



JAMES MACMILLAN

Veni, Veni, Emmanuel
MacMillan series vol. 1

Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic

James MacMillan, Colin Currie,
Gordan Nikolic

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James MacMillan conductor

Colin Currie percussion

Gordan Nikolic violin

JAMES MACMILLAN (b.1959)

- [1] **A Deep but Dazzling Darkness** (2001-02)
For solo violin, ensemble and tape **23:49**
- [2] **Í** (A Meditation on Iona) (1996)
For strings & percussion **16:26**
- [3] **Veni, Veni, Emmanuel** (1992)
Concerto for percussion and orchestra **30:13**
- Introit – Advent
 - Heartbeats
 - Dance – Hocket
 - Transition: Sequence I
 - Gaude, Gaude
 - Transition: Sequence II
 - Dance – Chorale
 - Coda - Easter

total time 70:29

Light in Darkness:

Music by James MacMillan

The music of James MacMillan may often be heard and understood on more than one level. As well as following the purely musical argument, the listener is often also following in parallel explorations of social and theological issues.

This is very much the case with his remarkable percussion concerto *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, written for Evelyn Glennie in 1992.

Veni, Veni, Emmanuel

The work is cast in one movement, but subdivided into eight short sections, alternating in mood between expectancy and celebration, and its musical material is derived entirely from the 15th century French Advent hymn *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* ("O come, o come, Emmanuel"). The full melody in fact appears only near the work's conclusion, and the

work might therefore be seen as a gradual "revelation" of the message of Advent, the awaiting of the coming of Christ. Liturgical connections are further manifest in the title of the first section, "Introit", the presence of two "Sequences" (sections 4 and 6) and a "Chorale" (section 7).

Fragments of the melody, however, appear from the beginning of the piece, the dramatic, coruscating "Introit", which comes to rest on the minor third that begins the chant melody. This leads into the second section, entitled "Heartbeats", of which the composer has said "the heartbeats which permeate the whole piece offer a clue to the wider spiritual priorities behind the work, representing the human presence of Christ". That human presence, the beating of the heart, is portrayed by unpitched percussion including gongs, providing an exotic colouring

underpinning the scurrings of the wind section, while the strings and brass seem to emphasize the stuttering rhythms of the human heart awaiting the fulfilment of Advent. The music becomes more anguished, as though trying to take flight, and wings are indeed given to it by the succeeding section, "Dance – Hocket".

This is a real dance (a rare thing in contemporary concert music), but it is also constructed using the mediaeval technique of hocket, literally meaning "hiccough": the melody is distributed between two or more voices, in such a way that while one voice is sounding, the other is resting. Such a technique obviously relies greatly on the performers' ability to create the unity of the melodic line from their separate notes and rests, and MacMillan here extends it in virtuoso fashion to the whole orchestra. Indeed, the Dutch composer Louis Andriessen

had built an entire work from this technique in 1976 – the ensemble piece *Hocketus*. In MacMillan's hands the hocket takes on an unexpected elegance, and the dance element becomes predominant, building joyously on further material from the chant theme. A transition follows, subtitled "Sequence I", mysterious and apocalyptic in character.

Towards the end of this section, the marimba predominates, and this prepares the fifth section, "Gaude, gaude" (Rejoice, rejoice), an extraordinary meditation on the chant's beautiful refrain. Here MacMillan summons up all his mastery of the orchestra, surrounding the marimba with a sonic halo of pulsing brass and wind chords and string glissandi in music of a tremendous, quiet power. "Transition: Sequence II" follows. This is a dance of an altogether darker hue than "Transition I", with which it has material in

common, suggesting, perhaps, like the mediaeval carol *Tomorrow shall be my Dancing Day*, the connection between the Advent and Birth of Christ and the Crucifixion. It is here that the theme, “Veni, Veni, Emmanuel” first emerges in truly recognizable fashion, provoking a simultaneously exultant and furious outburst from both soloist and orchestra.

