

A portrait of James Macmillan, a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark turtleneck. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. His arms are crossed. The background is dark and textured, with faint, illegible text visible in the upper left corner.

**World
premiere**

JAMES MACMILLAN
St Luke Passion
Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra
Netherlands Radio Choir
National Youth Choir

Markus Stenz conductor
Peter Dicke organ

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JAMES MACMILLAN (B. 1959)

[1]	Prelude	8:27
[2]	Chapter 22	32:45
[3]	Chapter 23	25:30
[4]	Postlude	6:17

total time 73:03

A Passion by James MacMillan

Following his sensational *St John Passion* (2007), the *St Luke Passion* is the second passion to be completed by the Scottish composer James MacMillan. MacMillan's attachment to the story of the Passion stems directly from his deep-rooted Roman Catholic faith. The list of his works contains a range of vocal compositions that deal with the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ: from his music theatre work *Visitatio Sepulchri* for choir and chamber ensemble (1993) and the cantata *Seven Last Words from the Cross* (1993) to the *Tenebrae Responsories* (2006) for eight-part *a cappella* choir. He regularly draws inspiration from the story of the Passion, even in his purely instrumental works. In the *Fourteen Little Pictures* for piano trio (1997), the composer's starting point is the fourteen Stations of the Cross of Jesus. And the first two parts of his orchestral triptych *Triduum, The World's Ransoming* and the *Cello Concerto* (1996), contain melodic material derived from the Gregorian liturgy for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. This catalogue backs up MacMillan's comment in *The Times* newspaper to the effect that he regards the Crucifixion and Resurrection as 'the most important days in the history of the world'. This was part of an interview in 2009, with the telling headline 'My art is shaped by my faith'. It was therefore always likely that, sooner or later, MacMillan would submit to the genre of Passion oratorio with an instrumental accompaniment.

However, it came as a major shock to many among the Passion-loving audience at the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's concert on Palm Sunday 2009 when MacMillan's truculent *St John Passion* resounded throughout the concert

hall instead of Bach's *Matthew* or *John Passion*. Where had the arias and chorales gone? Why had MacMillan utilized the Good Friday *Improperia* (the 'Reproaches of Christ') as well as the Gospel? And most of all, why was the Evangelist replaced by a four-part chamber choir?

Like most of his colleagues, MacMillan had of course listened attentively to Bach. But as a British musician he also felt a close affinity with his compatriots who had taken the choir centre-stage over the past hundred years, including Vaughan Williams, Tippett and Britten.

Gregorian chant

The contours of Gregorian chant are usually perceptible in the melodic creations of MacMillan's many choral works. We should also bear in mind MacMillan's special predilection for amateur choirs, primarily for the two institutions based in his home city of Glasgow with which he has a personal connection: he has regularly written new 'Strathclyde Motets' for the chamber choir at Strathclyde University, conducted by Alan Tavener, while he has also written numerous simple pieces for Sunday liturgy, to be performed by the choir of his own Dominican church of St Columba's, a choir he also enjoys directing. His community spirit and attachment to the people in his immediate circle extend beyond the profession of faith in the church. MacMillan is just as much at home in the pub with a gathering of folk musicians (he used to play in a band) or watching a football match in the company of his fellow Glasgow Celtic fans. MacMillan's social engagement is an intrinsic element of works such as *Búsqueda*, about the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, or *Cantos*

Sagrados, dealing with the slender divide between politics and religion. His sensitivity for justice and his nationalist consciousness were also determining factors behind the composition of the orchestral work that made his name in 1990, *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*. The main character in this instrumental requiem is a seventeenth century Scotswoman who was tortured and murdered on suspicion of witchcraft. The coincidences with the story of the Passion are plain to see.

Resignation

The *St Luke Passion* is a smaller-scale work, more compact and on the whole more serene than the *St John Passion*. This is partly to do with the specific ambience of the Gospel according to Luke, which MacMillan considers to offer greater scope for concepts such as forgiveness and redemption. Unlike the *St John Passion*, the *St Luke Passion* contains no deliberate reference to the world of opera.

