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Spirituality and Scottish Identity in Selected Works of James MacMillan

Bethany Lynn Alvey
University of Miami, bethanylynnalvey@gmail.com

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SPIRITUALITY AND SCOTTISH IDENTITY IN SELECTED WORKS OF JAMES MACMILLAN

By

Bethany Lynn Alvey

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
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SPIRITUALITY AND SCOTTISH IDENTITY IN SELECTED WORKS OF JAMES MACMILLAN

Bethany Lynn Alvey

Approved:

Karen Kennedy, D.M.A.
Associate Professor and Program Director,
Choral Studies

Corin T. Overland, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Professional Practice,
Frost School of Music

Coreen Sylvia Duffy, D.M.A.
Lecturer, Dept. of Vocal Performance

Guillermo Prado, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Juraj Kojs, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Professional Practice,
Dept. of Theory and Composition
Sir James MacMillan’s choral works have been studied through the lens of, and labelled by, three extra-musical themes: Catholicism, Scottish identity, and social consciousness. This study investigates the veracity of these labels from the perspective of the composer, and their application to choral music. Interviews with the composer were conducted in Glasgow, Scotland. Two choral works were studied, the large choral-orchestral work, *St John Passion*, and the short *a cappella* piece, “The Gallant Weaver.”

Texts and translations, as well as full transcripts of the interviews are included in the appendix.
To Jason
For not letting me do this alone
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The Gallant Weaver by James MacMillan
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been impacted by postmodern values of multiple truths, paradoxes, cultural relevancy, and challenges to the barrier between what is refined and what is common. There are as many styles, genres, and languages as there are individual musicians. Composer Sir James MacMillan exemplifies some of these postmodern values in his music, and confounds others. The composite of his personal priorities, values, and intentions make up a fascinating portrait of a complex individual.

There are three themes generally accepted by the academic community that form a baseline for influencing and identifying MacMillan’s works: Catholic spirituality, Scottish identity, and social consciousness. In part these have been working assumptions, based largely on his orchestral output composed before the year 2000. Without easy access to the composer or much in the way of scholarly text to analyze, further academic studies of identity and purpose in his work stagnated, even as a crucial change began. At the turn of the century and ever since, MacMillan has greatly increased his output of choral compositions, ripe for analysis and inference. Simultaneously, the advance of communication technology and social media platforms has granted the public unprecedented access to the composer himself. Despite this fortuitous combination, for over a decade scholarship has remained content with the old assumptions, and left the task of updating catalogues and analysis gathering dust. The author has picked up where old definitions left off in these three themes, and updated the conception of Sir MacMillan’s works through interview and analysis.
Statement of the problem

The ability to see clearly the portrait of such a composer is vital to a conductor, and the selection of repertoire and score study that follows are of utmost importance. Conductor Ann Howard Jones writes that this portion of the process is a conductor’s primary task. “It’s what we do as conductors; it’s where the composer and the performer search for one another; it’s where our energy, creativity, skill, imagination, knowledge of the score, and understanding of the instrument (the chorus) all come fully into play.”¹ She echoes the sentiments of Robert Shaw, who frequently wrote to his choristers about the necessity of a deep understanding of the composer and the music.

Shaw referred to a few assumptions that are made by the conductor and choir during this process.

The first [supposition] is that musical ensemble is not primarily the product of ‘following the conductor.’ Rather, it is the product of both of them [ensemble and conductor] following the composer...It is not the conductor’s prerogative to establish a willful or whimsical musical dictatorship, but rather by solid education to arrive at a satisfying and productive relationship to the composer through his printed page.²

He later added, “Our underlying supposition – our ‘faith’ – is that the great composer is also the great illuminator and communicator. – Therefore, if we wish to have our lives ‘touched’ and ‘illumined’ by his understanding, we need first to satisfy his technical prescriptions.”³ For the illuminating and communicating, Shaw identified text, harmony and rhythm as being three cornerstones to unpacking a composer’s meaning from the score. He wrote, “a text selected by a composer is both his inspiration and a part of his

³ Blocker, 52.
‘message.’ He seeks to enhance – to heighten, deepen, or dramatize – its meaning by musical means.”⁴ and “Musical analysis, then, is the attempt to comprehend the composer’s musical language tonally and temporally…What we must not forget is that the creator (in our instance, the composer) went through years of the stiffest sort of mental disciplines to arrive at ‘his’ or ‘her’ language.”⁵

Score study cannot, then, begin and end only with what is on the page of the score, but must also include as deep an understanding of the composer as possible. Michael Kemp, in The Choral Challenge, references how thorough knowledge of the composer and the context from which a piece of music was created can enliven the rehearsal process. He advises the conductor: “Research information on the composer, the author of the text, the time and place where the composition was written, what life was like when the composition was first performed—anything that might add some intrigue to peak the curiosity of the singers.”⁶

In 2010, Allan Kozinn wrote an article to discuss the debate of authenticity and composer intentions in early music in The New York Times.⁷ He gave a short history of the discussion, summarizing the attempt by performers and musicologists to return to authentic performances: “It was a lovely goal, but it was unachievable.”⁸ Kozinn then cited the 1990 New York Times article by Taruskin that unbound the rigidness of the early music

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⁴ Blocker, 115.
⁵ Ibid., 57-58.
⁸ Ibid.
performers and musicologists. “The Spin Doctors of Early Music,” drew attention to the impossibility of authentic performances and dismissed the word entirely. Instead, the concept of historically informed performance was introduced.9

The conversation of composer’s intent has been going on for centuries now. Edgar Jacques, in 1891, described intention as “that act of the mind by which we contemplate and design the accomplishment of some end.”10 This idea of intention manifested in two different ways, according to Jacques: “first, that musical effect which the composer had in his mind whilst writing or before writing, and which he wishes his music to produce when performed; second, that feeling or idea (when it exists) which was the cause of the music; and some part at least of which it may be supposed the music will convey to suitably practiced listeners, if properly performed.”11

Over a century earlier, Johann Mattheson wrote “someone who has never discovered what the writer of a piece himself might dearly want will scarcely be able to represent it well; instead he will often deprive the thing of its true vigour and charm, to such an extent that the author, should he himself be among the listeners, would probably hardly recognize his own work (Mattheson, 1739)”12 Johann Adolf Scheibe similarly argued “…how can a piece of music have the effect its author has sought to achieve if it is

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9 Kozinn.


11 Jacques, 41-42.

not also set up and performed in accordance with the wishes of the same and in conformity with his intentions? (J. A. Sheibe, 1740)”

Jacques succinctly addressed the two sides of the composer’s intent debate through two quotations. The first was spoken by pianist Rubinstein to a pupil: “‘Do I want your rendering of Bach, Tausig’s of Chopin, or Mr. Bülow’s of Beethoven? Not a bit of it. I want Bach, I want Beethoven, I want Chopin as they give themselves to us. They are good enough for me; for my pupils they must be good enough too.’” The second was by Rev. P. T. Forsyth, who wrote “We shall never get the true taste for art afloat till we can set people free from the paralyzing fear of going a jot beyond the direct and immediate consciousness of the artist at his work.”

The tension lies in an estimation of value – historical authenticity, or aesthetic veracity?

Randall Dipert offered a perspective which he termed low, middle, and high level intentions. The low level consists of the markings on the page of music, the middle level referring to the sound and general aesthetic. The high level entails

“The effects that the composer intends to produce in the listener. These effects can range from the perception of both tonal and formal relationships, to the particular emotional response he wishes to evoke…If we obtain reasons for following a composer’s intentions, we should follow first and primarily his high-level intentions. To do otherwise is to follow the letter and not the spirit of his intentions.”

Dipert then addresses the impossibility of following all levels of any composer’s intentions, and offers an example. Gluck’s high intention of shocking his listener with the

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13 Parrott, p. 37.
14 Jacques, 43.
sound of the clarinet may have worked when the instrument was new to the orchestral world of his generation, but it will not have the same effect today. A performer could choose to honor his low or mid-level intentions by keeping the clarinet as written. Alternatively, a composer could make the bold choice of having the clarinet solo be played on a digital instrument, thereby adhering to the high level intention of Gluck’s work, but deliberately defying the low and mid-level intentions.16

But the question of what to do with the music of living composers from this generation, who can make their desires known, still remains. Dipert’s arguments against strict adherence to composer’s intent are qualified by the statement: “the situation is quite different with regard to living, or recently deceased composers. For by failing to perform a piece the way a composer intended can well detract from his reputation and even adversely affect his income and happiness (or those of his heirs).”17 And yet, Kozinn points out that “some of the available evidence suggests that composers do not think in terms of definitive performances,” and that “Music is as much a performer’s art as a composer’s.”18 When Kozinn spoke with composer Philip Glass, he remarked that “Composers can be surprisingly cavalier about how their works are presented, even when they are at the helm.”19 Glass’ response to that claim was surprisingly nonchalant.

I have that problem with conductors sometimes…Sometimes I want to cut something, and they don’t want me to. But I’m not a purist, as you may have noticed. I suppose when I’m no longer around to not defend my work, other people will defend it for me, way beyond what I would probably have done myself.20

17 Ibid., 213.
18 Kozinn.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
This seems at first to fly in the face of Shaw’s recommendation to fully understand and pass on what the composer intended to communicate. What, then, is a performer to do with so many contradictory statements and arguments?

A closer look at these two sentiments however, demonstrates that the shared goal, always, is to reveal the music created by the composer. Shaw and Kozinn each described their perspective on this process. Shaw’s statement, “It is not the conductor’s prerogative to establish a willful or whimsical musical dictatorship, but rather by solid education to arrive at a satisfying and productive relationship to the composer through his printed page,”21 is a healthy foil to Kozinn’s “Music is as much a performer’s art as a composer’s.” Dipert might say that the performer should prioritize the high level intentions, but informing them with the low and middle level. The conductor must enter deeply into research, and understand the composer’s identity and ethos, and make performance decisions accordingly.

**Justification**

To that end, this study exists to examine choral works of one composer in the light of his own words, perspectives, and intentions with regard to his choral music. Research on Sir James MacMillan exists, but there is a conspicuous gap in the research. Most of the available research discusses his instrumental works, but there are a vast number of published choral works that are virtually untouched in scholarly research, and the number of choral works published by MacMillan is still growing. “There’s more of it now than ever before. I’ve settled into a groove of writing quite a lot of choral music. It does come

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very naturally to me, very fluidly and fluently so people have caught on to this and they ask me for...little pieces, you know pieces between three minutes, five minutes, seven minutes, and I like doing that.”

Additionally, the scholarly research on Sir James MacMillan accepts the three extra-musical themes postulated by early authors, Catholic spirituality, Scottish identity, and social consciousness. Without confirmation by the composer himself these are just conjecture, and without reexamination these themes may unknowingly be outdated. With the steady increase of his choral output, his recent knighthood, and last year’s premiere of his *Fourth Symphony*, the time is ripe to reexamine the previously postulated themes in the choral works of Sir James MacMillan.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to describe the use of extra-musical themes in Sir James MacMillan’s choral works. A secondary purpose is to determine to what extent these themes align with the intention of the composer. This study will include insight from the composer himself into the works analyzed. There are two questions that focus this study.

1. Are the three themes of spirituality, Scottish identity, and social consciousness discussed in previous research on Sir James MacMillan acknowledged and affirmed by the composer?

2. Do these three themes apply to his choral works?


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22 MacMillan, interview with the author, Glasgow, Friday, July 17, 2015.
works, and ceases analysis at the year 1993.\textsuperscript{23} A list of compositions until 2002 is contained in an appendix, but no information beyond basic forces is given. Kingsbury’s choice of examining works from 1983-1993 is based on the hypothesis “that these eight works illustrate a gradual change in aesthetic philosophy and compositional priorities that is integrally tied to the emergence of MacMillan’s mature style.”\textsuperscript{24} This change in aesthetic philosophy and compositional priorities moves Sir MacMillan’s music from modernistic techniques of the avant-garde in the early eighties to a style that Kingsbury says, “if not populist, at least open to communicating deeply held religious and political views.” \textsuperscript{25}

These deeply-held religious and political views have consistently been referred to not only in Kingsbury’s dissertation, but other scholarly works as well. The top three themes that continually return when researching Sir MacMillan’s extra-musical inspiration are his Catholicism, his Scottish identity, and ideals of social consciousness. The idea that music and the larger community are inextricable from one another seems to have been with him since childhood. His teacher, Bert Richardson, called him a “remarkable catalyst,” continually bringing non-musicians into musical activities. \textsuperscript{26}

The role of a composer in Sir MacMillan’s eyes, according to previous research, is that of an artist who explores interests and issues larger than his or her own thoughts and ideas.\textsuperscript{27} He tries not to alienate the listener by forcing his own religious views, but if music


\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 16.


is to be convincing, Sir MacMillan believes it must first have meaning to him as the composer.

There is definitely a connection between the extra-musical stimulus and the musical outcome, but there has to be some element of (to use a theological analogy) transubstantiation of the extra musical, so the idea communicates itself full as music. So for the people who initially do not want to engage with the theology, they should not need to. But to ignore where it’s come from is to ignore something of the substance and essence of the music. That’s where a composer like myself requires some open-mindedness from people who do not share my world view. There is never any attempt on my part to proselytize, to use my music simply as a vehicle for an idea. Nevertheless it has come from something pre-musical and wouldn’t be the way it is if it weren’t for its pre-musical genesis.28

He said that, “I also feel it is perverse to maintain that contemporary music should have no connection with the world around us, that the concern to achieve integrity in the abstract in somehow an activity which exists in blissful amoral isolation.”29 Author Timothy Rolls summarized Sir MacMillan’s style through his political and religious beliefs. First, from the earliest years of being involved with Young Communists, Sir MacMillan believed music should be available to the masses. Secondly, his Catholicism gave him a point of view in his works, but sectarianism he experienced helped him to take an open-minded view of other cultures. Thirdly, Sir MacMillan made a conscious decision to not let either of these extra-musical influences overshadow the subject matter of each work, but to make his music accessible to the widest audience possible, resulting in a turn from academic modernism to more accessible sound, influenced by the folk music of his own country.30

28 Rolls, 7.
29 Kingsbury, 14.
30 Rolls, 81-82.
Study works and interviews

The first avenue of research in this study is through three interviews with the composer. This should provide insight into Sir James MacMillan as a composer of choral works through his own words and commentary. The full transcript of each interview is included in the Appendix of this document. The second is through an analysis of works representative of Sir MacMillan’s choral music in order to investigate the presence of the themes of Catholic spirituality, Scottish identity and social consciousness. The inclusion of analyses of representative works will help provide insight into score study of Sir MacMillan’s works.

From the composer’s words: On social consciousness

In the course of interviewing the composer, Sir MacMillan reflected on the three themes as presented by other authors. While acknowledging his inherent Scottish identity and endorsing the investigation of Catholic spirituality in his works, he found the theme of social consciousness to be “unremarkable.”

I think the [theme of social consciousness] is superfluous, to be honest...they think they have to explain the music...in a less abstract way for a general audience. There are a couple of pieces that you could say relate to some kind of social awareness, in a contemporary sense, but I’m just the same as anybody else. I don’t think that’s very noteworthy. One can be affected by events and processes in one’s own time and one can respond to it or not in music. I haven’t done it too often, but I like to think like most people I have a heart, and that can be a motivating factor in making music too, sometimes. But the issue is, and I think we touched on it the other day, music is the most abstract of the arts. It’s the one thing that doesn’t need all these other things when it comes down to it.

If an artist didn’t have a social conscience there might be some problem, but it doesn’t necessarily need to feed into the music all the time, or indeed the art. It can sometimes. With music it’s more difficult because as we said.