If this is Yeats’s “uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor”, it also leads, as it must, to the glory of the Resurrection. The following section is accordingly entitled “Coda - Easter”. Of this, the composer has written that, “the music takes a liturgical detour from Advent to Easter - right into the Gloria of the Easter Vigil in fact – as if the proclamation of liberation finds embodiment in the Risen Christ”: in reality, far from being a coda, this final section may be said in many ways to

be the heart of the work. The “Veni” theme gradually fades away, and while the soloist moves to the tubular bells, the orchestral musicians also forsake their instruments for bells or “pieces of loud, clanging metal”, thus symbolizing both the Birth and the Resurrection of Christ in an exultant peal, left resounding in the air as though pitch – speech – were hopelessly inadequate to come to terms with such cosmic events.

A Deep but Dazzling Darkness

A Deep but Dazzling Darkness (2001-02) for violin, ensemble and tape, is overall, though still a work of tremendous contrasts of mood, much darker than *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*. The title comes from a poem by Henry Vaughan, *The Night*:

“There is in God, some say,
A deep but dazzling darkness;
as men here

Say it is late and dusky,
because they
See not all clear.
O for that night! where I in him
Might live invisible and dim."

This paradoxical idea of darkness that can dazzle (which is nevertheless the opposite of Milton's infernal "darkness made visible") is at the heart of the piece: the composer says that it "experiments with contrasts in light and shade, celebration and foreboding". Foreboding is perhaps the perfect word to describe the opening of the work, dredging its dark soundworld from the lowest-pitched instruments of the orchestra – contrabass clarinet, tuba and double-bass. The entry of the solo violin is scarcely more reassuring; in fact, the bleak, acerbic quality of much of the solo writing suggests that of Shostakovich – one thinks of the "Nocturne" that opens the Russian

composer's Violin Concerto no. 1. As always with MacMillan, however, there is light at the end of the tunnel: he speaks of "the mysterious connections between compassion and music", and his discovery that the patron saint of music, before the adoption in the West of St Cecilia, was Job. This, linked to his parallel role as comforter, was what sparked the work in MacMillan's mind. Indeed, he notes that "aspects of the chamber groupings within the ensemble, such as in a series of trio interludes, are drawn from medieval woodcuts and paintings depicting Job comforted by musicians, and there are links to musical references in the book of Job: 'my heart is turned to mourning and my flute to the sound of wailing'".

The affliction of suffering, and, indeed, "the sound of wailing", is suggested through both the dark, mysterious vocal material recorded on the tape

and the recurrent employment in the piece of the French renaissance melody “L’homme armé”.

Í (A Meditation on Iona)

Í (*A Meditation on Iona*) was written in 1996 as a collaboration with the sculptress Sue Jane Taylor. It is, in spite of the word “meditation” in its title, far from a tranquil contemplation of landscape. The composer notes that it is “intended to give an impression of the island of Iona where St. Columba lived, and died in 597. It is a place of stark and desolate beauty, a focus of deep spiritual resonance and historical significance”. That spiritual resonance is paralleled in the dramatic contrasts of MacMillan’s music, structured cyclically in eight sections and making great use of the colouristic properties of the percussion, which here consists of tubular bells, steel pans and a large thundersheet with superball.

Iona became the home of St. Columba (521-597), one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland, a scholar and missionary to the Picts; and the connection with the Saint is explicitly intended by MacMillan. Certainly the music, which grows in slow waves from its slow, pulsing opening, gradually becoming more intricate and active, returning after a series of “journeys” – including a thunderstorm! – to the calm of the opening, a luminous calm nevertheless containing no harmonic resolution. As with the composer’s other musical and spiritual journeys, the end may very well contain a new beginning.

Ivan Moody

Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic

The Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic is a versatile orchestra that covers a broad and varied terrain. The orchestra performs in various formations, from Baroque to contemporary music ensemble. Michael Schönwandt is chief conductor and artistic director.