At an early stage of the composition process, MacMillan decided to frame the two main sections (dealing with chapters 22 and 23) with more cheerful passages drawn from the Gospel. MacMillan contemplates the Annunciation in the *Prelude*. After a few phrases from the *Magnificat*, he has the string players improvise in whispering high registers, evoking the Kingdom of God. The result is a mysterious, peaceful episode that offers resignation and a counterpoint to the tale of Christ's suffering. The hopeful mood of the *Prelude* is echoed in the *Postlude*, which deals with the Resurrection and Ascension, following the biblical narrative. Early on in this *Postlude*, the entire orchestra embarks upon

a controlled improvisation. The presence of a children's choir also gives the *St Luke Passion* an extra dimension of humanity. MacMillan entrusts the role of Christ to the children's voices, singing either in unison or in three parts, to symbolize the theological essence of God – unity and trinity at one and the same time.

The role of Evangelist is interpreted by a mixed four-part adult choir, appearing in a range of guises; mostly all four parts sing in the same rhythm, but MacMillan sometimes uses just two parts - tenors/basses or sopranos/altos. Exceptionally, when his treatment of the text requires it, he also has this adult choir sing in polyphony. This occurs in the opening movement when the disciples are in dispute about who should be *primus inter pares*, and in the second movement when the enraged throng demands Jesus' crucifixion. A single choral voice is deployed to represent the monologues (the 'soliloquisers' such as Peter or Pilate).

At the start, the mixed choir is confined to a sober, syllabic style. As in some of his other choral works, however, MacMillan gradually introduces opulent decorations and modulations that hark back to oriental music. For each performance, the choir's conductor can enhance this multifaceted vocalization as he sees fit, by using just one section of the choir in any given place. There are even options for a soloist from the choir to take the responsibility for a particular passage. This type of flexibility increases the likelihood that, despite the demanding parts, it may be possible to use amateur choirs, which is patently what the composer wanted.

The orchestral forces are modest: a single flute and clarinet, no trombones or tuba and no percussion instruments apart from timpani. MacMillan gives the organ a pivotal role within the orchestral texture. All things considered, the instrumentation is reminiscent of that used in Handel's oratorios. At the end of each section, the orchestra provides a pause for contemplation in the form of an extended coda. MacMillan says he took inspiration for this from the *Lieder* of Robert Schumann, in which the piano expands upon the notions expressed by the singer during an epilogue. This meditative dimension, found in Bach in his numerous arias, allows MacMillan to present a narrative structure on different levels within the brief span of a single hour. A balance is maintained between the drama of the story of the Passion and the spiritual reflection on the meaning of this sacrifice.

Michel Khalifa

Translation: Bruce Gordon/Muse Translations

James MacMillan

James MacMillan is one of today's most successful composers and is also internationally active as a conductor. His musical language is flooded with influences from his Scottish heritage, Catholic faith, social conscience and close connection with Celtic folk music, blended with influences from Far Eastern, Scandinavian and Eastern European music.

MacMillan first became internationally recognized after the extraordinary success of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* at the BBC Proms in 1990. His prolific output has since been performed and broadcast around the world. His major works include percussion concerto *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, which has received more than 400 performances, a cello concerto for Mstislav Rostropovich and three symphonies. Recent major works include his *St John Passion* co-commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Berlin Radio Choir, his *Violin Concerto*, *Viola Concerto*, *St Luke Passion* and, most recently, his *Percussion Concerto No.2* for Colin Currie, co-commissioned by the Philharmonia Orchestra, Edinburgh International Festival, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra and Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music.

MacMillan enjoys a flourishing career as conductor of his own music alongside a range of contemporary and standard repertoire, praised for the composer's

insight he brings to each score. He was Principal Guest Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic until 2013 and was Composer/Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic from 2000-2009; he has conducted orchestras such as the Baltimore Symphony, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Vienna Radio Symphony, Danish Radio Symphony, Gothenburg Symphony, Luxembourg Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and NHK Symphony Orchestra among others. MacMillan was Composer in Residence at the 2012 Grafenegg Festival and a London Symphony Orchestra Portrait Artist in the 2009/10 season.

