



JAMES MACMILLAN

ORGAN WORKS



STEPHEN FARR

James MacMillan (b.1959)

Organ Works

Stephen Farr *organ*

The Rieger Organ of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh (1992)

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. Kenga e Krushqve (2018) * | [4:30] |
| 2. Gaudeamus in loci pace (1998) | [6:11] |
| St Andrews' Suite (2013) | |
| 3. One | [2:12] |
| 4. Two | [3:28] |
| 5. Three | [2:25] |
| 6. Offertorium (1986) | [4:42] |
| 7. Le Tombeau de Georges Rouault (2003) | [14:09] |
| 8. White Note Paraphrase (1994) | [2:11] |
| 9. Meditation (2010) * | [6:18] |
| 10. Wedding Introit (1983) | [2:52] |
| 11. Toccata (2019) * | [7:47] |

Total playing time [56:50]

**world premiere recording*



James MacMillan (Photography: Philip Gatward)

James MacMillan: Organ Works

James MacMillan's compositions for organ represent a small, but steadily increasing body of work that covers almost the entirety of the composer's career to date, from experiments with Scottish traditional music in the early 1980s through to substantial virtuosic fantasias from his sixtieth year. Though the pieces for solo organ are only a slight, but colourful strand of MacMillan's artistic fabric, they are some of his most personal and intimate creations, often written as wedding gifts for family, friends and for the composer's own bride on their wedding day in 1983. Taken on their own, they show one side of MacMillan's expressive and vibrant writing for the instrument, but when added to his use of the organ throughout his wider work they show a composer well-versed in the history, literature and culture of the instrument and someone seeking to embed this in every piece. For although there are only a handful of solo organ pieces, MacMillan has written for the instrument in many different settings: from the spiky, anxious outbursts in the emotional *Cantos Sagrados* (1989) to the declamatory declaration of Papal authority in *Tu es Petrus* (2010), and perhaps most vividly in the deeply-satirical 'enigmatic

variations' for organ and orchestra *A Scotch Bestiary* from 2004 – the organ has been a key part of the sounds and colours that MacMillan draws on to realise his compositional ambitions.

Perhaps one of the most personal musical gifts MacMillan has given to his family in recent years is **Kenga e Krushqve** written for his son's wedding in August 2018. As the bride-to-be was Albanian, MacMillan turned to this famous folksong from her homeland which is associated with weddings (the title roughly translates as 'Song of the In-Laws') for the recessional at the end of the Nuptial Mass. The piece is a whirlwind of raucous energy and passion with the same rhythm present throughout, gaining in momentum and power, almost unravelling in places due to the fiery dance contained within. MacMillan's suggestion that the organ play 'like a bagpipe' at the opening of the score is apt: this piece feels exactly like the ceremony it was written for, the coming together of Albanian and Scottish cultures in a feverish celebration of life. It is both heartfelt and thrilling in equal measures.

A much more serene offering is also one of MacMillan's most performed organ works, **Gaudeamus in loci pace** ('Let us rejoice in

the peace of this place') which was written in 1998 to celebrate the golden jubilee of the re-foundation of Pluscarden Abbey, a Benedictine community in north-east Scotland. Although cut from an entirely different cloth to the previous work, the composer seeks to blend different materials again, with a softly unfolding plainchant providing the framework for birdsong-like interjections that MacMillan refers to as 'like a slip-jig' (continuing the Scottish vernacular theme). As the piece begins to slowly move to a climax, the birdsong is suddenly set free and quietly fades into the distance leaving only the silence and peace of the abbey, and the timelessness of such a space.

One of MacMillan's most important recent collaborations has been with the University of St Andrews where he has been appointed a Professor of Theology, Imagination and the Arts in the School of Divinity. As well as giving talks, seminars and lectures, MacMillan has been part of the TheoArtistry Composers' Scheme which has seen him mentor a new generation of composers of sacred music amongst the august setting of one of Scotland's most venerable institutions. The link with the university heralded the composition of the **St Andrews' Suite**, commissioned in celebration of the 600th anniversary of

the foundation of the university in 1413 and first performed by Tom Wilkinson in June 2013. The three pieces that comprise the suite have a functional as well as celebratory nature being designed to be performed as voluntaries at university events and ceremonies. The first is a strident allegro vivace that utilises a bristling bitonality amidst pedal points and prominent melodic sevenths. The second is more reflective and pastoral with a highly ornamented melodic line reminiscent of *Gaudeamus in loci pace*. The final piece sees MacMillan paying homage to two of his most lasting influences, Bach and Messiaen, with the rigour of one and the colour of the other playing out in this short andante.