Its principal guest conductors are Philippe Herreweghe, Frans Brüggen and James MacMillan. Former chief conductor Jaap van Zweden was appointed conductor emeritus in May 2011. Radical cutback in expenditure of the Dutch Public Broadcasting Service results in the dissolution of the orchestra in August 2013.

The Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic makes an important contribution to the ZaterdagMatinee, Zondagochtend Concerten and Robeco Summer concert series in the

Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Utrecht's Vredenburg Friday series and the NTR concerts in the Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ. All of these concerts are broadcast via Radio 4 and many are recorded for live Internet streaming and TV broadcasts. The Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic is a frequent guest in 'De Magische Muziekfabriek' educational series, the International Gaudeamus Music Week and the Holland Festival.

The Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic is renowned for its impassioned performances of contemporary music. At the internationally respected Donaueschingen Festival for new music, the orchestra performed no less than four world premieres in a single concert conducted by Peter Eötvös in October 2010. One month later its concert performance of Pascal Dusapin's opera *Faustus, the Last Night* (a Dutch première) received rave reviews.

The Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic is also known for its performances of familiar and lesser known works of the old masters conducted by specialists in historical informed performance practice. In recent years the Radio Chamber Philharmonic worked with conductors like Harry Christophers, Andrew Manze, Masaaki Suzuki, Kenneth Montgomery and John Nelson and of course its principal guest conductors Frans Brüggen and Philippe Herreweghe.

The versatility of the orchestra is demonstrated in its wide array of recordings, ranging from Beethoven, Haydn and Stravinsky to Henk Badings, Tristan Keuris, Otto Ketting, Richard Rijnvos and James MacMillan.

The Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic was awarded the Muziekgebouw Prize in August 2008

for its performance of Richard Rijnvos' *NYConcerto* with John Snijders.
www.radiokamerfilharmonie.nl

James MacMillan

James MacMillan was appointed permanent guest conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic in September 2010. He succeeded Peter Eötvös, who held the post of chief conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra from 1994 to 2005 and went on to serve as permanent guest conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic. Like his predecessor, MacMillan brings together all the qualities of an internationally renowned conductor and composer. MacMillan is also one of the most frequently performed composers today. Over the last few years, the ensembles of the Broadcasting Music Center have performed and recorded various works by him under his ba-

ton. Recordings of *Visitatio sepulchri* and *Sun-Dogs* have won unanimous acclaim in the music press. Regular releases of new recordings are scheduled for the coming years; these include the percussion concerto *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* and *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*. With the latter work, MacMillan acquired an international reputation in 1990. Ever since, his music has been performed by many of the world's leading orchestras, conductors and soloists, including the New York Philharmonic under Leonard Slatkin, the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis, the Detroit Symphony under the direction of Neeme Järvi and the Los Angeles Philharmonic led by Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Born in 1959, MacMillan studied piano and trumpet, and began composing as a teenager. He studied music at the University of Edinburgh and composi-

tion at the University of Durham. He went on to teach at the University of Manchester for some time. Following the successful premiere of *Tryst* in 1990, he was appointed composer of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Between 1992 and 2002, MacMillan served as artistic director of the Philharmonia Orchestra's Music of Today series. He is active as a conductor all over the world. From the 2000–1 season up until his appointment with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic, MacMillan worked as both a composer and a conductor with the BBC Philharmonic in Manchester. He was made a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) in 2004.

Gordan Nikolic, violin

Gordan Nikolic was born in 1968 and began playing violin at the age of seven. In 1985, he entered the Musikhochschule Basel to study with violinist/conductor Jean-Jacques

Kantorow. Four years later, he graduated with the highest honours, as both teacher and soloist. He also worked with Lutoslawsky and Kurtág and developed an interest in both Baroque and contemporary music. He is the recipient of several international awards, which include the Tibor Varga, Niccolò Paganini, Città di Brescia and Vaclav Huml prizes. In 1989, he was appointed Leader of the Orchestre d'Auvergne, which he conducted regularly from his leader's chair: for instance, during a tour of Germany in 1993. In 1996, he was appointed Leader of the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra, and later he also became Leader of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. In 1997, he was invited to become Leader of the London Symphony Orchestra. Since 2004, he has been Artistic Director of the Nederlands Kamerorkest (= Netherlands Chamber Orchestra) in Amsterdam.

