



PASSION & POLYPHONY

Sacred choral music by
Frank Martin and James MacMillan

Sonoro
Neil Ferris conductor

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Sonoro

Emily Pailthorpe *oboe*
Benjamin Roskams *viola*

Neil Ferris *conductor*

About Sonoro & Neil Ferris:

'It was thrilling to hear the singers [...] bringing such a range of timbre and dynamics to the performance.'

Choir & Organ

'Sonoro aims to produce an inviting, rich timbre and pretty much perfectly achieved this [...] I have no doubt that Sonoro is going places.'

Classical Source

James MacMillan (b. 1959)

1. **Cecilia Virgo** [4:40]
2. **Children are a heritage of the Lord** [5:07]
3. **Miserere** [12:17]

Frank Martin (1890–1974)

Mass for Double Choir

4. Kyrie [4:56]
5. Gloria [6:06]
6. Credo [5:46]
7. Sanctus [4:18]
8. Agnus Dei [4:31]

James MacMillan

9. **Hymn to the Blessed Sacrament** [3:40]
10. **Bring us, O Lord God** [6:51]
11. **Data est mihi omnis potestas** [4:07]
12. **O Radiant Dawn** [4:06]

Total playing time [66:31]



Passion & Polyphony: Sacred choral music by Frank Martin & James MacMillan

The choral works of Frank Martin (1890–1974) and James MacMillan (b. 1959) both have an affinity with Renaissance music. Frank Martin's extraordinary and heartfelt *Mass for Double Choir* displays a desire to move away from the extravagances of the late-nineteenth century, especially in the field of opera to a simpler, leaner, purer form of musical expression. This is also true of James MacMillan in our own time whose music shows a deep connection with both early music (the Scot Robert Carver c. 1485–1570 in particular), folk music and chant. MacMillan is one of the most successful and sought-after composers of his generation. Unusually, everything he writes is driven and inspired by his deep Catholic faith. He has written a vast amount of music to enrich the liturgy of the church, (most particularly through the *Strathclyde Motets*), but even his so-called secular music, orchestral, chamber and vocal is related in some way either to his faith or to deeply held views: theological, moral or social. Remarkably he is also a composer who writes for any standard of vocal group without compromising his compositional integrity. Thus, an almost hymn-like piece of real simplicity like *O Radiant Dawn* will be as

instantly recognisably his as the much more complex *Miserere*.

Cecilia Virgo was commissioned by the Choir of Royal Holloway where there is a traditional annual celebration of the patron saint of music. The Latin text dates from the 1500s and MacMillan chose 'to draw on the heritage of richly contrapuntal music from the sixteenth century'. The work is scored for double choir; allowing for striking effects particularly with the arresting call to Cecilia at the opening and with the use of the opposing keys of C major and D major between the two choirs. The overall impression is mesmerising and dramatic and builds to a triumphant resolution of the harmony and texture.

Children are a heritage of the Lord is a deceptively 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 increases the intensity of the message and the impassioned, imploring nature continues right to the end where the top line is left all alone.

Miserere was commissioned by the Flanders Festival and first performed in Antwerp on 29 August 2009. The text is from Psalm 51 (verses 3–21) and is the same as was famously set by Allegri (MacMillan also sets it in Latin). It is scored for eight voice parts but MacMillan varies his ‘orchestration’ widely during the course of twelve or so minutes the piece takes to perform. All the familiar fingerprints are here including the ‘Scotch-snap’ style ornaments always directed to be sung on the beat and, as with the other works discussed here, quasi-chant like melodic lines which add to the timelessness of this music. The work is profoundly effective and deeply moving. MacMillan has spoken before of the audience needing to fully engage with the process of performance – in other words to focus and concentrate on what they are hearing and thus to be much more actively involved in allowing the music to work its magic and the words to truly communicate. This is part of his skill as a composer. In this spiritual journey one senses a deep past infecting all that is present and MacMillan

remarked how lucky he had been to learn and sing sixteenth-century polyphony early on. One senses a hand from the past raised in blessing on the present.

Frank Martin’s **Mass for Double Choir** is a product of Martin’s early maturity and dates from 1922. It is an outstanding and original work, which shows Martin’s deep understanding of and sympathy for choral sound. Martin was highly self-critical and often refused to allow his music to see the light of day until he was completely satisfied with it. The Mass is a good example of this reticence waiting forty years until 1963 for its first performance. At the time he wrote, ‘I considered it to be a matter between God and myself. I felt that a personal expression of religious belief should remain secret and hidden from public opinion.’

