable. This is true in Credo. While there are plenty of divisi, and the choir needs to be confident and to balance with a strong orchestra, the notes are not essentially difficult for a competent choir. Familiar issues do occur which will test some. The canonic ornamental chant in Filius between altos and tenors, for instance. But these hold few terrors in reality, and familiarity with the style will bring knowledge of how to deal with the grace notes and ornamental turns. They should not be done so quickly that they can't be heard (a common fault in performance). Pacing and tonal weight need thought.

There are beautiful passages in this work as well as dramatic outbursts and timeless chanting. MacMillan's ability as a contrapuntist brings an extra layer to the choral writing (let alone the orchestra...) and the powerfully emotive unaccompanied section for the 'Et resurrexit' is a wonderful piece of writing. The dancing 'qui ex patre' in the final movement is electric and has something of the B minor Mass Sanctus about its triplet exuberance – and taking of the Bach Mass, the cantus firmus-like Confiteor in MacMillan's third movement seems also to take its cue from Bach's powered cantus firmi in his own movement however different the sound world may be. Emphatic and exciting Amens close the work.

Choral score and orchestral parts on hire

Gloria (2011) 20'
for the 50th anniversary of the consecration of Coventry Cathedral
for tenor solo, treble voices, SATB choir, brass (3tpt.trbrn. btrbn), timpani and organ
Text: Liturgical (L)
Premiere: 23 June Coventry Cathedral
Ian Bostridge/Choral Society of Coventry Cathedral/Saint Michael’s Singers/CBSO brass and percussion/MacMillan
Level 1 (vocal parts)

James MacMillan has written of this major new work that it "is in one continuous movement but has clearly discernible sections throughout. It begins in a declamatory manner with the soloist, reflecting liturgical practice. The first main section Et in terra pax is boisterous and joyful, with instrumental interjections. The second section Laudamus Te is fast and energetic. This is followed by a slow, reflective solo for the tenor, Domine Deus. The children's voices are then highlighted in Domine Fili in music that is simple and dance-like. However, a more mysterious accompagnement is later added by the organ, muted trumpets and sliding timps. A climactic instrumental outburst then leads to the final section Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris where the large choir sings quietly and unaccompanied. The opening bold music returns before the final Amen which features the solo voice and the children again."

This is a festive setting and will make a welcome alternative to John Rutter's ubiquitous setting for similar forces (brass and organ). MacMillan has, as always, been very practical in making a setting which is an impressive aural experience but which is manageable by competent forces. Instrumentalists have to be agile, but the choirs are given music to sing which will be well within the range of most ambitious groups. There are some extended unaccompanied passages which need to be kept in tune to avoid embarrassment (à la Bruckner E minor Mass), particularly the "Qui sedes" section. The most difficult moment is likely to be finding the cluster chord which is used for 'garbled recitation' of the 'quoniam' text just before the end.

An exciting and effective new concert work which should be quickly picked up by many choirs.

Choral score and orchestral parts on hire
**Hodie puer nascitur** (2011)
Motet for chorus (SATB) and ensemble
0.0.0.0—1.1.2.0—perc(2):glsp/crot—cel—harp—strings(8,6,12,0,0,0)
Text and chant based on anonymous 14th century French-Cypriot anthem (L)
Premiere: 13 April 2012 Concertgebouw Amsterdam
Huelgas Ensemble / Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins

Level 3

This is a fascinatingly colourful motet based on a chant which MacMillan gives the tenors throughout. The sopranos and altos are given free rhythm and marked lontano (distantly) and MacMillan directs that ‘each singer should enter a few seconds after the one before, creating a dense but quiet web of sound throughout’. The effect is magically ethereal. The highly unusual ensemble, using only violins and no string basses, together with bell-like instruments: celesta, crotales, glockenspiel and the gently percussive but resonant harp, creates an apt sense of ancient and modern and also conjures up something of a Christmas atmosphere.

The notes are not difficult but the challenge will be for less expert choirs to have the confidence not only to sing softly and beautifully enough, but also to sing sufficiently independently of each other as MacMillan asks. The issue of balance between the ensemble and choir will also need to be carefully worked out with the brass instruments playing as softly but expressively as demanded. Everything in the music is closely related and so everyone has a responsibility to everyone else in their sense of line and rhythm. The ending, which has the sopranos and altos fading out individually could be truly beautiful if managed with real sensitivity.

Choral score and orchestral parts on hire

**Magnificat** (1999) and **Nunc Dimittis** (2000) for SATB choir and organ

for further information see Choral works with organ, page 15

**Quickening** (1999)
for soloists (ATTB), children’s choir, SATB chorus and orchestra
2.picc.3(II=corA).3(II=bcdl).2.dbn.—4.4.3.1—timp.perc(4)—harp—pft(=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 Concerts, and by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Wolfgang Sawallisch, music director, as part of its Centennial Concerts, and by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Wolfgang Sawallisch, music director, as part of its Centennial Concerts, and by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Wolfgang Sawallisch, music director, as part of its Centennial Concerts, and by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Wolfgang Sawallisch, music director, as part of its Centennial 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 / Sir Andrew Davis

Level 4.5

CD1, 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, rhythmic 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 singing a low D flat/F 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 Magnificat, antiphon, chorale-like conclusion of the last movement is thrilling and is one of the most celebratory in MacMillan’s choral output, before a fade out with distant boys’ voices.