Of the trio of wedding gifts that MacMillan composed in the 1980s and 90s, the **Offertorium** is perhaps the most beautiful and certainly the most directly inspired by folk music of the three. Written for an old school friend and first performed by the composer at the wedding ceremony in 1986 it bears all the hallmarks of the composer's vernacular musings from this period: drones, ornaments and plaintive modality. The multiple embellishments would soon become part of MacMillan's compositional lexicon, from the smallest to the grandest pieces, but here they feel intimate and earnest, gradually building

before fading to a soft and peaceful conclusion.

Le Tombeau de Georges Rouault is MacMillan's most substantial work for the organ to date, and certainly the most virtuosic and kaleidoscopic in his oeuvre. Written for leading concert organist Thomas Trotter in 2003 and premiered by him on the organ of Symphony Hall, Birmingham in 2004, it is a work of astonishing colour and variation throughout its quicksilver fifteen-minute duration. The work was written in homage to Rouault (1871–1958), one of the most significant French artists of the first half of the twentieth century and a leading light in the artistic revival of French Catholic culture during that period. Rouault's work is dark-hued and not afraid to find the divine in some of the basest elements of contemporary society, and this characterisation is reflected throughout MacMillan's composition. The work alludes to prostitutes, clowns and indignant judges amidst a pantomime of other characters and personalities, all seemingly longing for the presence of Christ to bring order to the chaos. The work feels like a natural companion piece to *A Scotch Bestiary*, with the menagerie of imagined animals present there, replaced by a panoply of grotesque characters in the

solo piece. It is one of MacMillan's most difficult works for the instrument (in both terms of virtuosity and accessibility) but it is also one of his most visceral and original.

White Note Paraphrase is the second of the three early wedding gifts, this time written for the composer's brother in 1994 and first performed by Tom Carrick at the wedding ceremony in June of that year. It covers much of the same ground as the *Offertorium*, but here (as the title suggests) sticking entirely to the white notes of the organ manuals and pedalboard. Like much of MacMillan's work it is a mix of influences, here Gregorian chant, folksong and Bach chorales. But if you peer a little deeper there is music of a very different cast present, the love duet from MacMillan's opera *Inés de Castro* that the composer was feverishly composing at the time.

Like the cross-fertilisation between material in *White Note Paraphrase*, the same technique is used by MacMillan in **Meditation**, written for Philip Sawyer and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2010. Here MacMillan draws on his motet *Qui meditabitur* ('He who meditates') from the second book of *The Strathclyde Motets*, a set which has provided the fertile ground for many works from the composer in the years after its composition. Here the

material is essentially the same between the motet and organ work, but a light is shone on different colours, tones and moods in the latter. A *cantus firmus* begins the piece in the pedals before moving to the manuals, where increasingly frenetic figurations finally herald an unexpectedly loud and dramatic final chord.

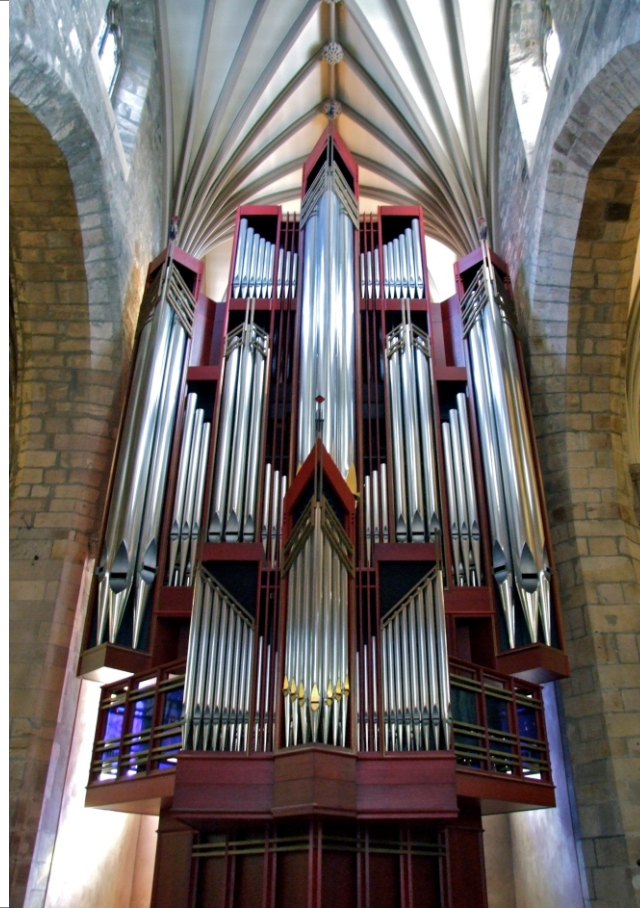
The final work in the trio of wedding gifts is the **Wedding Introit** written for the composer's own nuptials in Edinburgh in July 1983, where the premiere was given by Michael Bonaventure. It strikes a similar tone to the two later pieces mixing the vernacular with the idiomatic in a simple and effective manner. Rather than quoting from one of his own works, MacMillan chooses to allude to the famous Irish folksong *She moved through the fair*, which leaves a melancholy air to this beautiful miniature.