Martin’s approach to the writing of this Mass is essentially contrapuntal and he uses melodic lines which take their inspiration from Gregorian chant. This brings a wonderful sense of flow to the music. However, nothing is more original or aurally arresting than the quasi plainsong or folk-influenced opening of the ‘Kyrie’ with its ornamental notes and its sense of rhythmic freedom. This freedom soon becomes harnessed as the other parts join



in to make a kind of fugal treatment. There is a sense of supplication in the whole movement mirroring the words.

The 'Gloria' begins with a figure which breathes like a rumour as the whisperings of the word 'Gloria' move around the choir. There are moments of drama, and sections of repose where the second choir sits on an open fifth chord of D whilst the first choir sings in unison, plainsong-like again. The extended 'Credo' is full of contrasts and word painting. The 'crucifixus' is tellingly agonised with the tenors vying with each other to outdo the last part in its sense of angst. The 'Et resurrexit' flows and leads to a dance at 'Et in spiritum sanctam' before taking us foursquare to a triumphant and affirmative conclusion.

The 'Sanctus' is gentle and flowing whilst the 'pleni' is rhythmically lopsided but exciting as it leads to the 'Hosanna'. The 'Benedictus' begins with a mesmerising repetition of the opening words by the second choir, which is taken up with almost eastern-style harmony by the firsts. It builds to a strong conclusion at the 'Hosanna'. The 'Agnus Dei', written some four years after the rest of the Mass, takes its cue from the start of the 'Benedictus' with the second choir accompanying the firsts with steadily moving crotchet chords. The movement

becomes more and more impassioned before sinking into a sublimely peaceful ending.

Hymn to the Blessed Sacrament is one of MacMillan's earliest works, dating from 1980. The contrapuntal writing in the instrumental lines seems very much an influence of his teacher Kenneth Leighton and also reminiscent of Vaughan Williams. Over the weaving oboe and viola texture is a simple setting of the St Thomas Aquinas hymn and gives a glimpse of where the *Strathclyde Motets* come from; simple, effective and original sacred music.

William Harris's setting of John Donne's **Bring us, O Lord God** together with his extraordinary anthem *Faire is the Heaven*, represent a pinnacle of twentieth-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 MacMillan's *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 mesmerising. In this work the figure is used at key moments in different keys and pitches and, ultimately

fragmented, in the series of *Amens* which bring us back to the original key of E-flat but in a magical and unexpected progression. Having outlined how MacMillan avoids any reflection of Harris's setting, there is no doubt that he is writing within the continuing British choral tradition at its best.

One of the *Strathclyde Motets*, **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 ninth in the first soprano and first tenor, and sevenths and fifths 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. A second section sets the sopranos and later the tenors and basses on Monteverdi-like cadenza passages in falling thirds. A final outburst of three sky-rocketing Alleluias ends the motet and leaves a memorable impression.

O Radiant Dawn is another of the *Strathclyde Motets* and is built from simple separated phrases. It is particularly profound because of its straightforward nature which delivers its message unambiguously. This Advent hymn is full of a sense of anticipation, with a powerful building of tension with repeated suspensions at 'Come, Shine on those who dwell in darkness'. A short middle section

with sopranos and altos briefly explores the mystery of the prophesy of Isaiah before a return of the opening. A beautiful, rocking Amen concludes this lovely piece.

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Simon Wood



Texts & Translations

James MacMillan (b. 1959)

1. Cecilia Virgo

Cecilia Virgo, tuas laudes
universa concinit musicorum turba,
et tuis meritis supplices a Deo exaudiri possint.
Juncta voce et uno corde tuum nomen invocant,
ut luctum mundi in paradisi gloriam mutare digneris;
tuosque pupilos, tutelarīs Virgo, aspiciere velis,
pīam Dominam, inclamantes, et semper dicentes:
Sancta Cecilia, ora pro nobis.