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31 MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015
32 MacMillan, interview, July 20, 2015
yesterday, it’s an abstract form, essentially. Except you know when music and text combine, you can you can reach a wider group of people and touch on some subjects that are not necessarily abstract, such as politics and so on. Some of my other early music did use political texts or quasi-political texts, or texts that signified some contemporary residence. There’s a piece called Cantos Sagrados, a choral piece, which sets, amongst others, poems by Ariel Dorfman the Argentine poet – quite political, his works writing about The Disappeared and so on. There’s another piece called Búsqueda, which is the Spanish word for search, which is settings of poems by the mothers of the Disappeared, again from Argentina. And a piece called The Exorcism of Rio Sumpúl, which is just an orchestral piece, or an instrumental piece, and that’s where it starts getting trickier. How do you address political matters in pure sound? It is a kind of tone poem based on an event, in Guatemala I think it was or El Salvador, where there was a helicopter attack. There are elements of that that are quite easy to turn into music in a sense, you know the violins, and the helicopters and the sense of redemption that came from as well in the end. But that’s part of the joy of being a composer sometimes, to see or to wonder out loud sometimes in one’s own work how you actually do relate to the world round about you. For artists involved in the other arts it might be a bit more straightforward. If they’re dealing with text, dealing with image, they can, in fact, immediately address the world about them but for a musician you know there’s a few more steps still to be done before you can come to the conclusion that it’s valuable or possible. I’ve certainly had to live with that, and realize that sometimes it works, sometimes it can never work.33

Sir MacMillan, then, does acknowledge a few of his early compositions that were inspired by political or social awareness, and earlier interviews indicate his inclination for social commentary. Over time, however, the themes of Scottish identity and especially Catholic spirituality are far more dominant both in his subconscious and conscious compositional activity. Therefore, the study works investigated will focus on these two themes alone, and the theme of social consciousness will be laid aside.

Introduction to study works and method of analysis

The study works included in this document are The Gallant Weaver (1997) and St John Passion (2007). Several dissertations and studies have provided models for

33 MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015
compositional analysis. The primary model is described by Don Campbell, which was inspired by Karin Shovic.³⁴ In this method of analysis, the eight categories for narrative analysis are text, form/structure, use of traditional or historical elements, harmonic/tonal foundation, melody, rhythm and meter, use of drama or expressive elements, and performance practice suggestions. After having spoken at length with the composer, the element of texture was added to be discussed as well. These nine criteria will be examined in each of the study works.

These pieces were selected based on the following criteria: they were written after 1993, were written for an ensemble of mixed voices, and are in English (with a few exceptional statements in the Passion, which are in Latin). Beyond those similarities, they have the potential to represent the themes through which the researcher will be examining Sir MacMillan’s style: his Catholicism and Scottish identity.

Applications of the study

This study is designed to be both an update and an expansion of existing scholarly knowledge of Sir James Macmillan. The practical application for the choral conductor lies in the analysis of selected pieces, with the aim of drawing attention to techniques and moments in the score that resonate with Sir MacMillan’s own words. The study will also help to provide context for those entering into the score study process. Interviews with the composer will provide insight into his vision for choral performances, which will help conductors arrive at the “satisfying and productive relationship to the composer,” intended

by Robert Shaw.\textsuperscript{35} It is the hope of this researcher to weave together the interviews, previous research, and scores into a composite picture of a complex individual who composes choral music in order to more fully grasp the nature of his compositions.

**Limitations and challenges of the study**

This study does have limitations and challenges. The limitations of the study are that the research necessitates focusing in on an individual’s experience and perspective, a narrow view to take. Another limitation of this research is that it is by nature limited to the years the participant has lived, and does not include future years’ work or experiences. The scope of this study does not include an extensive investigation of all his choral works, let alone his entire output.

**Narrative research procedures**

While this study is not strictly a full narrative study, it does contain elements of narrative research. Creswell identifies eight common characteristics of qualitative research, citing LeCompte and Schensul (1999), Hatch (2002), and Marshall and Rossman (2010).

These eight characteristics are:

1. Conducted in a natural setting
2. Relies on the researcher as a key instrument in data collection
3. Involves using multiple methods
4. Involves complex reasoning, both inductive and deductive
5. Focuses on the participants’ perspectives and multiple subject views
6. Involves an emergent design, rather than a tightly prefigured design
7. Is reflexive and interpretive
8. Presents a holistic, complex picture\textsuperscript{36}

Narrative research is both a product and a method – it is a study of stories or events that account for human experiences. Narrative study is an ideal qualitative approach to take


if access to the composer can be made. It allows for the composer to provide as much personal insight into a specific piece, their general style, or their broader worldview. The purposeful sampling of qualitative research is accomplished in narrative research by choosing a participant. The limitation of narrative research is that is necessitates focusing in on one individual’s experience and perspectives.

**Interviewing process**

This study required live interviews with the composer. This researcher has gone through CITI certification, and has presented the protocol to the Internal Review Board through the University of Miami. After approval from the IRB, interviews with James MacMillan were scheduled, and formal consent through IRB’s forms were obtained prior to the interview. The semi-structured interviews took place at Sir MacMillan’s home in Glasgow, Scotland.

The interviews were recorded on video with an audio backup. After a full transcription was made from the audio, it was then edited, clearing the original of superfluous language, such as repeated words and fillers (um, ah, and the like). The transcription was sent to Sir MacMillan to give him opportunity to revise or correct any statements he feels were misrepresented.

**Touching up the portrait**

Scholarly research on any subject is never fully complete, and the opportunity to elicit understanding and meaning from living artists is a privilege. The understanding we pass on will be incomplete if we do not take the opportunity to question, and question again; to give living artists the opportunity to voice their meaning, even if their meaning is “find your own meaning,” or even, “there is no meaning.” This author has chosen to add
more shades to the existing portrait of one composer, Sir James MacMillan. It is in the contrasts and paradoxes that the fuller picture of who he is may be seen. Through a deeper understanding of one composer, we may discover a deeper understanding of his music, and possibly ourselves.
Chapter 2: Sir James MacMillan

Ayrshire lies on the southwest coast of Scotland, along the Firth of Clyde. The region is steeped in Scottish history and legend. The rolling green hills and mottled coastline of sand and rock were the scenery behind the stories of William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, and Robert Burns. More than forty castles dot the landscape, and the four islands Arran, Cumbrae, Ailsa and the Holy Isle look back on the coast from their place in the Firth of Clyde.

James MacMillan was born in Kilwinning, North Ayrshire, on July 16, 1959 to James and Ellen MacMillan. 37 His father was a carpenter in the nearby mines, and his mother was a teacher first, and later a social worker. 38 Both of his parents were amateur musicians, but MacMillan remembers that “the principal inspiration in my family was my maternal grandfather, who was a miner. In his younger days, he played the euphonium in the colliery band.” 39 Ellen MacMillan played piano, but never pushed the young James to be a musician. 40 At age nine, he began studying piano and trumpet, and from that point knew he wanted to be a musician. 41

The MacMillan family moved southeast to Cumnock, East Ayrshire in 1963. 42 MacMillan said, “it was a very important place for me growing up, lots of music

38 Telford, 41.
40 Telford, 41.
41 Ibid., 41.
42 Ibid.
happening…a tiny little place…only about ten thousand in the town.”  

In Cumnock, he attended St. John’s Roman Catholic Primary School, where he was taught by the nuns of the Sacred Heart. From this part of his life, MacMillan remembers that there was “always a new hymn, chant or antiphon to prepare for some mass or other, liturgies coming hard and fast.” He also served as an altar boy. Spirituality and creativity were wedded together for MacMillan early on through these experiences.

MacMillan’s early influences from western art music included Beethoven and Wagner. Beethoven’s *Fidelio* made an impression on him at age ten; he was caught not only by the music, but by the social message as well. He also developed an interest in Wagner’s operas during this time. MacMillan lived in a community that was growing musically, and it helped to form his perception of the social function of music.

Juxtaposed with this sense of inclusion in a growing musical community was the experience MacMillan had as a Catholic in a Protestant culture. James Telford noted that being a part of “a Catholic minority in a culture with a strong undercurrent of sectarian prejudice can be seen as having a profound effect on his musical and literary output.”

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43 James MacMillan, interview, July 17, 2015

44 Telford, 41.

45 Ibid.

46 Kingsbury, 1.

47 Telford, 41.

48 Ibid.

49 Telford, 41-42.

50 Telford, 42.
This later surfaced publically in his life, but MacMillan consistently identifies with minorities and the oppressed, and always portrays violence negatively.\textsuperscript{51}

In 1973 MacMillan moved schools to Cumnock Academy, where he spent the last four years of secondary school. There he met head of music, Bert Richardson.\textsuperscript{52} MacMillan reflected on his former teacher, saying, “looking back it must have seemed a small country school, but he loved choral music and he himself introduced a lot of the important repertoire to me and to my colleagues and friends at the school.”\textsuperscript{53}

He was an inspirational music teacher and got me very interested in choral music. He was an Ayrshire man and about ten years older than me, so in his late twenties then. Because of his youth and infectious enthusiasm, he got the most unlikely characters involved in singing.\textsuperscript{54}

From Bert Richardson’s choir, MacMillan was introduced to composers such as Palestrina, Lassus, Byrd, Bach, and Telemann.\textsuperscript{55} He specifically remembers Bach’s \textit{Magnificat} being introduced to him at this time, as well as Bach’s passions and some of his cantatas.\textsuperscript{56}

Bach’s counterpoint, whether it be choral, or also the study of fugue was very important to me. And the earlier contrapuntalists like Palestrina who figures in much of the curriculum, and it’s how you learn your species counterpoint when you study Palestrina. But also for me it was people like Byrd who became a very important figure for me, for lots of other reasons. Gibbons. Probably through Byrd and Gibbons some of the earlier British contrapuntalists, Tallis, the Eaton Choirbook people, and people like the Scots, Robert Carver and so on, who were to come to mean a lot.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{51} Telford, 42.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} MacMillan, interview, July 17, 2015.
\textsuperscript{54} Buie.
\textsuperscript{55} Teldford, “Reconciling Opposing Forces” p 42.
\textsuperscript{56} MacMillan, interview, July 17, 2015
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
Sir MacMillan’s training grounded in the old masters, had significant impact on his compositional output. The choral masters influenced his choral writing today. Specific instances of that influence on the study works will be examined in later chapters.

During this time, he also joined the school brass band and travelled to play with the County Youth Orchestra in Ayr.\(^\text{58}\) It was in this season of his life that the young MacMillan began to think creatively about choral music: “I think it was very important for me, both, not just in a general musical sense, but switching my mind onto writing choral music.”\(^\text{59}\) At Cumnock Academy, he also began composing. “that motivation has always been there. It’s a kind of itch in my soul that needs to be activated, and it was there right from the first day I was given an instrument. I wanted to write and create music; didn’t know what that would mean though, when I was ten, didn’t know how it would impact, but certainly that desire to write music would be there.”\(^\text{60}\) His earliest choral work, \textit{Missa Brevis}, was written in 1977 but has since been published by Boosey & Hawkes in 2007.

I kind of forgot about and left in in a drawer, until I discovered it. I didn’t completely forget about it, but I came across it in recent years…I was seventeen when I wrote that, in fact the Sanctus was sung at school with a group of friends. I remember singing it and conducting it, and so when I hear that, the Sanctus in particular, it takes me back to studying with Bert Richardson… when I re-found it, like thirty years later, I was actually quite impressed with it, in the sense that I knew my way around the choir, in a simple way I suppose. Maybe there was something then, that was the seedbed of things to come.\(^\text{61}\)

The musical component of MacMillan’s life was not the only facet developing at

\(^{58}\) Buie.

\(^{59}\) MacMillan, interview, July 17, 2015

\(^{60}\) Ibid.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.
that time. Here he met his future wife, Lynne.\textsuperscript{62} He also began to seek deeper understanding of social and political ideals and activism. He joined the Young Communists League as a teenager, finding meaning in protesting against injustice.\textsuperscript{63} The conservatism of the Roman Catholic faith may seem at odds with some of the more socialist and progressive political tendencies MacMillan has displayed, but when examined more closely it is clear that each perspective informs and motivates the other.

It is at this juncture that paradoxes begin to appear, primarily when it comes to attempts at labeling. MacMillan is indifferent at best regarding the labels placed on him, responding cavalierly, “You just look at the list of seemingly quite contradictory terms, and you think ‘What’s all this about?’”\textsuperscript{64} He is not cavalier, however, about his actual beliefs. These political dispositions would later be displayed in works such as \textit{The Confession of Isobel Gowdie} (1990), \textit{Cantos Sagrados} (1989), and \textit{The Exorcism of Rio Sumpúl} (1989).\textsuperscript{65} In \textit{Búsqueda} (1988), authors have connected MacMillan to Liberation Theology. This philosophy interested the composer for a time, but in an interview with Rebecca Tavener in he confessed that “Liberation Theology has had its day and become an historical thing…it has reminded us of the central importance within the Gospel of taking the poor’s side, as it were, and that’s not a political statement, it’s in with the bricks

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[62] Telford, 42.
\item[65] Rolls, 2-3.
\end{footnotesize}
of the Gospel.” Even so, MacMillan said, “it was a very fertile time for me, looking back.”

After leaving secondary school, MacMillan enrolled at Edinburgh University from 1977-1981, where he studied with Rita McAllister. At Edinburgh he studied the works of Stravinsky, Webern, and Messiaen, as well as Russian composers Gubaydulina, Schnittke, and Ustvolskaya. MacMillan also began expanding his harmonic language. His harmonic world became greatly influenced by Britten and Leighton, the latter of whom MacMillan studied with at Edinburgh University. Leighton had great impact on MacMillan, and was originally introduced to MacMillan by Bert Richardson. MacMillan earned a Bachelor of Music in 1981.

From there, he continued his post-graduate studies in composition at Durham University under John Casken. Here he began to develop an interest in ethnomusicology, and specifically in gamelan. The Piper at the Gates of Dawn and Three Dawn Rituals, a reconstruction of The Piper for western instruments were both written under the inspiration of gamelan. At Durham University, MacMillan studied the works of Polish composers,

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66 James MacMillan, interview by Rebecca Tavener, liner notes to Tenebrae, Cappella Nova, conducted by Alan Tavener, Linn Records BKD301, 2014, CD.


68 Kingsbury, 1.

69 Telford, 43.

70 Ibid.

71 Rolls, 3.

72 Ibid.
specifically in regards to aleatory technique in works by Lutoslawski.\textsuperscript{73} His teacher, John Casken, had been a student of Lutoslawski himself.\textsuperscript{74}

Following his coursework, MacMillan returned to Ayrshire where he took up a post as a part-time teacher.\textsuperscript{75} In 1983 he married Lynne Frew.\textsuperscript{76} At this time, his interest in ethnomusicology extended to his own home, and he began exploring Scottish and Irish folk music.

\begin{quote}
[It] wasn’t anything that had any precedent in my earlier life. Scottish music wasn’t a part of the family background. I discovered it afresh, and it was like a brand new discovery for me, aged 22, 23, which is quite an incredible thing for any Scottish musician to make that discovery of one’s self at such a late stage.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Even as Sir MacMillan was investing time into Scottish music, his previous motivations of social consciousness did not take a backseat during this time. He became involved in the local miner’s strike in 1983.\textsuperscript{78} In 1986 he began a lecturing post at Manchester University. He earned his Ph.D in 1987, and that same year his music was performed at the festival \textit{Musica Nova} in Glasgow.\textsuperscript{79} Macmillan expanded his university teaching schedule with a part-time lecturing post at his alma mater Edinburgh University in 1988. During this year, he collaborated with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, in addition

\textsuperscript{73} Rolls, 4.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Rolls, 3.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} Kingsbury, 178.

\textsuperscript{78} Kingsbury, 2.