979-0-060-11981-1 Study score on sale
Choral score and orchestral parts on hire

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

**Seven Last Words from the Cross** (1993)
Cantata for choir and string orchestra

The traditional text of the Seven 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 Alkaysius Church, Glasgow
Cappella Nova and the Scottish Ensemble / Alan Tavener

Level 4.5

CD1, 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.

979-0-060-11561-5 Vocal score on sale
979-0-060-11417-5 Study score on sale

String orchestra parts on hire

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)
2 instrument parts 2 (Il piazz) II cor A 2 II bcl 1 dbn 4 3 3 1 temp percul 1 t bells tuned gongs tgl Sanctus bells bil SD BD susp cym sizzle cym tam 1 chamber organ strings

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 / Colin Davis
Level 2
CD2, track 10

Audio clip www.bowesey.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. It 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.

The ‘large’ choir takes the other ‘personality’ roles such as Pilate and Peter, and of course takes the role of the trees – 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 sopranos are also asked to hum top B flats pianissimo amongst other voices. 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 chorus 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, Lulla, 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 orchestral parts on hire

Hyperion CDA 67460 Polyphony/Britten Sinfonia/Stephen Layton

Summae Trinitati (2009) 4'

for mixed voices, brass, timpani and organ

Text: Responsory for the solemn reception of an Archbishop, from a 15th-century Canterbury pontifical (L)
Composed for the installation of the Most Rev. Vincent Nichols, Eleventh Archbishop of Westminster
Westminster Cathedral Choir / Martin Baker

Level 2

This short work demonstrates MacMillan’s versatility as a composer. This has ‘coronation service’ wow factor with brass, timpani and organ making a hugely impressive entrance fanfare/motet for the new Archbishop as he entered the west door of Westminster Cathedral and processed down the centre of the nave to the high altar. It is pure musical theatre and would be a good starting work in a concert which included MacMillan’s Gloria.

The notes are not difficult for a choir to master. The work is in three sections. Fanfares and choral outbursts followed by chant in the habitual MacMillan manner interspersed with free chant in four part harmony before a return to the opening fanfare material and a wonderfully ‘driven into the buffers at full tilt’ ending.

Choral score and orchestral parts on hire

Hyperion release in 2013

Tu es Petrus (2010) 4'

for mixed voices, brass (4pt.3trbn), timpani, percussion (3 players: t bells/cyms/tam-t/BD) and organ

Text: Matthew 16: 18 (L)
Composed for the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Westminster Cathedral
Premiere: 18 September 2010 Westminster Cathedral London
Choir of Westminster Cathedral and London Brass / Martin Baker

Level 1

Another great occasional piece for a ceremonial event. MacMillan really has a perfect feel for the kind of music which sends shivers up and down the spine as the organ, brass and timpani thunder around a great reverberant space. The text: ‘Thou art Peter and on this rock will I build my church’ is perfectly appropriate for the visit of St Peter’s modern successor. The feel of the music, unlike that for the installation of the Archbishop of Westminster, however, is of a darker hue – maybe a reflection of the weight of responsibility surrounding the Pontiff, maybe a reflection of the dark secular times in which we live. Who knows? But what MacMillan marks to be played ‘joyfully’ in the brass triplet semiquavers (16th notes) feels slightly portentous – but then it is an extraordinary occasion in which awe is probably more in evidence than levity.

As with the other Westminster Cathedral ‘occasional’ works the choral parts are not especially difficult though it is a more challenging work than Summae Trinitati. There is a separate instrumental Processional movement based on the opening material. The end of the main motet leads directly into chant and the Introit for Christ The King. In a concert situation an...
ending would have to be organized. It could lead directly via
the organ pedal G which is held over after the final choral
phrase into the Processional movement.

Choral score and orchestral parts on hire

Hyperion release in 2013

Visitatio Sepulchri (1992-93) 40’
for 7-part chorus (SSATTBB, male speaker (Sprechstimme)) or 7
solo singers and chamber orchestra
2(l=picc),2(l=corA),2(l=bc),2(l=dn)—2.2.2(1=trbfn).0—
timp.perc(1):2cowbells2wdbll/2bongos/2timbales/SD/2tam-t/
5tom-t/5pl.bl/glsp/cyms/bell tree—strings(min:8.6.4.4,2)
Text: from a 14th century Easter Day liturgical drama and the Te Deum (L)
Premiere: 20 May 1993 Tramway, Glasgow
Soloists and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Ivor Bolton
Directed by Francisco Negrin

Level £
CD2, track 5
Audio clip www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/12996

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.

Full score, vocal score and orchestral parts on hire
NB: this work is available both as a music theatre piece and for concert performance

BIS SACD 1719 Netherlands Radio Choir/Netherlands
Radio Chamber Philharmonic/James MacMillan

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Resources include programme notes, a range of over 50 choral audio clips, news of premieres, details of forthcoming performances of each work, and purchase links for recordings and scores.

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Cover images: © John K Clark www.glasspainter.com
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