Since September 2003, he has also been a professor at the Guildhall School of Music. In the Netherlands, Nikolic also teaches at the Rotterdam Academy for Classical Music. He has conducted the Chamber Orchestra of the London Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre National d'Île-de-France, the Manchester Camerata, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Orchestre de Lille, among others.

Gordan Nikolic is regularly invited to perform at various festivals. These include the Edinburgh Festival, Daytona Music Festival, Chaise-Dieu Festival and the London Proms. He has performed as a soloist with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Orchestre Symphonique de Bâle, the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam, the Israel Chamber Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra under Colin Davis, Daniel Harding

and Bernard Haitink. In March 2003 he gave the première of James MacMillan's Violin Concerto, *A Deep but Dazzling Darkness*, under the baton of the composer with the London Symphony Orchestra. Gordan Nikolic has made many recordings for various labels, exploring the lesser-known violin repertoire. One of his recordings, dedicated to Vivaldi, was nominated "Recording of the Month" in Holland. Gordan Nikolic plays a Lorenzo Storioni violin dating from 1794.

Colin Currie, percussion

The soloist of choice for composers from Reich to Rautavaara, Colin Currie has been the driving force behind new percussion repertoire for more than a decade. Colin Currie is soloist with many of the world's leading orchestras, such as the Concertgebouw Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles

Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra and London Philharmonic.

Currie's "athletic percussionism, compulsive showmanship and deep musicality" (*The Guardian*) has inspired composers from around the globe, and forthcoming commissions include new works written for Currie by Steve Reich, James MacMillan and Louis Andriessen. He was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artist Award in 2000 for his inspirational role in contemporary music-making. Recent projects include premieres by composers such as Simon Holt, Kurt Schwertsik, Einjuhani Rautavaara, Jennifer Higdon, Alexander Goehr, and Elliott Carter.

Colin Currie is Artist in Residence at London's Southbank Centre from the 2011/12 season onwards. The residency also involves several major commission projects in future

seasons including the world premiere of Kalevi Aho's *Percussion Concerto*. Other world premiere performances of this season include with the New York Philharmonic in Elliott Carter's double concerto, the Los Angeles Philharmonic in a new work by Joseph Pereira, Sally Beamish's percussion concerto *Dance Variations* with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra, and Askill Masson's Percussion Concerto with the Turku Philharmonic.

Recent concerto highlights include HK Gruber's *Rough Music* in Tallinn, Higdon's Percussion Concerto conducted by Marin Alsop, marimba concerti by Schwertsik and Hartl with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra, and performances of Rautavaara's percussion concerto *Incantations*. Elsewhere, Currie returns to the Utah Symphony with Thierry Fischer and makes his debut in Madrid with the RTVÉ Symphony Orchestra. Currie returned to the

2012 Grand Teton Festival to perform MacMillan's *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, conducted by James Gaffigan.

Currie's dynamic percussion ensemble The Colin Currie Group continues to receive critical acclaim for its performances of Steve Reich's iconic work *Drumming*. Other recital projects include a new duo recital with trumpeter Hakan Hardenberger, and new commissions by Lucas Ligeti, Christian Muthspiel and Tobias Broström. Currie's recording of Rautavaara's *Incantations* with the Helsinki Philharmonic under John Storgårds is released in Spring 2012. Previous CD releases include Jennifer Higdon's Percussion Concerto (2010 Grammy Award), and Currie's recital disc *Borrowed Time*, which features music by British composer Dave Maric.

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