\textsuperscript{79} Rolls, 3-4.
to completing *After the Tryst*, a piece for violin and piano to follow the 1984 work, *The Tryst*, and *Búsqueda.* 80

The year 1989 began a period of intense creative activity, coinciding with a significant increase in popularity as a composer. He became the composer-in-residence for St. Magnus Festival in Orkney, became the Artistic Director for Edinburgh Contemporary Arts Trust, and completed the orchestral version of *Tryst, The Exorcism of Rio Sumpúl,* and *Cantos Sagrados.* The following year was no less significant. In 1990 he became an affiliate composer of Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and established a post-graduate composition class at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now Royal Conservatoire of Scotland). 81 While he was developing his academic career, his international breakthrough came with the July 1990 premiere of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* at the Proms in London featuring the BBC Scottish Symphony under the direction of Jerzy Maksymiuk. 82 One other event in 1990 brought significant change to Macmillan: he became a father to his first daughter, Catherine. 83

Macmillan continued his fast-paced composing and conducting schedule through 1991. He conducted *Isobel Gowdie* with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, and was appointed their visiting composer. 84 He was also the featured composer at the *Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.* He wrote *Tuireadh,* and began work on his first opera, *Inés de Castro,* based on a play by John Clifford. In 1992 MacMillan began a series of evening

80 Kingsbury, 2.
81 Rolls, 6, 8.
82 Rolls, 6.
83 Rolls, 3.
84 Rolls, 9.
concerts for the Philharmonia called *Music of Today* to feature and encourage interest in contemporary composers, especially Celtic, Nordic, and eastern European composers, and composers from behind the Iron Curtain.\(^{85}\) At this time he also wrote the percussion concerto *Veni, Veni Emmanuel* for Evelyn Glennie, which premiered at the BBC Proms on August 10, 1992.\(^{86}\)

The year 1993 brought significant changes to MacMillan’s life. He became a father again with the birth of his twins, Aiden and Clare.\(^{87}\) That same year he was a featured composer at the Edinburgh Festival in August with the premiere of the trumpet concerto, *Episclesis*, with trumpet soloist John Wallace.\(^{88}\)

Every day during the Festival, MacMillan drove between Glasgow and Edinburgh, trying to balance his extremely full personal and professional life. On the last day of the Festival, MacMillan crashed his car.\(^{89}\) Timothy Rolls suggested that this traumatic experience caused MacMillan to reflect on the direction in which he was moving, and what kind of composer he wanted to be. He reviewed his works to date, eliminating several works from the Boosey & Hawkes catalogue.\(^{90}\) Looking back now, though, Sir MacMillan’s take on the process is much more pragmatic:

> There’s not much that’s been removed, but basically I didn’t think they were competent for one reason or another. Or in the case of one piece that used an electric acoustic component, that simply the technology had moved on and had left the piece looking kind of jaded and aged. Having used computer

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\(^{85}\) Ibid.

\(^{86}\) Rolls, 9.

\(^{87}\) Rolls, 3

\(^{88}\) Rolls, 10

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.
technology in the nineteen eighties, and I wasn’t very good at it. So it’s withdrawn, but there were instrumental parts in it, so I might actually go back to it, to find maybe another way of doing it that doesn’t require technology.91

By the end of 1993, he completed his commission for Seven Last Words from the Cross. This particular piece has aged well, the number of performances growing slowly and steadily. “[It] was only gradually I began to realize that the piece was being performed a lot, mostly Easter time or during Holy Week, and in very different places…and it’s now quite a regular happening to have it performed [in the United States] and elsewhere.”92

More international performances of MacMillan’s works continued through the remainder of the decade. The United States premiere of Veni, Veni Emmanuel led to two additional commissions from Mstislav Rostropovich in 1994.93 Britannia saw over thirty performances in the United Kingdom, and Memento premiered in New York by the Kronos Quartet.94 In 1995, Veni, Veni Emmanuel tours worldwide across North America, Netherlands, France, Sweden, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Japan and Australia.95 This year also saw the completion of his opera, Inés de Castro, which premiered at the Edinburgh Festival in 1996.

The first two parts of Triduum, his Easter Triptych, were written and premiered in 1996, and the third part premiered a year later.96 Also in 1997 was the Raising Sparks

93 Rolls, 11
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Rolls, 12.
Festival, a retrospective tribute put on by the South Bank Centre in London, named for the song cycle written for Jean Rigby and Nash Ensemble.\textsuperscript{97} Other compositions from 1997 include the clarinet concerto Ninian, Í (A Meditation on Iona), and a piano trio, Fourteen Little Pieces.\textsuperscript{98} *Veni, Veni Emmanuel* hit a landmark of one hundred performances that year.

The turn of the millennium saw completions of several major works by MacMillan. *Why Is This Night Different?* and *Cantos Sagrados* were written in 1998, *Quickening* and *Symphony No. 2* were completed in 1999, followed by the premieres of *Mass* and *Magnificat* in 2000.\textsuperscript{99} The tone poem, *The Birds of Rhiannon* for orchestra and optional chorus was written in 2001, along with a *Te Deum*.\textsuperscript{100} His third symphony, *Silence*, was completed in 2002.

Scholarly research on James MacMillan’s life ends here.\textsuperscript{101} However, many sources from newspapers, magazines, and websites provide a more up-to-date biography. Online interviews are easily found, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter have allowed many composers, including Sir MacMillan, to communicate regularly with the public. The most notable recent event has been his award of knighthood in 2015.

[It] was a big surprise. Astonishing really, we didn’t expect it. But, I’m greatly honored. It’s a very, very happy thing to have happened, it doesn’t

\textsuperscript{97} Boosey & Hawkes, “James MacMillan Timeline”

\textsuperscript{98} Rolls, 15.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} Boosey & Hawkes, “James MacMillan Timeline”

\textsuperscript{101} With the exception of a newly published dissertation by Nathan Frank titled, “James Macmillan’s St John Passion: the Role of Celtic Folk Idioms and the Reproaches.” (2014) The dissertation was unavailable to the author at the time of this writing.
happen in music very often to be honest, in classical music. So with the goodwill I’ve had from fellow musicians and those involved in music, I realize that it does mean something and I feel it’s a recognition that classical music still matters to British culture.102

More relevant to choral musicians is Sir MacMillan’s perspective on the current shift in the balance of choral and instrumental works worldwide.

I happen to see number of things over the years as I’m getting on, and one is (it could be the basis of a talk I’m giving next month) the emergence, or re-emergence of of choral music, as an important, a very important part of contemporary music. When I was twenty-something, yes there were choirs, but the composers didn’t really seem to involve themselves as much with choirs as they did with instrumentalists. And it’s partly to do with the nature of modernism, that it’s all about the angular and a kind of sonic and the making something new out of some combinations, and I sense voices, you can’t really do that very much. So the real sort of avant garde searchers as it were, the ones who would want to reinvent the wheel with every piece of music would see choral music as something that wasn’t really for them. Now something’s changed, and a number of composers in the last few decades have come forward and have made choral music their specialty and their priority. It’s quite clear composers like Arvo Pärt, and Tavener love choirs, and it’s the same with me. In a sense I’ve been able to stop hiding my guilty secret. I love choirs so I’m delighted that choirs are being rediscovered by composers and there’s a whole range of composers I’ve been quite happy to follow that through, and both sides of the Atlantic. British and Americans particularly. The whole Mortin Lauridsen-Eric Whitacre phenomenon is very interesting. I don’t want to pass any judgment on that but there’s always something happening in the American choral world as well. In the UK there’s younger composers coming out forward that are similar in their motivations, people like Tarik O’Reagan, and Gabriel Jackson, but in a sense it’s never really gone away from British music. You know, Benjamin Britten, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, they were always keen to write choral music, but that tradition was eventually regarded as conservative by the true avant garde, and that’s why in a sense, the real pioneers from the sixties and seventies went a different way. So I see that as a very significant and notable development in contemporary music and one that suits me down to the ground.103

Sir MacMillan’s reflections on the current state of choral music are positive. He feels he’s able to compose freely as he is led, producing pieces intuitively from his own

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background. This “guilty secret,” of his is no longer secret, if it ever truly was, and moreover, is no longer guilty.

**Previous studies on Sir MacMillan’s works**

Scholarly articles on James MacMillan are moderately common, most often in publications from the United Kingdom. Of the articles that specifically address his choral works, two investigate *Seven Last Words from the Cross* (1994), one analyzes *A New Song* (1997), and one compares *St. John Passion* (2007) with David Lang’s *the little match girl passion* (2008). One magazine article discusses his opera *Inés de Castro* (1996), and several discuss his instrumental works. Another article delves into MacMillan’s unknown years at Edinburgh University, but all commentary is drawn from university program notes alone and contains no musical analysis.

Cambridge University Press has published several articles on MacMillan and his works in *TEMPO*. Stephen Johnson’s 1993 article titled after the composer discusses MacMillan’s style primarily through *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* (1990).\(^{104}\) Johnson also briefly discusses other works by MacMillan, such as *Búsqueda* (1988), *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* 1992), *Sinfonietta* (1991), *Cantos Sagrados* (1989), *The Berserking* (1990), and *Visitatio Sepulchri* (1993). Mandy Hallam published an interview in *TEMPO* with James MacMillan in 2008 that primarily discussed *Seven Last Words from the Cross*, but ranged into his compositional process, religion and artistry, folk music, and the reverberations from his “Scotland’s Shame” keynote address at the Edinburgh Festival in 1999.\(^{105}\)

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James Telford’s 2011 article in TEMPO investigated the early student works of James MacMillan. This article, titled “Reconciling Opposing Forces: The Young James MacMillan – A Performance History,” collected information primarily through program notes and biographies. ¹⁰⁶ Only one choral work was mentioned in this article, 1979’s *The Lamb has come for us from the House of David*, which remained unpublished until 2007. The piece is for SATB choir, and the text is from St. Ephraim. ¹⁰⁷ Dominic Wells wrote a comparative article titled “In the Footsteps of Bach’s St. Matthew Passion: The Passion Settings of David Lang and James MacMillan.”¹⁰⁸ The article discussed similarities between Lang’s *the little match girl passion* and MacMillan’s *St. John Passion* with Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, as Wells refers to both composers having cited Bach as an inspiration in their settings.

In 1990, Keith Potter began a series of articles in *The Musical Times* which was “intended not only to introduce the music and ideas of a variety of younger British composers but to discuss some of the wider issues concerning the state of composition in Britain at the beginning of the 1990s.”¹⁰⁹ In the autumn issue of 2010, Richard McGregor co-authored his interview with James MacMillan.¹¹⁰ Their discussion centered on Scottish

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¹⁰⁷ Telford, 46.


cultural identity, and later tied to McGregor’s analysis of MacMillan’s *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*.

There are four primary dissertations that address MacMillan’s works, the most recent being the 2014 dissertation by Nathan Frank, “James Macmillan’s St John Passion: the Role of Celtic Folk Idioms and the Reproaches,” unavailable at the time of writing this document. Prior to this, the 2002 dissertation discussed above, “The Early Choral Music of James MacMillan: 1983-1993,” was written by Stephen Kingsbury.

The earliest was written by Timothy Michael Rolls, “James MacMillan: An Analysis of Selected Works (1983-1997)”. Seven works were briefly analyzed, with a more in depth analysis of MacMillan’s percussion concerto, *Veni, Veni Emmanuel*. Of these eight total works, only one of them included choir, *Cantos Sagrados*.111 In this dissertation, Rolls chose the works examined based on three criteria. All eight pieces were composed between 1983 and 1997, they were easily available through MacMillan’s exclusive publisher, Boosey & Hawkes, and they provided an overview of MacMillan’s stylistic traits.112 Of the works examined, Rolls identified certain styles and features; all demonstrated one or more of the following: exoticism, expressionism, the use of pre-existing music (his own or quotations from others), a reference to Liberation Theology, and metric modulation.113


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112 Rolls, 19.

113 Rolls, 54-55.
Búsqueda, a socially conscious instrumental work. He briefly discusses MacMillan’s opera, Inés de Castro as well as the symphonic work The Confession of Isobel Gowdie.\textsuperscript{114}

Telford, having explored MacMillan’s early compositional development and struggles to come to terms with the different views he held in himself, wrote that MacMillan’s music is “born of rigorous spiritual and personal investigation, a day-to-day struggle towards the reconciliation of the opposing forces within a complex and relentlessly self-questioning musician. Whether relating to Catholicism and Socialism or Romanticism and Modernism, it is music which bears witness to the moral, spiritual, and intellectual complexities of modern living.”\textsuperscript{115}

**Summary of related literature**

The three themes of MacMillan’s extra-musical inspiration as identified by Potter and Kingsbury are Catholicism, Scottish identity, and social consciousness. Music can be tied to each of these three themes independently, but in MacMillan, previous authors have found they all come together. It has been reported and reproduced in the available literature that MacMillan’s instrumental music displays these themes, and that his early choral works were following the same trajectory. It is worth investigating whether these themes are owned by the composer himself. If they are, how and to what effect they combine may be explored. If not, then it is necessary to craft a new understanding of composer Sir James MacMillan, and of his music.


\textsuperscript{115} Telford, 50-51.
Chapter 3: Catholicism in St John Passion

Sir MacMillan wholeheartedly endorsed the theme of Catholic spirituality. The composer became effusive and passionate as soon as the subject was broached, his enthusiasm reflecting the great stacks of books on theology in his office.

[Catholicism] is harder to bat away (not that I would want to) but there’s a whole range of reasons there why that can be important, or has to be important. First of all, there’s liturgy, and a lot of the music I’ve written is for liturgy, or could be used for liturgy, both in the Catholic church but in other churches as well now. I’m delighted…the music is used in a whole range of different denominations, and then beyond the pew and liturgical, there are those works which are written for the concert hall, which have a religious subject matter…When one usually hears a Bach passion or indeed the Handel’s Messiah in a secular context, and the people will respond to it in different ways, some will perceive it as a spiritual experience, others will not, although we use different criteria to account for how spiritual it is. And then there are other pieces of mine which definitely have been influenced by theological thought in some way, and I’m still fascinated by that. I think that’s a valid pursuit, and it keeps my mind active, and hopefully keeps my soul active as well.\(^{116}\)

It is certainly worth finding out because it’s been…and continues to be, a significant factor in the way I think about lots of things.\(^{117}\)

With these two statements, Sir MacMillan establishes a value for the connection between heart/soul and mind, and that this connection finds its fullness in his Catholic faith. When discussing music and Catholicism he slips easily from pragmatic and scholastic thought to spiritual, and the overlap becomes more pronounced as he describes his St John Passion. The familiarity with and affinity for the Catholic faith began in his childhood and continues through the present day.


Development of Sir MacMillan’s Catholic faith

Sir MacMillan was raised as a Catholic, and was taught his first music lessons by the nuns of the Sacred Heart at St. John’s Roman Catholic Primary School in Cumnock. He was quickly enlisted to help with the musical tasks of his parish, and became familiar with liturgy from that point forward.

I’ve always been involved with liturgy. If you’re a musician you tend to get roped in, and to help with musical matters in church life, and that’s certainly the case with me. Ever since I was a little boy, as soon as I was able to play the keyboard, you’d be drafted into help at parish, at school events that involved church music, and that continued. Because I go to Mass every week, I see liturgy and I’m able to reflect on it.\(^\text{118}\)

Later, in his days as a young student under Bert Richardson, MacMillan was introduced to choral music and some of choral music’s finest composers, Bach, Palestrina, Lassus, and more. He was introduced at this time to Byrd, a composer with whom he identifies to this day. Byrd’s staunch Catholic faith amidst violent anti-Catholic sentiment at the time gave the young MacMillan a figure with whom he could relate. As an adult, Sir MacMillan addressed the topic of religious sectarianism in Scotland between Catholics and non-Catholics, opening avenues of conversation and shedding light on a centuries-old prejudice still in operation.

I think Byrd, as a Catholic composer writing in England at a very difficult time for Catholics. It’s amazing even today to think that the four, three, and five part masses were written for secret use, and if you were found carrying a copy you could be arrested at the time, if you were seen with the score. And that has resonances today, not just for Catholics, but for Christians who increasingly, maybe not so much in the West yet, find themselves in situations of persecution. But he is a kind of a beacon figure for a Catholic composer, especially in this country that he followed his faith unto near death, that when a lot of his compatriots and co-religious would be put to death because of their faith.\(^\text{119}\)

\(^{118}\) James MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015

\(^{119}\) James MacMillan, interview, July 17, 2015
During his university education, MacMillan lived above a group of Dominicans who regularly sponsored Mass for the students. This was a growing experience for him because they helped him to engage anti-Catholic viewpoints. It is perhaps here where he learned to hold tightly to what he believes, defend it articulately and passionately, and still hold respect and openness for others.