The closing piece on this recording is also the most recent, the **Toccata** written for organist John Scott Whiteley to be performed at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester Cathedral in 2019. The work treads on similar virtuosic ground to *Le Tombeau de Georges Rouault* and features comparable rapid changes of mood and material as toccata and dance elements collide with a famous plainchant and

more traditional music. In many ways the *Toccata* brings this recording full circle, as mid-way through the piece a familiar tune marked 'dance-like' comes into view: this vibrant utterance is no other than the melody from *Kenga e Krushqve* which MacMillan had completed the year earlier, now found in a slightly more subdued fashion than the wild folk dance that greeted his new Albanian in-laws.

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Phillip A. Cooke's book The Music of James MacMillan was published in 2019 by Boydell Press



**Specification of the 1992 Rieger Organ
St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh**

Great (Manual II)

1. Bourdon	16
2. Principal	8
3. Stopped Diapason	8
4. Harmonic Flute	8
5. Octave	4
6. Nachthorn	4
7. Quint	2 2/3
8. Superoctave	2
9. Mixture	VI
10. Mixture	IV
11. Cornet	V
12. Trumpet	16
13. Trumpet	8
14. Trumpet	4
Tremulant	

Swell (Manual III - enclosed)

26. Bourdon	16
27. Diapason	8
28. Souffle	8
29. Flûte à cheminée	8
30. Gambe	8
31. Voix Céleste	8
32. Prestant	4
33. Flûte pointue	4
34. Nazard	2 2/3
35. Quarte de Nazard	2
36. Tierce	1 3/5
37. Sifflet	1

38. Plein Jeu	VI-VIII
39. Basson	16
40. Trompette	8
41. Hautbois	8
42. Voix humaine	8
43. Clairon	4
Glocken	
Tremulant	

Positive (Manual I)

15. Gedackt	8
16. Salicional	8
17. Principal	4
18. Chimney Flute	4
19. Octave	2
20. Recorder	2
21. Sesquialtera	II
22. Larigot	1 1/3
23. Mixture	IV
24. Rankett	16
25. Cromorne	8
Tremulant	

Pedal

44. Untersatz	32
45. Principal	16
46. Open Wood	16
47. Sub Bass	16
48. Octave	8
49. Gedackt	8

50. Choral Bass	4
51. Flute	4
52. Mixture	V
53. Bombarde	32
54. Bombarde	16
55. Fagotto	16
56. Posaune	8
57. Clarion	4
Glocken	

Compass: manuals C-a3 (58 notes)
pedals C-f1 (30 notes)
Couplers: III/I, I/II, III/II, I/P, II/P, III/P
Combinations:
12 generals
6 individuals per division on
16 memory levels
Sequencers
General Crescendo
Tutti

General cancel

Stephen Farr (organ)

Stephen Farr's career as a soloist and ensemble and continuo player has taken him throughout Europe, to North and South America, and to Australia. He has performed with some of the world's leading ensembles and conductors, and has appeared in venues including the Berlin Philharmonie (where he performed with the Berlin Philharmonic in the world premiere of Jonathan Harvey's *Weltethos* under Sir Simon Rattle), the Royal Festival Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Symphony Hall Birmingham, Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, Notre Dame de Paris, and the Royal Albert Hall. He appears frequently at the BBC Proms: he gave a solo recital in the 2011 season, including the world premiere of Judith Bingham's *The Everlasting Crown*, and made a concerto appearance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo in the 2015 season. He is Director of Music at All Saints Margaret Street, and teaches organ at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In 2017 he succeeded Patrick Russell as Chief Examiner of the Royal College of Organists.

Stephen Farr was Organ Scholar of Clare College, Cambridge, graduating

with a double first in Music and an MPhil in musicology as a postgraduate student of John Butt's. He then held a number of cathedral appointments before embarking on a freelance career. In 2014 he completed a PhD on the organ works of Judith Bingham.

A prize-winner at international competition level, he has an established reputation as one of the leading recitalists of his generation, with an impressive stylistic grasp of a broad range of repertoire and a particular commitment to contemporary music. His extensive and wide-ranging discography for Resonus encompasses music from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century – recent releases include the complete organ works of Kenneth Leighton and works by J.S. Bach and Judith Bingham – and has received unanimous critical acclaim.

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'Stephen Farr is proving himself to be one of the most persuasive and compelling advocates for new British organ music [...] these performances are beautifully prepared and powerfully delivered'
Gramophone

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Console assistant: Stefan Piotrowicz

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