*Virgin Cecilia, all musicians of the world
sing your praises,
and through your merits,
petitions are heard by God.
They call on your name
with united voice and heart
that you might change the
world's mourning into glory of paradise;
may you be inclined, protecting Virgin,
to look over your charges,
who call on the pious Lady, always saying:
Saint Cecilia, pray for us.*

Anonymous, medieval

2. Children are a heritage of the Lord

Except the Lord build the house,
they labour in vain that build it:
except the Lord keep the city,
the watchman waketh but in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late,
to eat the bread of sorrows:
for so he giveth his beloved sleep.
Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord:
and the fruit of the womb is his reward.
As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man;
so are children of the youth.
Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them:
they shall not be ashamed,
but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Psalm 127

3. Miserere

Miserere mei, Deus:
secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.
Et secundum multitudinem miserationem tuarum,
dele iniquitatem meam.
Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea:
et a peccato meo munda me.
Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco:
et peccatum meum contra me est semper.
Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci:
ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis, et vincas cum judicaris.
Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum:
et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.
Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti:
incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi.
Asperges me hyssopo, et mudabor:
lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.
Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam:

et exultabunt ossa humiliata.
Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis:
et omnes iniquitates meas dele.
Cor mundum crea in me, Deus:
et spiritum rectum innova, in visceribus meis.
Ne proicias me a facie tua:
et spiritum sanctum tuum ne auferas a me.
Redde mihi laetitiam salutaris tui:
et spiritu principali confirma me.
Docebo iniquos vias tuas:
et impii ad te convertentur.
Libera me de sanquinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meae:
et exultabit lingua mea iustitiam tuam.
Domine, labia mea aperies:
et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam.
Quoniam si voluisses sacrificium, dedessem utique:
holocaustis non delectaberis.
Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus:
cor contritum, et humiliatum, Deus, non despicias.
Benigne fac, Domine, in bona voluntate tua Sion:
ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem.
Tunc acceptabis sacrificium iustitiae,
oblaciones et holocausta:
tunc imponet super altare tuum vitulos.

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to thy great mercy.
And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies
blot out my iniquity.
Wash me yet more from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my iniquity,
and my sin is always before me.
To thee only have I sinned,
and have done evil before thee:
that thou mayst be justified in thy words
and mayst overcome when thou art judged.
For behold I was conceived in iniquities;
and in sins did my mother conceive me.*

*For behold thou hast loved truth:
the uncertain and hidden things of thy wisdom
thou hast made manifest to me.
Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and
I shall be cleansed: thou shalt wash me,
and I shall be made whiter than snow.
To my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness:
and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.
Turn away thy face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create a clean heart in me, O God:
and renew a right spirit within my bowels.
Cast me not away from thy face;
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,
and strengthen me with a perfect spirit.
I will teach the unjust thy ways:
and the wicked shall be converted to thee.
Deliver me from blood, O God, thou God of my salvation:
and my tongue shall extol thy justice.
O Lord, thou wilt open my lips:
and my mouth shall declare thy praise.
For if thou hadst desired sacrifice,
I would indeed have given it:
with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted.
A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit:
a contrite and humbled heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.
Deal favourably, O Lord, in thy good will with Sion;
that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up.
Then shalt thou accept the sacrifice of justice,
oblations and whole burnt offerings:
then shall they lay calves upon thy altar.*

*Psalm 51 (50): 3–21
Douay-Rheims translation*

Frank Martin (1890-1974)

Mass for Double Choir

4. Kyrie

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

*Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.*

5. Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo
et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, rex caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens,
Domine Fili unigenite, Iesu Christe,
Domine Deus, agnus Dei, Filius Patris,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis;
qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram;
qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus sanctus.
Tu solus Dominus.
Tu solus altissimus, Iesu Christe.
Cum Sancto Spiritu,
in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

*Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to men of good will.
We praise you. We bless you.
We adore you. We glorify you.
We give you thanks
for your great glory.
Lord God, king of heaven,
God the Father almighty,
Lord, only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
Lord God, lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you who take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you who sit at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.
For you only are holy.
You only are Lord.
You only are most high, Jesus Christ.
With the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

6. Credo

Credo in unum Deum,
Patrem omnipotentem,
factorem caeli et terrae,
visibilem omnium, et invisibilem.
Et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum,
Filium Dei unigenitum,
et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula,
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero,
genitum, non factum,
consubstantialem Patri,
per quem omnia facta sunt.
Qui propter nos homines,
et propter nostram

salutem descendit de caelis,
et incarnatus est
de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria virgine,
et homo factus est.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis:
sub Pontio Pilato passus, et sepultus est.
Et resurrexit tertia die,
secundum scripturas.
Et ascendit in caelum:
sedet ad dexteram Patris.
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria,
iudicare vivos et mortuos:
cuius regni non erit finis.
Et in Spiritum Sanctum Dominum,
et vivificantem:
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit,
qui cum Patre et Filio
simul adoratur et conglorificatur:
qui locutus est per prophetas.
Et unam sanctam catholicam
et apostolicam ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma
in remissionem peccatorum.
Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum,
et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.