Every year they had a course called “Objections to Catholicism” which involved some very vehement and powerful speakers making an anti-Catholic case from the perspective of other religions and philosophies. Being made to examine the issues in that kind of way is, for me, a Catholicism that feeds the mind as well as the soul. Just slavishly accepting what you are told is the road to fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{120}

These yearly courses did not shake his beliefs, but gave him a sharp intellect with regard to theological matters, which in turn fueled him in his compositional life. In a program note to his 1980 piece \textit{Canons and Interludes}, MacMillan wrote, “Mutual communication between Man and God is always discussed with relationship to Man’s conscious state. But if God is the God of our whole spirit then he must have some relationship with Man’s unconscious state as well. This piece, therefore attempts to represent God’s relationship with man both in his rational conscious state and in his imagination or his subconscious state.”\textsuperscript{121} His association with the Dominicans deepened over the years, he and his wife later becoming lay Dominicans themselves.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{120} Telford, “Reconciling Opposing Forces” p 46.

\textsuperscript{121} Telford, 47.

\textsuperscript{122} Sir MacMillan on Dominican life now: “It’s more difficult now, became more difficult. My daughter had a little, extremely disabled child, and we’ve had to sort of abandon quite a lot of our extracurricular work just to help...So we had to park the lay Dominican life, although we’re still very, very close to the Dominican family. We still regard us as a Dominican family.” James MacMillan, interview with the author, Glasgow, July 21, 2015.
The particular charism that marks the Dominican order is that of preaching. How a twenty-first century classical composer interacts with this idea is thought-provoking, and Sir MacMillan offered his perspective,

Dominicans are known for their preaching because Dominic was a great preacher, and...the first generations of Dominicans were itinerant preachers that went out into the world and spread the word of God, so that idea of preaching is actually central to what the Dominicans are about. But of course in our own world, in our own time, there are associations in the secular mind at least, about the word “preaching.” Preachiness is regarded as quite negative. And if one is a Christian composer or a religious composer of any sort, then, there is a tension I think, in the secular world about what your motivation is, at least what your purpose is, what you see your purpose is. I never think of myself as trying to proselytize through music, but that’s not necessarily the be-all and end-all of preaching. Another way of talking about preaching is bearing witness to the truth, and to divine truths, and there are ways and means that that can be done beyond words.123

A great many of MacMillan’s later works were inspired by his Catholic faith. Seven Last Words from the Cross was premiered nightly during holy week of 1994 on the BBC. Each night Cappella Nova and the BT Scottish Ensemble under the direction of Alan Tavener performed a different movement.124 1996 saw the composition of The World’s Ransoming and his Cello Concerto. The World’s Ransoming was a concertate work for cor anglais and orchestra, and premiered on July 11, 1996 at Barbican Hall, London by the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Kent Nagano.125 The Cello Concerto featuring Mstislav Rostropovich premiered on October 3, 1996 at Barbican Hall by the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Sir Colin Davis.126 These two works became the first two movements of the Easter triptych, Triduum. The third part,

125 Rolls, 14.
126 Rolls, 15.
MacMillan’s first symphony entitled *Vigil* was composed a year later, and was premiered by London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Rostropovich on September 28, 1997. In addition to this collection of large works, Sir MacMillan adds a vast number of short choral works with Catholic liturgical, or Christian, texts.

In an article for *Chorus America* by Donald Nally, Sir MacMillan noted that "as a Catholic, I have a sense of ownership over the Passions because they were around before Bach,"\(^{127}\) and yet MacMillan cites Bach as being an early influence on his style, especially in his *St John Passion*. This is unsurprising, since although Bach was not a Catholic, his influence is ubiquitous among composers of the Western classical tradition, and his name almost synonymous with the passion genre. Dominic Wells compared MacMillan’s *St. John Passion* to Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* (1727). In Wells’ article, he referenced MacMillan’s thoughts regarding the influence Bach had on the 2007 passion work,

> I knew from the outset that there would be extra texts interpolated into my piece, just as Bach uses the chorales in his Passions. I’ve thought a lot about my own alternative to those chorales, and the Latin motet seemed to be a strong counterbalance to the narrative of *The Passion* [...]. These motets will move the action from the vernacular into something that perhaps subliminally evokes the detachment in Bach’s chorales, but they come from my own Catholic tradition.\(^{128}\)

MacMillan has added a second passion work to his oeuvre, *St Luke Passion*, in 2012-2013, and was premiered on March 15, 2014 at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.
by Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and Choir, Vocaal Talent Nederland, and National Jeugdkoor under the direction of Markus Stenz.\textsuperscript{129}

Catholicism in music

The following section explores Catholicism in music. James MacMillan’s Catholic faith is a primary source of inspiration and motivation in his compositions. In order to understand the depth of connection Catholicism and Western classical music share in MacMillan’s works, it is necessary to establish at least a modicum of the philosophical and historical context between the two.

Western culture steeped for so long in the Judeo-Christian tradition that it cannot be understood apart from it, but in the twenty-first century the predominant culture is no longer ruled by the church. The role of sacred music is no longer the same as it was in Thomas Aquinas’ lifetime, or even in the lives of twentieth-century Catholic composers like Messiaen. Sir James MacMillan said, “embracing spirituality is now one of the most radical and counter-cultural moves a musician can make.”\textsuperscript{130} Peter Phillips, conductor of the Tallis Scholars, alternatively says that great sacred choral music can be fully enjoyed as a secular concert item; it is not counter-cultural because it occupies a central place within the cultural mainstream.\textsuperscript{131} Jonathan Arnold, former member of The Sixteen grapples with these two theories:

Thus, the question arises whether most people consider sacred music to be completely detached from its religious heritage. I argue that society, as a whole, seems reluctant to accept theology as part of everyday life; and yet the intrinsic theological essence of a sacred work of art cannot be extracted... If a composer


\textsuperscript{130} Jonathan Arnold, \textit{Sacred Music In Secular Society}. Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2014, 12

\textsuperscript{131} Arnold, \textit{Sacred Music In Secular Society}, 12-13.
has theological intentions when composing a piece of music, they are essential to its meaning...At some level, whether great or small, the faith embedded in the music must be acknowledged.\textsuperscript{132}

Every conductor must choose to what degree the “faith embedded in the music” will be investigated and discussed, but it cannot be entirely ignored. Just as music from any culture must be performed authentically as possible, Catholic sacred music must be studied and approached the same way.

The connection between Catholicism and Western classical music is centuries old, and it is difficult to conceive of one without the other. The justification for weaving music into Christian liturgy can be traced as far back as the Last Supper, when Christ and apostles sang hymns together after the Passover meal.\textsuperscript{133} Ancient Jewish traditions included singing and passages in the Old Testament referred to music and its effects; the book of Psalms is itself a collection of ancient sacred songs.\textsuperscript{134}

It is not an unusual method for the church to use music as a tool to stir the soul toward God. Christianity has repeatedly encouraged taking earthly things and using them as tools to help lead people to God. Christ himself took on a human form in order to do the same thing.\textsuperscript{135} Over the first millennium B.C.E, the liturgy of Christian worship developed to unify Europe under one faith. The liturgy was meant to lead people to God and to be the “highest form of praise and worship of God.”\textsuperscript{136} The second millennium B.C.E. saw the expansion of artistic expression in this established liturgy, as well as great creativity in

\textsuperscript{132} Arnold, 13.


\textsuperscript{134} Guettler, “Music As Prayer,” 8.

\textsuperscript{135} Guettler, 7.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
hymnody and original sacred composition. David Gregor Corner, abbot of Göttweig, in the 1631 preface to his published hymnal, was grandiose in his praise of music:

> The attractive sweetness and the powerful effect of singing is great, indeed almost unbelievable, for it can influence and even change the most hardened spirits. Plainly, no class on earth is so noble, no office so burdensome, no person so bad but that it could be touched and softened by attractive singing. Small infants in the cradle, adults performing their hard work, clerics in the churches, laity in their homes, kings in their palaces, soldiers in the field, the wanderer by day, the watchman by night, farmers and artisans with the sweat rolling from their brows – all rejoice and are strengthened in their tears, worries, sufferings, burdens and labors by an uplifting and pleasant song.\(^{137}\)

Over three hundred years later, at the Second Vatican Council in 1962, Catholic leaders again agreed on the value of music in liturgy and worship. “The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.”\(^{138}\)

As music performs such a significant role in the practice of the Catholic faith, it is unsurprising that there is a traceable history of significant Catholic composers. This vast collection of Catholic composers includes Palestrina, Victoria, Byrd, Vivaldi, and Messiaen. All of these composers, and many more, wrote for the Catholic liturgy, and this connection with liturgy has not left Sir MacMillan untouched.

> [Y]ou can’t help but see the very close relationship between music and ritual in the Catholic church, the tradition, this wonderful wealth of music and tradition associated with the liturgy. Going back through some of our great composers, Bruckner, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Monteverdi, Palestrina, they all wrote music for liturgy. And even in our own time there are composers still writing music for liturgy, whether it be Catholic or otherwise. Messiaen, a Catholic composer who died not so long ago, was a

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\(^{137}\) Guettler, 7.

liturgical animal as well...there’s a whole wealth and tradition there of music and ritual, Catholic ritual being connected. One feeds the other. Certainly music feeds the rituals that are important to the prayer life of the church, so it’s inevitable that you would be drawn in as a composer to help with the liturgy, either as a composer or even just as a jobbing musician Sunday on Sunday. Beyond that though, someone like me can’t help but be shaped and influenced by liturgy in other matters so that, for example, liturgy spills out. My interest in liturgy spills out of just purely liturgical music, which actually is quite a small part of my work, to be honest, but it spills into all my other stuff, like the settings of the passions, which are quasi-liturgical, para-liturgical, or certainly have roots in liturgy. And in works like Seven Last Words, …which…have their impetus of being and root of being in liturgy, although they tend to be heard and performed purely and simply as concert works now. That’s the way of it, same with Bach as well. So there’s that – liturgy spilling out into concert music, but then there’s liturgy and theology, which is a source of a lot of my reading on life, the things that matter to me. Eventually that kind of spills over into how I think about making the abstract nature of music…In the writing of my recent symphony, the Fourth Symphony, which is, as I say is a purely musical abstract work, I did read around a lot of what liturgy was about. The two very different books, one is quite difficult, impenetrable, philosophical study of liturgy and culture, and the other is more of a kind of exploration of the roots of liturgy. But in their different ways they provided a kind of bedrock for my thinking before I started writing the piece of music. I suppose what was important to me, I began to realize, is if liturgy is such a big thing for me, and it has been practically, but also in my reading and thoughts, then could it impact on a purely abstract work? And it should, really. But how it does is a matter that I’m still working out.139

His contemplation of the role of liturgy in his life as a composer is already finding a way into his recent works. In the Fourth Symphony, which premiered at the PROMS in August 2015, he has come to a place where liturgy is so deeply in his subconscious that it has spilled out into this work, despite not being liturgical in design.

…[I]n the Fourth Symphony, I at least acknowledge that there’s something, there’s an attempt to try to absorb a lifetime of interest and involvement in liturgy into what I do as an abstract composer. So the Fourth Symphony isn’t liturgical music, but it’s imbued with a kind of memory or experience of ritual that one associates with liturgy. And there’s no need to say as much as that, even in the program note, although I do mention certain types of

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rituals associated with liturgy. That become the basis of the musical germination, as it were, of the work.\footnote{Ibid.}

Other works, both short and long, are intentionally liturgical. Short liturgical choral works include the dual collections of the Strathclyde Motets. Longer works include his early \textit{Missa Brevis}, various masses, and the first of his passion works, the \textit{St John Passion}.

\textbf{St John Passion}

\textit{St John Passion}, composed in 2007, bears the dedication, “To Sir Colin Davis for his 80\textsuperscript{th} birthday.” This ten-movement work, consistent with the genre, tells the story of the crucifixion of Jesus according to the Gospel of John in the New Testament. Unlike other passion settings which frequently use a tenor Evangelist, Sir MacMillan’s uses a small SATB chamber choir of anywhere from eight to twenty-four voices to play the narrator’s role. The only soloist in the entire passion is the role of Jesus (Christus in the score), a baritone. The large choir is designated SATB divisi and recommended for eighty to one hundred twenty voices. The orchestra is large, comprised of two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, four French horn, trumpet, trombone, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, organ, and a large string section. MacMillan sets the narration and action from the Bible in English, but movements one through nine conclude with liturgical sections in Latin. The piece runs nearly ninety minutes long. Currently the only available recording is the publisher recommended recording by the London Symphony Chorus and the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of the dedicatee, Sir Colin Davis, recorded in 2008 and featuring baritone soloist
Christopher Maltman.\textsuperscript{141} This casting also gave the premiere in Barbican Hall, London on April 27, 2008.

**Historical context of \textit{St John Passion}**

This is the first true passion work of Sir MacMillan’s. He has, however, written several works centering around the story of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. These earlier pieces became preludes to the \textit{St John, St Luke}, and other future passions he intends to write.

I’ve circled around the passion narrative in different ways before settling to actually writing one. And so, I was trying it through writing \textit{The Seven Last Words} but there’s also another piece called \textit{Visitatio Sepulchri}, the visitation to the Sepulchre, which is based on a medieval liturgical drama of the woman encountering the angels at the tomb, so that was another way. But there’s other, more abstract ways, such as – there’s a piano trio of mine called \textit{Fourteen Little Pictures}, which is essentially the fourteen stations of the cross. It was a way of painting, painting the Via Dolorosa in fourteen little miniature movements all stitched together to make a bigger piece.\textsuperscript{142}

The story of Jesus is ubiquitous in Western culture, and particularly in Western music. For musicians and listeners in a secular twenty-first century, there is a question of the relevance of sacred music, especially sacred music that is rooted in past forms. While this question cannot be fully addressed in the scope of this document, Sir MacMillan offered his perspective.

I am very interested in the older music, and it’s an attitude of mind, I think that that regards music, and indeed culture as a kind of continuum through history. And there was a time, maybe fifty, sixty, seventy years ago, or maybe even a little bit older, where composers and many involved in the arts, and indeed culture generally and philosophy and politics thought that the links to the past were going to stop, and perhaps should stop. Because if you think about it what happened in in Europe especially after 1945, there must have been a feeling that culture had come to an end, that the world,


\textsuperscript{142} James MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015.
our culture had been a failure and led directly to the Third Reich and the Holocaust, and you can understand all these young idealist people wanting to begin again—sometimes from scratch—untainted by a culture, a civilization that ended in Auschwitz. So you can imagine that it would have been a rational and understandable view to see previous culture, previous music even, as tainted in some way, and that they had to begin again, so they began with a blank canvas in all things, not just music. You can see the desire to begin from scratch in many aspects of our life, but it was a mistake. And a nihilistic mistake to see culture as being debased and broken in that way. Whereas, I think an artist like myself would prefer to see a continuum through history, and for our culture, so that you recognize the past as important. Yes, there have been some wrong turnings politically and so on, but the past has great lessons for us, and culture we can absorb so much from the past and perhaps remake it in new ways. But if you put a dam up in history, if you actually build a dam to keep everything not flowing, you parch the land. And that parching of our culture has been disastrous. And so I am much more open to a continuum of the past such as it could be chant, it could also be the principles of sonata form, for example, or something that is clearly of great value and substance that can be continued. I suppose a respect for tradition in music and other things has been something that has driven me.143

But obviously the word is important to a culture like Christianity, because the written word is important. The Christ is revealed as the word of God, it’s man made flesh, man made into a speaking, writing, talking individual that gets ideas across. So the Word of God is very central to what the Christian message is all about. But so, I think, are the other arts, and that’s when it gets slightly more complicated, a little bit messier, and less easy to define, because my art isn’t essentially words. Although I love words. One has to look at what choral music is. Even people who are not necessarily religious, in fact some of the most skeptical minded music lovers that we know, still are people who will use the word spiritual in terms of describing the impact of music in their lives. They talk about music being a spiritual art form, and that music being a spiritual experience. That means something to them, and so we should maybe explore what it does mean. One meaning is that we have a lot more in common than we think, and it’s that love of music that opens up common truths about the spiritual nature of music. There is something about music that does touch us in the crevices of our souls, that releases something. And someone from a Catholic or Christian tradition has a means of understanding what that is, others would reject it, but they know that there’s a similar, they recognize a similar impact in the power of music. So when I write these pieces that are inspired by theology, I’m simply acknowledging something secular and even non-religious

people, non-religious music lovers have accepted—that music is a spiritual force.\(^{144}\)

Notable in these two comments by Sir MacMillan is the desire to not staunch the continuum of cultural history, and the universality of a spiritual nature in music. These expressed ideas reaffirm the previously stated marriage of heart and head that finds expression in Sir MacMillan’s Catholic faith and music. The *St John Passion* lies in the middle of this paradigm.