In spring 2014 MacMillan conducted three projects with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, culminating in a ground-breaking tour to India with Nicola Benedetti performing in Chennai, Mumbai and Delhi including public concerts, schools concerts and outreach work. In the 2014/15 season, MacMillan conducts orchestras including the Bergen Philharmonic, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Britten Sinfonia. In January 2015 he conducted a new production of his opera, *Inés de Castro*, at Scottish Opera and elsewhere this season conducts choral concerts in Sao Paulo and with the BBC Singers. In October 2014 MacMillan founded his music festival, The Cumnock Tryst, which takes place in his native Ayrshire.

MacMillan has directed many of his own works on disc for Chandos, BIS and BMG, most recently a disc featuring MacMillan's violin concerto *A Deep but Dazzling Darkness* and percussion concerto *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* with Colin Currie and the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic.

MacMillan was awarded a CBE in January 2004.

The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra

The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic (RFO), founded in 1945, is an essential link in the Dutch music life. The RFO performs symphonic concerts and operas in concert, as well as many world- and Netherlands premieres. Most concerts take place in the context of concert series NTR ZaterdagMatinee (the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam), the AVROTROS Vrijdag van Vredenburg series (TivoliVredenburg in Utrecht), broadcasted live on NPO Radio 4 and regularly televised.

Markus Stenz was appointed chiefconductor in 2012, after predecessor as Bernard Haitink, Jean Fournet, Willem van Otterloo, Hans Vonk, Edo de Waart and Jaap van Zweden. The RFO has worked with internationally highly regarded conductors such as Leopold Stokowski, Kirill Kondrashin, Antal Doráti, Charles Dutoit, Michael Tilson Thomas, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Mariss Jansons, Peter Eötvös, Vladimir Jurowski and Valery Gergiev. The American conductor James Gaffigan is principal guest conductor since the season 2011-2012; Bernard Haitink has connected his name to the RFO as patron. The RFO has

build an extensive cd catalogue, with works by contemporary composers such as Jonathan Harvey, Klas Torstensson, James MacMillan and Jan van Vlijmen, the registration of Wagner's Parsifal, Lohengrin, die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Complete symphonies of Bruckner, Rachmaninow, Shostakovich and Hartmann have been released in recent years. The release of Simplicius Simplicissimus (K.A. Hartmann) has especially received the highest international critical acclaim. The RFO has been awarded the Edison Classical Oeuvre Award 2014 for its longstanding essential contribution to Dutch musical life.

www.radiofilharmonischorkest.nl

Netherlands Radio Choir

Existing of 60 vocalists, the Netherlands Radio Choir (Groot Omroepkoor, GOK) is the largest professional symphonic choir of the Netherlands. Since its founding in 1945, the choir has build an extensive repertoire. Most of the concerts take place in the NTR ZaterdagMatinee series and the AVROTROS Vrijdag van Vredenburg series, often in collaboration with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. The repertoire extends from classical to contemporary. The choir premiered many works by Dutch composers such as Visman, Vleggaar and Diederik Wagenaar, and premieres of foreign composers including MacMillan, Henze and Adams. The programs feature twentieth-century works, opera and oratorio alongside the romantic repertoire.

The Netherlands Radio Choir is regularly invited by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic. The Netherlands Radio Choir has been led by its chiefconductors Kenneth Montgomery, Robin Gritton, Martin Wright, Simon Halsey and Celso Antunes. At the start of the 2012-2013 season Gijs Leenaars has been appointed chiefconductor. Michael Gläser is principal guest conductor since September 2010.

www.grootomroepkoor.nl

Netherlands Female Youth Choir

The Netherlands Female Youth Choir (NFYC) consists of outstanding young singers from the age of 16, from throughout the Netherlands. Once a month they gather for rehearsals. Conductor is Wilma ten Wolde. Vocal coaches are Irene Verburg and Anna Sims (UK). The NFYC performed a cappella projects with conductors as Eric Ericson, Daniel Reuss, Peter Dijkstra, Kaspars Putnins and Iván Fischer. The NFYC is part of the Netherlands Vocal Talent Foundation that offers musically talented young people an opportunity for essential training in singing, aural skills, choral singing and general musicianship. The Foundation organizes the National Choirs: Netherlands Childrens Choir, Netherlands Boys Choir, Netherlands Mixed Youth Choir and Netherlands Female Youth Choir.