*I believe in one God,
Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all visible and invisible things.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten son of God,
born of the Father before all ages,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten not made,
consubstantial with the Father,
by whom all things were made.
Who for us men,*

*and for our salvation,
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate
by the Holy Spirit through the virgin Mary,
and was made man.
He was also crucified for us:
under Pontius Pilate he died and was buried.
And on the third day he rose again
in accordance with the scriptures.
And ascended into heaven:
he sits at the right hand of the Father.
And he will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead:
there will be no end to his kingdom.
And in the Holy Spirit, Lord
and giver of life:
who comes from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
together is adored and glorified;
who spoke through the prophets.
And in one, holy, catholic
and apostolic church.
I confess one baptism
for the remission of sins.
And I await the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

7. Sanctus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

8. Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

*Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.*

*Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world,
grant us peace.*

James MacMillan

9. Hymn to the Blessed Sacrament

*St Thomas Aquinas
Translated by James Quinn (1969)*

10. Bring us, O Lord God

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening
into the house and gate of heaven,
to enter into that gate and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling,
but one equal light; no noise nor silence,
but one equal music; no fears nor hopes,
but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings,
but one equal eternity: in the habitations of thy
glory and dominion, world without end. Amen.

11. Data est mihi omnis potestas

Data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo et in terra.
Alleluia.
Euntes, docete omnes gentes,
baptizantes eos in nomine Patris,
et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Alleluia.

*All power is given to me in heaven and in earth.
Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing
them in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost.*

*Matthew 28:18–19
Douay-Rheims translation*

12. O Radiant Dawn

O Radiant Dawn, Splendour of eternal Light,
Sun of Justice:
come, shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.
Isaiah had prophesied,

'The people who walked in darkness
have seen the great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of
gloom a light has shone.'
Amen.

Antiphon for 21 December

Sonoro

Soprano

Jenny Bacon
Zoe Brookshaw
Eloise Irving
Rebecca Lea
Helen Semple
Joanna Tomlinson

Alto

Cathy Bell
Lucy Goddard
Carris Jones
Ruth Kiang
Martha McLorinan*

Tenor

Stephen Brown
Peter Davoren
Tom Herford
Greg Tassell*

Bass

Colin Campbell
Tim Dickinson
Stephen Kennedy*
Cheyney Kent
Richard Savage

** soloist in Miserere (track 3)*



Sonoro

Sonoro, the outstanding professional chamber choir founded in 2016, has attracted critical acclaim for its warmth of tone, rich blend of colours and vibrancy in performance. Sonoro is conducted by Neil Ferris, one of today's leading figures in the world of choral conducting.

Sonoro's distinctive sound has propelled the ensemble to secure engagements from some of the UK's most prestigious venues and promoters, including the London Chamber Music Series at Kings Place, and the Wimbledon International Music Festival. Sonoro has also performed live on BBC Radio 3 'In Tune' and been featured on London Live television.

The choir's unmistakably rich and full sound has been realised by allowing each singer to be free to use all of their voice, matched with careful blending, creating warmth and resonance. 'Sonoro' in Italian means 'sonorous, voices that are rich and full' and Sonoro lives up to that name as a choir with a distinctive and perfectly blended sound.

www.sonoromusic.com

Neil Ferris

Neil Ferris is co-Artistic Director of Sonoro, Chorus Director of the BBC Symphony Chorus, Music Director of Wimbledon Choral Society and Chorus Director at the Royal College of Music. In demand as a guest conductor to some of the finest choirs in the UK, he has worked with the National Youth Choir of Great Britain, the National Youth Choir of Wales, London Symphony Chorus and The Bach Choir. He has conducted the London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan, the orchestra of Welsh National Opera, London Mozart Players and Florilegium.

Formerly Head of Choral Conducting at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Neil helped establish the international reputation of the choral conducting course and developed the conservatoire's choral ensembles. He is recognised as one of the UK's leading teachers of choral conducting and has also led masterclasses in the USA, Ireland and Denmark.

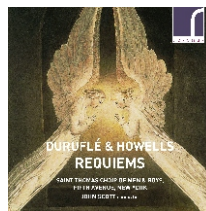
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