At the intersection of spirit and word are the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, from which musicians have drawn many texts, poems, and of course, passion narratives. The passion genre does not exist in a vacuum, but as Sir MacMillan said there exists a continuum, centuries of context in the collective musical mind. Any composer who writes a passion must grapple with his choices of which traditions to honor, and where he might be innovative. Some traditions, like the choice of using a baritone for the role of Christ, were an “easy choice.”\(^{145}\) His second passion work, *St Luke* (2012-13), would go a different direction – “if Christ is a baritone…in this work, he has to be something very different in [that] work, so he’s a baritone here, he’s a group of children here. And it gives that different characterization of Christ that I think is there in the various different Gospel writers.”\(^{146}\)

A composer who wishes to write a passion will also have to face the giant of Bach. “[B]ecause the Bach passions, the *Matthew* and the *John*, are so important and so central to the canon, it is a daunting prospect for a composer to turn to the passion as a form.”\(^{147}\)


\(^{146}\) Ibid.

\(^{147}\) Ibid.
Sir MacMillan chose to not fight this particular giant, but to face it; not emulating Bach’s passions, but cooperating with the pervasive presence of the eighteenth century composer.

I decided to use the Bach as a help, rather than a hindrance. He was like a frightening ghost over our heads, it’s the same with everybody who writes a passion. It’s inescapable. But you can accept it, embrace aspects of it, even to the extent of quoting the big passion chorale, which I’ve done now in both my passions. “O sacred head sore wounded” as near as a kind of quotation and a kind of signifier at certain points in both passions.\(^\text{148}\)

Having given himself the freedom to not compete with Bach, Sir MacMillan was able to proceed as a colleague. He could, metaphorically, stand next to Bach and face the same direction. He began the process by asking himself questions about what Bach did and how he could relate to it.

I wasn’t writing it for the liturgy, but liturgy played its part. I wasn’t a Lutheran, so the chorale tradition wasn’t mine. So would there be, perhaps, ways in a purely musical sense that I could punctuate the narrative the way that Bach did? So in a purely structural sense, the narrative is broken up by these commentaries which are almost like detours into Latin motet territory. Those Latin motets at the end of each movement become the kind of punctuation points where the drama stops and in a sense we stand back, as we do with the chorales of Bach, and reflect on what we’ve just seen and heard. So there was something from Bach that I was allowed to absorb and redirect in my own way as a modernist, as a Catholic, for an audience that would be very mixed and essentially secular.\(^\text{149}\)

Sir MacMillan both acknowledged Bach, and felt no compulsion to make an exact imitation of the renowned work. This demonstrates a remarkable sense of self and confident belief in his own values. The inclusion of the Latin motets are the primary connection in the *St John Passion* to his core understanding of liturgy and the Catholic faith.


\(^\text{149}\) Ibid.
Catholic liturgy in the *St John Passion* texts

Sir MacMillan’s contemporary Catholic expression of the passion became a foil to Bach’s Baroque Lutheran one. The selection of texts, especially of the commentaries, was instrumental in the development of Sir MacMillan’s work as a synergy of the traditional and the innovative. The selection of text began with choosing which of the four Biblical accounts of the passion story to set, and each are unique.

It is of course the same story, but there are different aspects that are highlighted in the different versions, different aspects of the character of Jesus that come to the fore. Jesus the innocent is very clear in Luke’s Gospel. I think, even the way I’ve set it subliminally, there’s a different character who has come to mind. Same man, but there’s different aspects of the character. Perhaps different ways that Jesus can be seen, depending on who’s telling the story. I’m sure I’ll find out or make new discoveries about it when I turn to Mark and Matthew.¹⁵⁰

Sir MacMillan chose to begin with the account from the Gospel of John, “because it was the one that was most known to me.”¹⁵¹

[T]he reason I say I know it more than the others, is that it’s part of the liturgy every year. On Good Friday it is the John passion that is recited on Good Friday in Catholic and Anglican churches, and indeed sung. The parish, we sing it in very, very simple plainsong we might have, and that sort of Gregorian or at least Dominican chant had a bearing on the way I would write the narration chorus, for example. A simple chant line, harmonized in different ways in every different movement. Year on year I do it; I am the narrator at the local parish church, the parish where we go to worship on Good Friday. I sing the narrator’s part, the priests sing the part of Christ, and there’s someone else that would do ancillary and some of the other parts so there’s three way sung dialogue, very very simple chant. I’ve just got into the way of doing that, I’ve done that for decades now. So that’s why I know the John better than others. Anybody who goes to a church on Good Friday would hear that rather than anything else. The way that one hears the other passions liturgically is that on Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday the week before, you would hear one of the other Gospel readings, one of the other passion accounts. I don’t know if you know, but in the


¹⁵¹ Ibid.
liturgical life, there are cycles of three years so that there are different readings, different psalm settings used depending on what cycle. We’re actually in year B just now, so year two. At the end of year two there would be one of the other three. You tend to hear the other three, but in a cycle of three, whereas the John is always on Good Friday.\footnote{152}{Ibid.}

Beyond which Gospel account to set, the next choice with regard to text is language selection. Music in the Catholic church has a deep historical association with Latin, but contemporary Mass has been commonly read in the vernacular since after the Second Vatican Council in 1965. Another strong argument for setting the vernacular is that the charism of the Dominicans focuses on clear witnessing and preaching. Sir MacMillan set the narrative in English, from the Revised Standard Version, while preserving a tie to the historical Catholic church through the use of Latin liturgical texts to punctuate all but the last movement. All texts and translations are included in Appendix A.

I decided what the different sections would be on purely dramatic art levels. I’d get to the end of what I imagined to be section one or two or three, and then recalled, at that moment really, what there was in Good Friday liturgy that would, in a sense, allow me to comment on what we’ve just heard, at the same time slightly stepping back from it so that you’re absolutely able to take a breath, a little bit of a break, from the relentless nature of the story telling and just sort of pause with some loose references, loose threads that might arise.\footnote{153}{James MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015.}

The interpolations of all Latin texts used in the \textit{St John} are liturgical in origin, but are taken from different places in the liturgy. The text chosen for the first movement “The arrest of Jesus,” is \textit{Accipite et manducate}, part of the Eucharist when the host is elevated. \textit{Tu es Petrus} concludes the second movement, and comes from the Alleluia psalm verse following the Gradual for the Mass on June 29, in honor of Saints Peter and Paul.\footnote{154}{Ron Jeffers, \textit{Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire Volume I: Sacred Latin Texts}, Corvallis, OR: earthsongs, 1989, p 228.}
At one point I just quote the Crucifixus from the Credo. “He was crucified for us, he was put to death for us,” just seemed to be right at the end, for the end of [movement] four. There were other moments where Judas was mentioned, one of the responses from Tenebrae mentions Judas, and he betrayed Christ; so I just remembered. So that’s the obvious choice, [for movement three] and so on.\textsuperscript{155}

The Latin text of movement five, \textit{Astiterunt reges terrae}, is Psalm 2 and is present in liturgy for Good Friday, and \textit{Peccantem me quotidie} from movement six is from the liturgy of the dead on November 2.\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Stabat Mater}, one of the five great sequences, for a time was used as a prayer on the Friday prior to Palm Sunday, and is still sung at the Stations of the Cross during Lenten services. It is also used on September 15 for the Feast of the Seven Sorrows.\textsuperscript{157} An excerpt of this text is interpolated with a lullaby in movement seven, “Jesus and his mother.” It is also in this movement that the quote from Bach’s \textit{St. Matthew} is sung from the perspective of Mary, the text changed to, “Your sacred head is wounded,” and following the melody of the Bach chorale.

The troublesome Reproaches of movement eight are from the Good Friday liturgy. This movement includes the only instances of Greek. In between Christ’s declarations, the men of the large choir sing “Holy is God,” in Greek, while the women sing the same phrase in Latin. The choice to use the vernacular had some unanticipated results, particularly in regards to this movement.

“I decided to use the vernacular, which has problems in itself, I’ve got to admit… I didn’t see this coming, when music lovers go to hear the Bach passion settings, they’re mostly hearing it in German, and particularly in kind of an archaic German, and there’s a lack of immediacy. And when you hear it in modern English, you’re suddenly, for some people, not just secular people but even religious people, it tends to feel as though you’re hearing it for the first time, there’s an immediacy about it. There’s also a problem; I

\textsuperscript{155} MacMillan, July 21, 2015.
\textsuperscript{156} Dom Laurence Shepherd O. S. B., \textit{The Liturgical Year}, New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1911, p 131, 414.
\textsuperscript{157} Jeffers, \textit{Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire Volume I: Sacred Latin Texts}, p 207.
don’t think it’s a problem, but I’ve run into a problem about the nature of the St John text. You’re probably aware that the St John text is sometimes regarded by people who have a grind about it as anti-Semitic. We can’t solve this in one sentence, but there’s always the generations in history and we’ve got centuries of problems between Christians and Jews and gradually that’s being sorted out, thankfully, but historically the John text has always been singled out as the one that seems to be more problematical and now having done my St John I’m wondering why that is. Considering that there’s a lot in the Matthew text that could be much more problematical, the whole blood libel thing that no one ever mentions, and I wondered why that is. And I think it’s simply because in the translations, English translations, indeed the German translations, of the John text, the words “The Jews” just keeps on coming back in a way that allows our modern sensibilities “The Jews did this, the Jews did that.” And it’s quite clear that John or the Johnines who wrote the text were meaning a particular branch of Jewish society that took against Christ for social and political reasons or whatever. The Johnines were Jews themselves, so I don’t think it was an act of anti-Semitism on their part, in that kind of visceral, tribal, racial sense that we understand it as a problem today, certainly in the last century. But I think modern audiences, especially those who are very sensitive about political correctness or otherwise of these things just hear the words “The Jews, the Jews, the Jews. Die Juden, die Juden,” continually and it makes them feel very, very nervous. And it’s as knee-jerk as that, it’s almost as unthinking as that. I don’t want to play down people’s genuine concerns about anti-Semitism. There are reasons that, there are manifestations of anti-Semitism, but you don’t get them in the concert hall. You find them in certain places and here in the west of course, but certainly not with people like me. So I resented that at the time, because I’d run into some problems, but it seems to have sorted itself out. I also wondered, why is it, you know others like Arvo Pärt have written a St John Passion, why didn’t he have this problem? And the answer is, he set his in Latin, and no one registered, or it just went over their heads in a subliminal way. If you’re struck by the modern English text, and confronted with, not just the story but so many other dimensions that lie, possibly in the common psychology.”

In this discussion, we are able to see a conflict with Sir MacMillan’s ideal of marriage of heart and head and the larger consciousness. The heart is found in the desire to express Christ’s anguish from the cross and the head is found in the understanding of the Jewish origin of the text. The clash exists due to the understandable sensitivity against anti-

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Semitism in the collective, but it is a conflict that exists outside of the composer himself. Internally, Sir MacMillan is at peace with this tension.

In “The death of Jesus,” movement nine, “When the death of Christ happens I just remembered there is Christus factus est which is straight out of Good Friday liturgy again. They suggest themselves at the right points for me.”\(^{159}\) The final movement is titled “Sanctus immortalis, miserere nobis,” and is purely instrumental. The title translates “Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us,” in Latin, which is the final line of the response in the Reproaches from movement eight. Concluding with an instrumental movement is a technique used by Sir MacMillan in other works, including his Seven Last Words from the Cross. The emotion and drama of the story necessitated a catharsis without crossing over into Easter Sunday, and Sir MacMillan chose a wordless one.

I always cite the example of Schumann’s songs. There’s a number of Schumann’s great lieder where the song is sung and the piano just keeps going. So it’s almost as if the piano is providing a postlude, a commentary, where the words stop but the story goes on, the song goes on but not using words. And to telescope that into a large scale form, seemed a natural thing to do here. We got to the “Christus factus est,” “he gave up his spirit,” in a sense, nothing else needs to be said, but perhaps emotionally, dramatically something did need to be said. The story needs to go on in pure sound – that’s what music is, after all. It’s a communication of feeling, the emotion beyond words, and something as profound as the crucifixion. Well, we’ve just been getting words all the time for a long, long time; it needs some kind of change, a kind of clearing of the air. It didn’t seem ready to end at that point, it needed something else. In fact, I’ve done something similar, although not the same this time, but as a postlude movement. Schumann had the right idea, you know, even in a little thing like a song, sometimes the instrumentation needs to continue. Ah, there’s an incompleteness sometimes about the end of a poem, especially when you’re talking about music.\(^{160}\)

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\(^{160}\) Ibid.
The choices of liturgical texts by Sir MacMillan in *St John Passion* offer reflection and commentary on the drama, according to the composer, and that Bach’s chorales were an inspiration for the use of these. A comparison of Sir MacMillan’s liturgical texts and Bach’s chorales from *Johannes-Passion* against the dramatic events of the passion is listed below in Table 1. Occasionally, the texts chosen by Sir MacMillan anachronistically

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dramatic Event</th>
<th>Bach <em>Johannes-Passion</em></th>
<th>MacMillan <em>St John Passion</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’ arrest</td>
<td>3. Herzliebster Jesu (stanza 7, O große Lieb, o Lieb ohn alle Maße)</td>
<td>1. <em>Accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Vater unser im Himmelreich (stanza 4, Dein Will descheh, Herr Got, zugleich)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus before Caiaphas</td>
<td>11. O Welt, sieh hier dein Leben (stanzas 3 and 4, Wer hat dich so geschlagen and Ich, ich und meine Sünden)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus before Pilate</td>
<td>15. Christus, der uns selig macht (stanza 1)</td>
<td>3. <em>Judas, mercator pessimus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Herzlibster Jesu (stanzas 8 and 9, Ach großer König, groß zu allen Zeiten, and Ich kanns mit meinen Sinnen nicht erreichen)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. Unknown hymn, aria text from Postel’s 1700 <em>St John Passion</em>, Durch dein Gefängnis, Gottes Sohn, ist uns die Feiheit kommen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus is condemned</td>
<td>26. Valet will ich dir geben (stanza 3, In meines Herzens Grunde)</td>
<td>4. * Crucifixus*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus is crucified</td>
<td>28. Jesu Leiden, Pein und Tod (stanza 20, Er nahm alles wohl in acht)</td>
<td>5. <em>Astiterunt reges terrae</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ’s garments divided</td>
<td></td>
<td>6. <em>Peccantem me quotidie</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus speaks to his mother and John</td>
<td></td>
<td>7. <em>Stabat Mater</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus on the cross</td>
<td></td>
<td>8. The Reproaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus dies</td>
<td>32. Jesu Leiden, Pein und Tod (final stanza, Jesu, der du warest tot, lebest nun ohn’ Ende)</td>
<td>9. <em>Christus factus est</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Comparison of Reflective texts in Bach’s and MacMillan’s St John Passions
Taking Jesus down from the cross

Closing reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Christus, der uns selig macht (stanza 8, O hilf, Christ, Gottes Sohn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Herzlich lieb hab ich dich, o Herr (stanza 3, Ach, Herr, laß dein lieb Engelein)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Sanctis Immortalis, miserere nobis (instrumental)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

referenced a prior event in the story. For example, in the first movement Jesus commands Simon Peter to put away his sword, saying “shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?” *Accipite et manducate* follows, which is the text from the Passover meal Jesus shared with his disciples prior to the opening of the passion. Later, when Jesus is before Pilate, the closing dialogue of Jesus, “therefore he who deliver’d me to you has the greater sin,” reflects back to the betrayal of Judas from the first movement. Also of note is the perspective on the moment of Jesus speaking to Mary, his mother. This moment is unique to John’s gospel, and it is understandable that both composers would reflect on it. Bach, being Lutheran, chose to focus on Jesus, his chorale text translating to “He, of all, did well take heed.” while MacMillan’s took the Catholic view, highlighting Mary in her distress and using the well-known Stabat Mater text.