Patron is Sir Simon Rattle. Their conductor Wilma ten Wolde is recognized internationally as a well established expert on Youth Singing. Wilma ten Wolde has trained the National Choirs for more than 60 varying orchestral productions, under the direction of conductors including: Charles Dutoit, Iván Fischer, Bernard Haitink, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Philippe Herreweghe, Mariss Jansons, Vladimir Jurowsky, Sir Simon Rattle, Vladimir Jurowsky, Daniele Gatti and Markus Stenz.

www.vocaaltalent.nl

Markus Stenz

Markus Stenz is Principal Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor designate of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

His previous positions have included General Music Director of the City of Cologne and Gürzenich-Kapellmeister (posts he relinquished in the summer of 2014), Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (1998 – 2004), Principal Conductor of London Sinfonietta (1994 – 1998) and Artistic Director of the Montepulciano Festival (1989 – 1995).

In 2000 he took the Melbourne Symphony on their triumphant first European tour in 2000 including concerts in Munich, Cologne, Zurich and Salzburg and in

2008 visited China with the Gürzenich Orchestra and the same year conducted their first ever BBC Prom at the Royal Albert Hall. He returned to China in 2010 with Cologne Opera for two cycles of Wagner's "Ring" in Shanghai and Mozart's "Don Giovanni" in Beijing. He returned to China with the Gürzenich Orchestra in 2014.

He made his opera debut in 1988 at La Fenice in Venice in the first performance of Hans Werner Henze's revised version of "Elegy for Young Lovers". He has since conducted many world premieres including Henze's "Das Verratene Meer" at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, "Venus und Adonis" at the Bavarian State Opera and "L'Upupa" at the Salzburg Festival and Detlev Glanert's "Caligula" at the Frankfurt Opera and "Solaris" at the Bregenz Festival.

Markus Stenz has appeared at many of the world's major opera houses and international festivals including La Scala Milan, La Monnaie in Brussels, English National Opera, San Francisco Opera, Stuttgart Opera, Frankfurt Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera and Edinburgh International Festival.

His notable performances in Cologne have included Wagner's "Ring", Lohengrin "Tannhäuser" and "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg", as well as Janacek's "Jenufa" and "Katya Kabanova", Mozart's "Don Giovanni" and Eötvös' Love and other Demons".

Other of the world's leading orchestras which Markus Stenz conducts include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, the Symphony Orchestra of the Bayerische Rundfunk, Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig, Berlin Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, Vienna Symphony and the Symphony Orchestras of the Hessische Rundfunk, WDR and NDR.

In the United States these have included the Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, St Louis and Seattle Symphony Orchestras, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Minnesota Orchestra.

Future engagements, apart from his regular concerts with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, include concerts with Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Helsinki Philharmonic, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Seoul Philharmonic, Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra at the 2014 BBC Proms. He will continue a regular relationship with the Hallé.

His extensive discography, which was recently enlarged by the addition of the Dutch première of K. A. Hartmann's "Simplicius Simplicissimus" (Challenge Classics), includes many award-winning productions. His recording of the complete symphonies of Gustav Mahler with the Gürzenich Orchestra (Oehms Classics), for instance, was given an enthusiastic international reception, and was selected among the "Quarterly Critic's Choice" issued by the German Record

Critics' Award Association with the recording of Mahler's 5th. And the production of Richard Strauss's tone poems "Till Eulenspiegel" and "Don Quixote" with Lawrence Power (viola) and Alban Gerhardt (violoncello) on Hyperion Records was chosen by the BBC Music Magazine in 2013 as its "Disc of the Month".

Markus Stenz studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Cologne under Volker Wangerheim and at Tanglewood with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa.

Markus Stenz has been awarded Honorary Fellowship of the Royal Northern College of Music.

www.markusstenz.com

This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



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Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic

James MacMillan | Linus Roth

Julius Berger | Lars Wouters van den Oudeweijer

The composition is commissioned by NTR ZaterdagMatinee, Duke University,
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia and Soli Deo Gloria.



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