**Emotional connection through dramatic structure**

While a composition written with thoughtful historical consideration, *St John* is far from a cold, academic liturgical work. The work plays out like an opera, full of drama in the storytelling. The large structure of *St John* separates these ten movements into two large parts that behave like operatic acts. Part I begins with Jesus and his disciples crossing the Kidron Valley, where Jesus was arrested, and continues through his trial and sentencing. Part II begins with his crucifixion, and concludes with Jesus’ death. The bulk of the work occurs in the four movements of Part I, concerning the events leading up to the crucifixion. The first three movements in particular are the longest, and movement three, “Jesus before
Pilate,” is over twenty minutes long. In this work that is part-liturgical drama, part opera, Sir MacMillan stated,

[S]peaking about it objectively, it needed a big dramatic movement. Again, this is the operatic dimension. At this stage in an opera, you’re getting into the living guts of the narrative, the story. You really have to be gripped by this point. You’ve introduced characters, you need to get this plot going. You need to get the drama going and the tension building. So a large section, unbroken—in fact it’s over twenty minutes, this section, a really big movement—seemed to be the right kind of dramatic choice to make. That’s essentially why I shaped it that way…[T]here are ten movements in the piece, and some of them are very short. But it needed a kind of unbroken, through-composed, working through of all the dramatic tensions that were at work at that point. And it takes us to the to the crux of the crucifixion, and the drama. I didn’t want to break it up by that stage.\textsuperscript{161}

The remaining six movements of Part II move like a panning video camera, offering various perspectives of the scene at Calvary. Movement five, “The crucifixion,” picks up the story from where it was left by Pilate and the crowd. The next movement, “Christ’s garments divided,” focuses on the activity of the soldiers.

Movement seven, “Jesus and his mother,” examines and communicates the grief of Mary, his mother. This movement offers a brief respite from the heavy drama, dense texture, and driving rhythms from the previous movements. It is also the only simultaneously macaronic text in the work. While the sopranos and basses are singing a lullaby from Mary’s perspective in English, the altos and tenors are singing the reflective \textit{Stabat Mater} in Latin.

Sir MacMillan chose this poignant moment to quote Bach directly (See Figures 1 and 2). Despite being translated into English and transposed, the quotation is unmistakable for those who know the Bach. It is intriguing that this, the most Catholic of the movements

\textsuperscript{161} James MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015.
in the *St John*, is the moment Sir MacMillan chose to explicitly reference the Lutheran giant. This choice is indicative of Sir MacMillan’s desire to participate in a historical continuum in music. He also reflected on the drama of the movement saying,

It’s about Mary’s pains as a mother. Seeing her son dying, and the quote just comes at the very end actually. I do change the words so that it is connected with Mary. Just simply at the end, instead of “O sacred head so wounded”, I’m putting these words into Mary’s mouth, “Your sacred head is wounded.” …The *Stabat Mater* is used throughout…but there’s a kind of lullaby aspect to the whole setting. Even taking something from the Coventry carol, this kind of “lulla lullay,” which is a kind of lullaby from Mary to her son, and it’s connecting beginning and end of life through Mary’s eyes.\(^{162}\)

**Figure 1:** Bach, *Mattäuspassion* Mvmt. 54, melody of first phrase only

![Figure 1: Bach, *Mattäuspassion* Mvmt. 54, melody of first phrase only](image)

**Figure 2:** *St John Passion*, Mvmt. 7, mm. 89-95, soprano only\(^{163}\)

![Figure 2: *St John Passion*, Mvmt. 7, mm. 89-95, soprano only](image)


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The camera follows her gaze to Jesus, where “The Reproaches,” are spoken from the cross, the only movement entirely in first person. The ninth movement, “The death of Jesus,” withdraws from the immediacy of the scene, perhaps spoken as a memory from the author of the Gospel. The tenth movement, with no words, is an opportunity for the listener to have a time of reflection and catharsis from the drama of the crucifixion.

**Emotional and musical gestures fused through melody and harmony**

Beyond the Bach quotation, there are several other references scattered throughout the work, both from works by the composer, and also from the context of the greater musical consciousness. Donald Nally, who conducted the work in 2014, wrote that, “The separation of musical ideas into opposing or converging musical planes makes sense to us; it is how our minds work, particularly the minds of moderns. Gestural writing is a fascinating and dominating characteristic of postmodern music.”  

Contextual inferences from sonorities and motives are not unique to this generation of composers, but the enormity of material with which to work certainly is. A brief example here is the appearance of the destiny motive from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, present in both the fourth and final movements. These moments close each half of the passion with connotations of fate and love (See Figure 3 and Figure 4) wrapped up in the Christ figure. The use of this motive is, like the Bach quotation, indicative of Sir MacMillan’s concept of a historical continuum in music. Here also, it is tied tightly to his understanding of the person and purpose of Jesus in human history, underlining his Catholic faith. The first

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instance, in the fourth movement, occurs as Pilate presents the question “Shall I crucify your king?” left hanging in the air, unaccompanied. The drama plays out the crowd’s response, but Sir MacMillan brings the same motive back in the instrumental tenth movement, as though he were presenting this question again, this time to the audience, in the exegetical manner of a preacher.

Figure 3: St John Passion, Mvmt. 4, mm. 59–63

Tristan chord

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Self-quotations by Sir MacMillan in the *St John Passion* include a reinterpretation of the melody of his great organ mass into the Latin text of the first movement, a quotation...
of Isobel Gowdie in movement eight, “The Reproaches,” a motive of Veni, Veni Emmanuel, and there is also cross-pollination with his opera The Sacrifice as well.\textsuperscript{167}

The harmonic language of St John is pantonal, neither prioritizing any key nor a true atonal work. The relationship with tonality flexes throughout, much like the body of Sir MacMillan’s works. In reflecting on how things have changed for him over time, Sir MacMillan commented on the recurring movement toward and away from tonality both in himself and in contemporary music as a whole:

“…there’s been a moving in and out of tonality but it’s not time-specific. There are times in the nineteen eighties when I could, looking back, see my music was going in certain directions and influenced by certain modernist composers like Lutoslawski, and Berio, and so on. And there are other times where I felt their influences and impact on the wane more. I suppose the ongoing debate that composers have with themselves or amongst themselves is always about (certainly in the last fifty or sixty years) tonality, and how valid is tonality? How do we deal with the claims of Schoenberg and so on who thought that tonality had exhausted itself? How do we cope with that? Do we take on board, do we ignore it? We all react in different ways, sometimes very different ways within the same composer over a period of time. So I suppose the necessity that choral music has to be rooted, much more rooted for practical reasons, in a modality perhaps, and certainly in a tonality. Those tonalities and modalities are there as well in orchestral music but I can afford to stretch the layered effect of tonalities more so than in the choral music. So it’s all to do with an attitude to complexity and tonal complexity when one weaves between tonality and the absence of tonality.”\textsuperscript{168}

The voices of the narrator’s choir have a stronger pull towards tonality, as they are composed with strong ties to historical church music. The large choir, however, fluctuates between tonality and non-tonality. They have passages of cluster singing, including the first entrance of the large choir (See Figure 5). The staggered entrances of the large choir here have theological and dramatic implications. The text is the liturgy from the Eucharist,

\textsuperscript{167} Nally.

\textsuperscript{168} James MacMillan, interview, July 17, 2015.
Figure 5: St. John Passion, Mvmt 1, mm. 123-129, voices only\(^{169}\)

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and the twelve voices correspond with each of the twelve disciples taking the bread and wine from Jesus’ hand in the upper room before leaving for the garden. The cluster chords at the end of each phrase dramatically present the agony in the character of Jesus.

In movement two, “Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas. Peter disowns him,” Sir MacMillan creates a dramatic juxtaposition of the two interrogations of Jesus and Peter.
“[I]t’s like a duo happening, the High Priest followed by Peter, the duality of the two situations, they’re not unconnected. In fact, Peter’s looking on. But it seems to be a natural way of kind of combining two very different aspects on the scenario that has been dealt with; one that had huge implications for Peter, of course, and the church.” The movement concludes with the Latin text, *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam.* “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” This is an ironic conclusion, considering Peter has just denied knowing Jesus.

Here is someone who’s betraying his friend and yet he was given the keys for the kingdom, and I think it’s a beautiful thing that Peter was chosen. Because he was a very flawed individual. He reminds me of all of us; he was a coward, a traitor, a man that couldn’t stand up for his friend, and yet he was made the foundation of the church. And you could say, in retrospect, that the church has been in crisis ever since Peter heard the cock crow. It’s just a natural way, and we have to deal with it; it’s almost as if it was pre-planned. I’m sure it was.

The harmonic contrast between the Latin text *Tu es Petrus* in E-flat major in the choir against the harmonic chaos in the orchestra reflects the internal conflict of Peter, who has just denied knowing Jesus. The choir sings the legato melodic line, complete with traditional harmony and motet-like suspensions to a final plagal cadence, while violent outbursts of cluster chords in the orchestra interrupt them. The movement concludes with the orchestra sounding the final tonic in E-flat, as though Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s destiny finally won out against the failure of Peter’s denial. (See Table 2)

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171 Ibid.
Table 2: St John Passion, Mvmt 2, mm. 236-243

Measure: 236                  237                       238                            239
ORCH

LGE CH  V  ii       IV     Bb pedal
       V  vi42     V         vi42     V  (ln)   V42     IV7       V42

Measure: 240                  241                      242                              243
ORCH.

LGE CH  IV ii65       ii42     I
       +suspensions  9-8  4-3  6-5
       I
       I

Foil of heart and head through texture in St John Passion

In the wedding of heart and mind, Sir MacMillan also makes compositional use of the distinctions between the two, primarily through the variety of texture and timbre in the St John Passion. There are four primary voices in the St John Passion: the orchestra, the narrator’s chorus, the large chorus, and the baritone solo of Christus. As this document focuses on the choral writing of Sir MacMillan, the discussion will focus on the vocal writing and only include orchestral study when it directly interacts with the vocal lines.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic that makes Sir MacMillan’s passion stand out is the handling of the narrator’s role. The iconic Bach passions feature a tenor soloist in the role, and other composers have followed suit. However, Arvo Pärt used a quartet for the evangelist role, and this may have been a starting point for Sir MacMillan.

I thought: who’s going to put this kind of piece on, who’s going to choose to perform the St John passion, my St John Passion? It will usually be the choirs and those who run the choirs. And that means that it’d have to be a good amateur choir or professional choir. And they’d have to think then
about the expense of orchestras. The orchestra’s big. Bigish. Not huge. But if there’s lots of soloists, there might be a crippling budget there, so I decided just to limit it to one soloist, that’s Christ, a baritone. And then I had to think about other ways, how to compensate for that, how to re-think the voices. In the big choral, there are actually characters presented. Pilate has a role: it’s a choral role, it’s the bass section. Therefore, I thought about the different kind of choral traditions that I’ve been involved with; the big choral writing is written specifically for those big symphonic choruses that you know in America, and we certainly know here.\textsuperscript{172}

The choral traditions that Sir MacMillan has been involved with include chamber and church choirs. From this place, a dimension of contrasts in timbre and texture opened up for the composition. The austere sound of the narrator’s chorus takes on the voice of the Gospel writer, while the rest of the drama is played out by the larger choir, and by the role of Christus.

[T]he church-world is a very different kind of choral sound, or can be. I thought that maybe the narrator’s choir could have that essence of liturgy that one associates with the church world. So it’s slightly more emotionally detached, it’s a kind of chant-like delivery, it has that liturgical objectivity. It tells a story, but in a very dispassionate, objective way. The emotional turbulence in vocal terms at least are associated with the other chorus, and Christ himself, but mainly the other chorus. So that’s where the kind of almost operatic flavor exists. The liturgical, the detached, liturgical, cool simplicity is connected with the chamber choir. The turbulent, chaotic, violent, dramatic, theatrical music is the other choir, the big choir. And I think the opposition of the two was an important building factor for me, making two very different kinds of choral music.\textsuperscript{173}

The writing for the chamber choir is homophonic and declamatory, their one single motive being the telling of the story. What rhythmic variation they have often comes in the form of ornamentations and grace notes. Such figures are expected in works by Sir MacMillan, they are almost like a signature. (See Figure 7) These ornamentations and grace

\textsuperscript{172} James MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
notes are markers of the Scottish style, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, but should not go without mention here. The narrator’s chorus’ chant-like melodies reappear throughout the work, often in harmonic planing or in unison. (See Figure 8) The rhythm and meter of the narrator’s chorus serves the text stress throughout. The delivery of the text in a clear, straightforward manner reflects again Sir MacMillan’s Dominican roots, where preaching is the primary charism.

Figure 7: *St John Passion, Mvmt 2, mm. 3–6, voices only*

Grace notes

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Figure 8: *St John Passion*, Mvmt 1, mm. 3-8, voices only

Even when the narrator’s material uses dramatic effect, the delivery of the text is still clear and unhindered. In movement six, “Christ’s garments divided,” the narrators begin their lines as usual, but descending glissandi immediately follow, obscuring the pitch and creating an eerie and breathless weariness. (See Figure 9)

Figure 9: *St John Passion*, Mvmt 6, mm.11-16, voices only

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The large choir’s music, by contrast, is filled with a variety of textures, harmonies, and rhythmic figures in order to depict the story, rather than the detached story-telling of the narrator’s chorus. The large choir covers ground from playing character roles, (e.g. Peter, Pilate, and Mary) to the emotional reflection and commentary in the selections of Latin text. In the role of Pilate in movement three, the men of large chorus are paired with temple blocks and the bass drum, which only disappear when Pilate asks the questions, “What is truth?” and “Where are you from?” (See Figures 10-12) Each of Pilate’s questions progresses with fewer instruments until he is finally left stating the pivotal question, “Where are you from?” unaccompanied. The intensity of these questions moves from the philosophical discussion of truth to the very personal discussion of Jesus’ identity. This is the skill of a preacher, to incite and highlight a question that must then be answered by the listener.

The large chorus also has profound interactions and juxtapositions with the narrator’s chorus. For example, in movement six, after the narrators have just finished one of their descending glissandos (Figure 9), the men of the large chorus have a foil against
them. Their line ascends decisively and rhythmically in a canon at the third between the basses and tenors (See Figure 10) It stands out from other sections of the work, providing a contrast to the descending breathlessness of the narrator’s reference to Jesus on the cross.

Again, the priority here is clear text delivery, all to serve the telling of the story.

Figure 10: *St John Passion, Mvmt 6, mm. 24-31, voices only*\(^\text{176}\)

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The singular solo voice of Christ adds a third primary texture to the work, and stands out in sharp relief against the choral sound everywhere else. He is introduced amid Sir MacMillan’s version of a “halo of strings,” first made famous by Bach in the *St. Matthew Passion*.¹⁷⁷ (See Figures 11 - 12) Christus’ voice is not always accompanied with serene strings. In movement three, Jesus answers Pilate’s question and declares himself to be an otherworldly king with a brass fanfare. While there are occasional references to Bach and heavy influences from liturgy, moments like this demonstrate how this passion plays out much more like an opera than a Baroque or liturgical work.

**Figure 11: J. S. Bach, *Mattäuspassion*, Mvmt 2, mm. 4-8**

Contrasts in rhythm and meter

The complement of heart and head is further supported through contrasts in the rhythmic character of different voices within the work. The primary juxtaposition of rhythm lay between the narrator’s choir and the large choir. The narrator’s choir consistently has steady, chant-like rhythms that clearly deliver the text, and the only points of real rhythmic interest are the grace notes and ornamentations indicative of Sir MacMillan’s style. By contrast the orchestra, large chorus, and baritone soloist play and sing a wide variety of rhythmic figures.

Rhythmic interest is found throughout the work in the large chorus, and while this document cannot address all instances, a few moments are worth examining. First, in movement three, “Jesus before Pilate,” the temple blocks accompanying the men’s voices singing the role of Pilate. Their repeated questions, “What accusation?” are punctuated, additive, and the unbalanced meter gives an unsettled feeling to Pilate’s interrogation.
Secondly, the rhythms sung by Christus rarely conform to metric beats or subdivisions. Instead, the solo’s rhythms often employ tuplets, sustained pitches, and the signature MacMillan ornamentations and grace notes. This conveys the message that Jesus... 

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is operating on an entirely different plane than the persons around him, who all obey the pulse.

Part II begins with the crucifixion of Jesus, orchestrally and rhythmically violent. When speaking about this particular movement, Sir MacMillan demonstrated a synthesis of the drama and storytelling with his compositional process.

It’s quite a noisy affair, isn’t it? Quite tricky. Well, it’s linked with the choral ending, some of the thematic material is related to the motet material, some of the opening is related to the motet material, which is very violent. *Astiterunt reges terrae*, it’s about the kings of the earth being thrown down. I wanted to do basically a kind of ABC form so that there’d be a link between what you’d hear at the beginning and the end, and that the middle section would be given over to story-telling. I suppose that would be a purely musical reason. But it gave me an opportunity to begin the second part in a very dramatic, striking way.  

179 (See Figure 13)

**Figure 13: St John Passion, Mvmt. 5, mm. 1-3, 111-115 downbeat, melody only**


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Drama and expressive elements

The *St John Passion* was written on the heels of Sir MacMillan’s opera, *The Sacrifice*. The rehearsals for the opera began in late morning and ran all day, so Sir MacMillan would rise early and spend a few hours working on the passion before heading to rehearsals. “I was hearing *The Sacrifice* in rehearsal and it was going in subliminally, sometimes subconsciously, other times very consciously.”


The operatic bent of the passion is felt throughout, intentionally engaging with the drama of the passion narrative, and compounded by the spiritual or religious implications. A full exploration of the operatic qualities of the *St John Passion* are beyond the scope of this document, but an example here is found in movement three, “Jesus before Pilate.” Stark contrasts are made in brassy orchestral exclamations; detached chant-like statements from the narrator’s chorus; rhythmic, driving accusations from the large choir singing Pilate’s role; and alternatively serene and confident answers from Christus. At Jesus’ scourging in this moment, the soldiers say, “Hail, King of the Jews,” and their exclamations of “Hail!” are reminiscent of Verdi’s iconic “Dies Irae.” (See Figure 14)
Figure 14: *St John Passion*, Mvmt 3, mm. 317-318

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Later in this movement, the crowd’s insistence that Jesus be crucified is declaimed in loud shouts and imitative descending melismas. (See Figure 15) The movement concludes with a disturbing reflection on Jesus’ final words to Pilate, “therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.” The Latin text speaks of Judas, and is presented a cappella by the large choir. The absence of the orchestra at this point is extremely cold and stark until the final chord, when the orchestra enters forcefully with what sounds like strikes of a gavel on a cosmic scale, pronouncing judgement on the one who betrayed Jesus.

Figure 15: St John Passion, Mvmt 3, mm.389-397, voices only

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Performance practice suggestion

Performance practice of this piece at the notational or sonic level is not the focus of this document. Dipert’s suggestion of adhering to the high-level intentions, however, is the primary focus. The declamation of the Gospel of John from a Catholic worldview, cannot be ignored in this piece. This may be difficult for modern concert audiences, but as Arnold addressed in *Sacred Music in Secular Society*, there is a place for engaging religion in music, even in the concert hall. Conductors should be prepared to engage this perspective openly and honestly, even if it is not their own personal belief.

The operatic length and intensity of Sir MacMillan’s *St John Passion* requires players and singers of a high caliber. It requires a great deal of stamina even with the intermission between Parts I and II. Sir MacMillan did, however, express a desire to see the work performed uninterrupted.

Every performance of this has had an interval – I think that’s a mistake, actually, but it would make life very difficult for the performers. I mean that’s the way music organizations work. You need an interval. But it does seem strange, to be honest. *Crucifixus pro nobis*, then go for a red wine, settle back down for the rest of it. When I wrote my St Luke I decided not to make an interval so that the four parts just all run almost continuously. It makes it difficult to program. That means it’s seventy-five minutes unbroken. However, there are big pieces like that, Mahler symphonies and so on. But it means there can be no interval. And that’s a consideration for some. But I think that there has to be other considerations. I’d just once like to see the St John without interval, but I know that the stamina that is required for the players, the performers is immense in that piece, they just need a break.

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184 Dipert, 207-208.


Indeed, it would be a long play for the orchestra, and a long listen for the audience, but for those with the forces and means to do so, should consider the possibility of performing the piece without an intermission. This piece has been performed with a dancer before, so adding visual interest is not outside of the realm of possibilities.

Sir James MacMillan and Catholic spirituality in choral music

The connection between head and heart is made through Sir MacMillan’s Catholic faith. Liturgical or liturgically inspired music is fertile ground for this expression. It also has implications for previous research that concluded social or political consciousness was a major theme of his body of works. Rather than pushing a socio-political agenda, Sir MacMillan composes out of a much more organic place.

That organic place was created by Sir MacMillan’s spiritual and religious life and history. Liturgy and religious music and study were a part of his childhood, his musical study, his personal life, and his adult career as a musician and composer. In conversation, he lights up and becomes more energized and impassioned as he discusses spiritual and religious matters. He has strong opinions, or in the words of Donald Nally, belief in “the innate right to hold a belief without being persecuted for it, to live freely in our own worlds of love and passion, to live with understanding and compassion.”

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187 Donald Nally.
Chapter 4: Scottish Identity in The Gallant Weaver

Of lesser intensity than his Catholic spirituality but still important to Sir MacMillan’s output is the theme of Scottish identity. To understand what that means musically, an exploration of Scottish style is necessary.

A note on Scottish musical style

Western art and concert music was not overly popular in Scotland because the nation was seldom peaceful and stable during the time musicians in other European nations were composing.188 Some of the earliest Scottish music in the Western tradition (as opposed to Scottish folk music) was contained in the Carvor choirbook from the sixteenth century during the reign of James III and James IV. The Carvor choir book contained works by Robert Carvor, David Peebles, and Robert Johnson, in addition to several works by English composers.189 Political alliances and royal marriages with the French court brought a great influence of French culture to Scotland during the reign of James V. The style of the French chanson was echoed by composers John Fethy and Dean David Steill.190

The Reformation brought Lutheran chorale melodies and French and English psalm tunes to the Scottish Reformed Church. Composers Peebles, Kemp, Angus, Blackhall, and Buchan preferred a syllabic style for these new melodies over the polyphony of the previous age.191 In the court of James VI, the Castalian Band was led by Alexander


189 Elliot.

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.
Montgomerie and performed chansons, keyboard music, and Italian madrigals. The establishment of Presbyterianism dramatically cut back the compositions of church music in the seventeenth century. The Scottish court was dispersed, and with it, its culture. It is this phenomenon in particular that Sir MacMillan cites as formative for Scottish music.

Scotland missed out for a couple of centuries on the European classical development experience, and there’s a couple of reasons for that. It has to be said that the nature of the Scottish reformation was quite hard line and attempted to simplify a lot of liturgy, and indeed liturgical music at a time when other parts of Europe (not just Catholic Europe), there were quite profound and significant developments in liturgical music leading to Bach in northern Europe but also right through the counter Reformation, Palestrina through to Monteverdi and so on. Scotland missed out on those developments because of a particular kind of theological strand. Shortly afterwards, with the union of the crowns…it meant that just at the time when the royal courts of Europe and the ducal courts and the aristocratic courts and indeed the ecclesiastical courts of Europe were becoming the centers for huge musical developments, Scotland got rid of their courts. They got rid of the most important court, the royal court, which left Edinburgh and went to London, taking all its musicians with it. So in a sense, this double whammy as we might say, has had repercussions in Scotland. It meant we didn’t have a classical music at the time when classical music was beginning to develop in other countries in Europe.

Folk music was therefore the dominant musical culture of seventeenth century Scotland, and her musical heritage is largely based on folk music.

Into that vacuum developed the very intricate forms of bagpipe playing called *pibroch*, which is our classical music. And other forms of music filled that vacuum. Wonderful, strange, complex music like Gaelic psalm singing, which is a highly developed, highly ornamented form of singing the psalms in the free churches in the west which has attracted a lot of attention internationally and contemporaneously because it’s so strange. And obviously the social music making at the time flourished, the music for dancing, music for social interaction, the little music. *Ceòl mór* and *ceòl beag* is what we call it in Gaelic. *Ceòl mór* is the big music, and *ceòl beag*

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192 Elliot.

193 Ibid.


195 Rolls, 1.
is the little music. The little music has always been very strong and had a social function. Those musics are marked by certain archetypes. There are drones in Scottish music because of the pipes, there’s a lot of ornamentation of line, whether it’s the pipes or the way that the fiddle is played, but even vocal music is highly ornamented. So this is all Scottish. There’s a modality about Scottish music. You get in Gaelic music from the isles, and the west, northwest, pentatonicism. All those things are not unrelated to other indigenous vernacular musics you find in other countries but they do have a Scottish flavor and I accept that as unmistakable, and I’m still quite fascinated by those.196

Scotland’s folk music comprises a great many songs, including ballads, Gaelic songs and psalms, but instrumental music is popular as well, including music for the pre-eminent Highland bagpipe, the fiddle, a Scottish harp called the clàrsach, and free-reed instruments such as the mouth organ or accordion.197 Traditional Scottish music has been made by professionals since at least the seventeenth century, and the various styles are often related to the language or geography.198

The three main languages of Scotland – English, Scots, and Gaelic – are all present in traditional song. The geography of Scotland is mainly broken up by the division of the north and west (Gaelic) against the south and east (Scots). There are no longer any monolingual Gaelic-speaking areas in Scotland, but populations of the Western Isles and the Highlands still speak Gaelic and consider it a vital part of their culture.199 The languages of Scotland, in Sir MacMillan’s opinion are what contribute to the innate “Scottishness” of common folk idioms such as pentatonicism, modes, ornamentation and drones.

…[T]here is a local specific-ness about the way that the Scottish accent shapes a lot of the vocal music. And I think I think that there’s something,
the voice that shapes it and with the voice comes accent and delivery and I think that probably feeds into the specific design of the music in Scotland. But you can, as you say, trace parallels, there are lots of folk cultures with five-note scales, pentatonic scales, there’s lots of folk cultures with ornamentation. The ornamentation that we have comes from our voices but also the instruments specific and thought about the Scottish, such as the pipes, the kind of archetypal Scottish sound. So in a kind of archetypal way you can play it and that feeds the general tenor of things.\(^{200}\)

Traditional Scottish music began to be printed in the early eighteenth century, but the existing oral tradition kept record of authorship of songs long before that. Mary MacLeod, born circa 1615, is the known author of some of these songs not written down until a hundred years after she lived.\(^{201}\) Similarly, the bagpipe collection of music called *piobaireachd* [pi:pɛrəxk] often has traced authorship, excepting some of the earliest.\(^{202}\) Song and fiddle tunes began consistent publication by the middle of the eighteenth century, with bagpipe notation beginning about fifty years later, but aural teaching is still the primary mode of instruction and distribution of traditional tunes.\(^{203}\) In 1996, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama began a degree for traditional musicians, allowing them to pursue studies in accordion, bagpipe, *clàrsach*, fiddle, Gaelic song, Scots song, and percussion.

While the general style of traditional Scottish music varies according to geography and language, the underlying feature of Scottish traditional music is a common repertory of melodies. These melodies are played on all instruments, and they are the staple of *céilidhs* [ke̞li], pub session playing, concerts, and teaching. Musical characteristics of these

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\(^{201}\) Elliot.

\(^{202}\) Ibid.

\(^{203}\) Ibid.
melodies include pentatonic modes, double-tonic tunes, cyclical melodies, and the Scotch snap.\textsuperscript{204}

The growing social and economic stability of the eighteenth century allowed for musical composition to revive, and musical societies and concerts began to crop up in the major cities. Native Scottish composers from this time included William McGibbon, Charles McLean, James Oswald, David Foulis, and Thomas Erskine, 6\textsuperscript{th} Earl of Kelly.\textsuperscript{205} These composers wrote songs, sonatas, concertos, and symphonies in the popular Baroque and Classical styles of the day. The Union of 1707 had profound cultural effects on the nation, causing a dualism between the folk music encouraged by nationalists and European music which was seen as much less Scottish.\textsuperscript{206} The composition of art music declined and folk music rose, but with the collapse of patronage, even the market for folk music began to dry up.

Choral societies began to spring up in the middle of the nineteenth century due to the growing influence of musical standards in taste and performance of the Episcopal Church. It was not until the end of the century, however, that a group of truly Scottish composers began to create a new Scottish musical identity. Sir Alexander MacKenzie combined his German training with the influence of folk music in his cantatas and oratorios.\textsuperscript{207} Hamish MacCunn and Learmont Drysdale both had a strong current of national expression in their music, and were active during the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{208}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{204} Elliot.
\bibitem{205} Ibid.
\bibitem{206} Ibid.
\bibitem{208} Kenneth Elliot, et al., “Scotland.”
\end{thebibliography}
Composers who espoused more individualistic music of the classical European style were William Wallace and J. B. McEwen.

The twentieth century saw a great upswing of Scottish art music, but the composers still tended to fall on either side of the folk/art music line. Those that tended to fall on the traditional, folksong revival side were Robin Orr, Cedric Thorpe Davie, and Ronald Stevenson. Those that tended to fall on the art music side, complete with serialism and aleatory technique were Iain Hamilton, Thomas Wilson, and Thea Musgrave. Sir MacMillan commented on the overarching phenomenon of the integration of Scottish musical identity into contemporary art music.

…[C]omposers began to be interested in Scottish traditional music. Not in necessarily a kind of antiquarian way, not making a genuflection to the past, but in a way to rediscover what their roots were. But being composers they didn’t want to just put the music in inverted commas like a quotation mark, they started to do things with it. If you look at a lot of my colleague Scottish composers – people like Judith Weir and Peter Maxwell Davies in a sense, although he’s English he lives in Scotland, and William Sweeney and Edward McGuire, Lyell Creswell who’s a New Zealander who has settled in Scotland – they were composers who were fascinated by the Scottish tradition and made their own explorations in it. Sometimes you can hear the origins and it’s deliberately heard, but other times it was more a sense of a development taking a musical object trouvé, specifically from our own tradition and history, but making something new out of it. So there was a wide-spread interest in Scottish traditional music, not just from composers but in a popular sense as well over the last fifty years I would say.

The result is a diverse interpretation of Scottish musical identity, from the stereotypical bagpipes-and-tartan identity to more sophisticated nuance of Scottish folk music elements in contemporary concert music.

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209 Elliot.


211 Elliot.
Sir MacMillan and Scottish musical style

For his own part, Sir MacMillan has infused much of his work with the Scottish idioms discussed above. He says, “I grew up in Scotland, and can’t help but be affected by the experience of hearing music here, and Scottish traditional music, and making an evaluation of that kind of tradition, et cetera. But I always intermix, and that mix is a purely musical one in the end.”  

Yes, I am a composer from Scotland. For purely musical interest, the points worth mentioning are…just how the Scottish traditional repertoire and historical music feeds into the work of a living composer, and I’m not alone in that. There’s various composers that have picked up on the importance, and indeed the beauty, of the influence of traditional music.  

Born and raised in Scotland, Sir MacMillan has been steeped in the sound of Scottish music from his youth. His own words describe the experience this way,

...[P]eople especially in my generation, which might have been the last actually, grew up with the sound of Scottish music in the background. We learned to dance Scottish country dances at school...And I always thought that was a joyous experience, exciting, lighthearted. So I was always aware of Scottish country dance music, which is a very specific thing, not necessarily connected with the folk revival, all the traditional music revival. But it’s always been there, and it fuels social music making in Scottish communities, and has done. You would hear it in the radio, you’d hear your parents playing it either on a record or at the piano sometimes, but then it’s concurrent with the folk revival, which is a North American thing as much as a British thing. There was a rediscovery in Scotland of our Scottish roots, and a principled and sometimes academic study of what that music was and what it meant. You began to, in the nineteen seventies and there on, hear a lot of that music being brought back for concert purposes, folk music concerts and that sort of thing.

Being trained in Scotland and northern England, MacMillan chose to reside in Scotland and contribute to Scottish society and music. This decision has allowed him to have a voice as a Scottish composer, working in education and frequently being asked to give public statements or lectures. An earlier instance of his public voice was a lecture given at the Edinburgh Festival in 1999 entitled “Scotland’s Shame,” where he raised the topic of religious bigotry in Scotland toward Catholics, and a more recent instance was his article on the recent referendum in Scotland. The referendum of 2014 allowed Scottish citizens to vote on whether Scotland should remain a part of the United Kingdom or become a sovereign nation. Sir MacMillan’s article for the Scotsman titled, “Scottish independence essay: arts and the referendum,” garnered both praise and criticism prior to the vote. On the topic of the referendum almost a year later, he said,

“I found it very unpleasant. I didn’t enjoy it at all, and there’s still a bit of a residue from that. It was divisive, it led to friendships ending, it caused splits in families, and it may continue to do that. I tried to keep out of it, but it was hard. Eventually I had to write an article about nationalism and the arts for The Scotsman, which kind of flared up and it meant I was involved whether I wanted it or not. No, I wouldn’t like to repeat that experience.”

He has also occasionally drawn a much more direct connection in his music to Scotland through subject matter, like his opera The Confession of Isobel Gowdie, or the use of texts by Scottish poets.

There’s a piece called “So Deep,” which is a setting of “My Love Is like a Red Red Rose.” …There’s one that I thought was Burns, called “Lassie, wad you lo’e me?” Lassie would you love me, which is more anonymous, but it’s the same kind of linguistic style. There’s a piece, quite a big, through composed work which is an ode to Mary, Queen of Scots, which Burns wrote. It’s a big piece, using just five musicians though – two singers and a piano trio – so that that was the most, probably the most significant Burns setting I’ve done.


\[216\] Ibid.
I’ve written a couple of secular Scottish settings, some Burns. So in the way of the music the likes of Burns would have known and would have used to set his own words, because he found a lot of melodies. Some people even say that Robert Burns was a composer, that he wrote his own melodies. And he’s obviously from the same part of the world as I am, in Ayreshire. So there seems to be something deep in the cultural waters as it were that draws me back to the text but also an appropriate use of some of the Scottishisms that we’ve been talking about.217

MacMillan set William Soutar’s poem “The Tryst” in a Scots ballad style, and subsequently used it for melodic material in several future works, including St. Anne’s Mass (1985), Tryst (1989), and After the Tryst (1988).218 In After the Tryst, MacMillan takes the original melody and runs it through with many embellishments, which is the basic concept of traditional piobaireachds.219 The same technique is applied in a different way in The World’s Ransoming (1995-1996) when MacMillan writes embellishing grace notes into the plainsong melody.220

In other compositions Sir MacMillan has used Scotland as a visual inspiration rather than an auditory one. For example, in Piano Sonata (1985), he took inspiration from the scenery of Ayrshire.

I wrote my Piano Sonata during a bitter Ayrshire winter and recall the barren trees and hard frozen ground of a landscape that was empty and silent but for the harsh, hollow cry from the rookeries. This is reflected in the Sonata’s tolling, mournful chords, with its bursts of violent, or delicate and icy figuration. Throughout the three movements the music conveys a mood of elegy, of despair and desolation.221

219 Kingsbury, 34.
220 Kingsbury, 47.
221 Rolls, 29.
This was one of MacMillan’s last pieces in his academic, modernist style, and with *Litanies of Iron and Stone* in 1987, his music became much more accessible, and regularly began incorporating more traditional elements of Scottish music.\(^{222}\) While early in his career he made intentional choices towards a Scottish sound, he now uses traditional Scottish musical characteristics subtly, almost unconsciously. He said,

> It was very intentional and very conscious in the early days such as when I was writing *Isobel Gowdie*. But what I think has happened is that I’ve done it so much that it’s become subconscious and second nature, so that I do it almost without thinking. So I mean it’s part of my cultural make-up. As I was saying, I grew up with it in the background, and I’ve made a study of it. But I’ve done it so much that it becomes almost an unthinking process. So the influence is the Scottishness is subliminal; it’s under the skin now without having to think too much about it.\(^{223}\)

However subtle or unconscious the influence of traditional Scottish music, it is still a very real one. It can be found in the use of Scottish texts and musical forms, the use of modes and scales common in Scottish music, the presence of harmonic drones, and “the rhythmic, intervallic and ornamental archetypes of Scottish music.”\(^{224}\)

### “The Gallant Weaver”

“The Gallant Weaver” was commissioned by the University of Paisley for its centenary in 1997. It is an *a cappella* work for SATB divisi choir, although the soprano part, splitting into three voices frequently, could and often is performed by soloists. The text is by Scottish national poet, Robert Burns, and is in English throughout although there are several words in Scottish dialect. The piece runs about seven minutes long. The recommended recording is by the BBC Singers under the direction of John Scott, but this

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\(^{222}\) Rolls, 29.


\(^{224}\) Kingsbury, 179.
piece is also included on recordings by The Sixteen, The Elysian Singers, and The Mornington Singers, as well as various recordings by amateur and school choirs. The work was premiered on April 14, 1997 at Thomas Coats Memorial Church in Paisley, Scotland by The Choir of Paisley Abbey and conducted by George McPhee.

Robert Burns, national poet of Scotland, hailed from the same region of Scotland as Sir MacMillan. Burns was born on January 25, 1759, and Burns Day is still celebrated each year on the twenty-fifth of January with the reading of Burns poetry and a meal of haggis, neeps and tatties. His literary and poetic style was full of Scots dialect, social commentary, and traditional Scottish song. Burns poetry became a forerunner of the Romantic era, centering on the individual common man and a desire to create a better world, a fascination with nature and agriculture, and an emphasis on emotion and feeling.225

His personal life also looked much more like a tumultuous Romantic-era life than a refined, dignified life of the eighteenth century. He had twelve children, three of whom by women who were not his wife, and he regularly found himself at odds with the church.226 “The Gallant Weaver,” was written in 1791, the same year that a daughter was born to Helen Anne Park nine days before a son was born to Burns’ wife Jean Armour.227, 228 It was also in this year that Burns gave up a lease on his Ellisland farm in Dumfriesshire in order to work full time as an Exciseman in the town of Dumfries in the south of Scotland.


228 McGuirk, xxvi
“The Gallant Weaver” was written in first person from the perspective of a young woman thinking of the local young weaver with whom she is in love. Her father has engaged her to a young land owner, but she has sworn her love to the weaver and is choosing to marry him instead. Scots words proliferate the short poem, a marker of Burns’ style. The poem and a glossary of Scots words used in “The Gallant Weaver” is included in Appendix A.

The poem is written in two large stanzas divided into two smaller verses of four lines. Each stanza has three lines of iambic tetrameter, followed by one line of seven syllables. The rhyme scheme is \textit{aaabcccb dddbeeb}. These rhythmic and rhyme schemes make for fertile musical soil, and Sir MacMillan takes advantage of the form already laid out by the poet. Every fourth line, though not identical, is similar enough to be considered a return of the original. Each verse concludes fully before the next begins. The structure of the entire piece is melody-driven in the style of a folk song, even though the melody is an original composition by Sir MacMillan, but it was his intention to create a melody that could have been considered a folk melody.

[I]t’s original. But I deliberately tried to, when I write these original Scottish melodies, make it sound as if it might indeed be something that has existed for a long while, because I’ve sung and performed a lot of traditional Scottish music. I feel drawn to it, and there’s something about the folk melodic line that sits well in my subconscious somewhere. And I do think it’s quite a conscious thing sometimes to try to recreate it, and even confuse people so that they would think it was a traditional melody.\footnote{MacMillan, interview, July 20, 2015.}

The folk melodic line present in the A section of “The Gallant Weaver” consists of four phrases paired into two macro-phrases which ascend and descend. (See Figure 16) In
the B-section, Sir MacMillan brings in slight variations to the melody, occasionally inverting or expanding melodic intervals, and generally employing a higher tessitura.

Figure 16: “The Gallant Weaver” melody

This melodic scheme is easily found in a cursory search of other folk melodies, consistent with the purpose Sir MacMillan stated of wanting the melody to sound as though it could have been a folk song. (See Figures 17-19) The sampling of folk songs below demonstrates the ascending-descending melodic contour, as well as the variations in the B-section of each melody.

Figure 17: Soldier’s Joy

A

I am a son of Mars who have been in many wars, And show my cuts and scars wherever I come; This here was for a wench, and that other in a trench, When welcome the French at the sound of the drum. Lal de dudle, lal...

B section variation

A

D

dedudle, lal de dudle, lal de dudle, lal de dudle

lal de dudle, lal de dudle, lal de dudle.

Figure 18: Corn rigs are bonie

A

It was upon a Lammasnight, When corn rigs are bonie, Beneath the moon's unclouded light I held away to Annie: The time flew by, with tentless head, Till 'tween the late and early, Why

B section variation

A

D

sm' persuasion she agreed. To see me through the barley.

Corn rigs, an' barley rigs, An' corn rigs are bonnie: I'll ne'er forget that happy night A-mang the rigs wi' Annie.
Figure 19: Shawnboy

Come boat me o'er sea, Come boat me o'er to Charlie; I'll give John Ross another baw-bec To boat me o'er to Charlie; We'll o'er the water we'll o'er the sea, We'll o'er the water to Charlie; Come weal, come woe, we'll gather and go, And live or die wi' Charlie.

“The Gallant Weaver” concludes with an extension of the last line, followed by a rocking hum in the second soprano, an augmentation of the final line of the original melody. (See Figure 20)

Figure 20: “The Gallant Weaver” final line of A-section melody, and ending second soprano, augmented melody

I wanted it to sound like a traditional piece. I wanted it to have an echo of the modalities or the simplicities associated with Scottish folk music. Although it is actually quite complex, “The Gallant Weaver,” it takes the melody and weaves it like knot work as it were through three lines, three
women’s voices. So you do hear the melody, but it’s like heterophony if anything. It creates a texture. So it’s the texture rather than the melodic line that impacts more. But that texture is shaped by its particular Scottish modality.232

Sir MacMillan specifically cites the cross-section of melody and texture in “The Gallant Weaver.” The melody is initially presented by three soprano voices, either solos or divisi within the section. These three voices are in strict canon only for the first three phrases. From there the melody is passed through, in, and around the rest of the choir, tenors pairing with the sopranos, while altos and basses have slower, broader, countermelodies. This cross-section of melody and texture is worth examining. Sir MacMillan will often use the technique of imitative and crossing melodies in order to create a texture.

[C]horal textures is something that I’ve always been fascinated by, and always fascinated at how difficult it is to achieve a particular kind of texture, or sound coloring from choirs…it is a much more limited palette than an orchestral one. However, it’s that limitation that, in essence, is the provocation and inspiration for me to go up a little bit further and find new ways of getting sounds and more expression, more highlights, more innovation even, from choral works using techniques that can seem very, very simple compared to some of the complex and complicated instrumental techniques that other composers use.233

I still do this a lot with the melodic line you know, there is a canonic thing going on but it’s very simple, but it’s just staggering the sequence really. I find myself doing that a lot, it’s a way you can make a texture into a melody, it’s something that I’ve always found an attractive, an enjoyable thing to involve myself in, compositionally.234

This study of texture and layering in choral music was arguably one of the first compositional techniques the young MacMillan learned. His years with Bert Richardson

introduced him to the counterpoint of Bach, Palestrina, and others. Later, Gaelic psalm singing provided him a new angle on the same idea of melodic textural complexity.

I’ve always maintained looking back on it that the study of counterpoint was crucial for me, and I would imagine for most composers I think. Not that you need to absorb the styles if it was going to be your own but to absorb something of the principles of handling complexity. So Bach’s counterpoint, whether it be choral, or also the study of fugue was very important to me.235 So that study of counterpoint allowed me to see that it’s important in the way a composer handles complexity. It doesn’t need to be line against line, it could be idea against idea, layer against layer, rhythm against rhythm, tonality against tonality, the principles of this lie in the study of these figures, I think, from the past.236

In “The Gallant Weaver” specifically, there exists a direct connection between melodies intertwining and the actual craft of weaving. The piece was commissioned from an area of Scotland with a great history of weaving tradition. Sir MacMillan intentionally highlights this connection through the choice of text and through melodic and textural composition.

It was written for Paisley University, which is now called, it’s changed its name to University of the West of Scotland. And in the mid nineteen nineties it was based in Paisley, which is a town just south of Glasgow, an old weaving town. And it so it was written for some sort of graduation ceremony, and they invited one of the local Paisley choirs, (the abbey choir is very good) to come and sing it. So I was looking for a secular piece that would mark the occasion in a highly appropriate way, to take a poem very much associated with the traditions and the history of Paisley itself, the weaving industry, which would have been quite a major thing at that time.237

The tonal foundation of “The Gallant Weaver” is centered around E mixolydian, however, there are elements of ambiguity throughout the piece. The first occurs in the

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236 Ibid.

initial interval of the melody, an ascending perfect fourth, hinting at A major, followed by the climax of the melody in the third phrase, rising to an A. The second is a repetitive rocking between major chords in first inversion in the lower voices. The chords might suggest IV\(^6\) and V\(^6\) in A major, but there is never a cadence or resolution. Just as the rocking first inversion chords begin, the melody concludes with a descending 4-3-2-1 in E, which gives context to the chords being a major bVII\(^6\) and a major I\(^6\) and establishing E mixolydian. (See Figure 21)

Figure 21: “The Gallant Weaver” melody with underlying first inversion chords

The second half of the first stanza then emphasizes A major again with a pair of dominant seventh chords followed by minor ii\(^7\) and minor vi respectively, before the rocking first inversion chords re-appear. The whole process is repeated again from the beginning, concluding with a longer section of the rocking first inversion chords and finally

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ending on a b-minor chord before two soprano voices leave the listener with a sustained E and the augmented figure from the original melody. This ambiguity develops out of the natural instinct Sir MacMillan has for Scottish idiom and folk song.

I don’t think about modes in a very conscious way. I don’t have a chart of modes where I say, I’ll use this one. It’s really much more instinctive than that. It’s something that emerges from the compositional process, maybe thinking about the words, or if there are not words involved, the mood, and the feeling that is required. But it is a natural instinct, and it is one that seems to happen quite a lot. Even when I’m writing sacred works that are not necessarily specifically associated with Scotland. Certainly with something like “The Gallant Weaver,” it seemed a natural choice.

Another Scottish musical archetype is the Scotch snap, a rhythmic figure of a sixteenth note followed by a dotted eighth note in common time. This figure has been associated with Scottish music since the eighteenth century, but had origins in both English and Scottish song from 1675 and onwards. Sir MacMillan makes use of this exact rhythmic figure only once in the melody, however an augmented version appears several times. The early presence of the Scotch snap establishes this figure in the ear, and the augmented versions recall a more sedate, peaceful version of the same rhythm. (See Figure 22)

Figure 22: “The Gallant Weaver” Scotch snap and augmented snap

239 James MacMillan, interview, July 20, 2015

240 Nicholas Temperley and David Temperley, “Music-Language Correlations and ‘The Scotch Snap’”, *Music Perceptions: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol 29 No. 1 September 2011, p. 53. The authors note here that this rhythm is also sometimes referred to as the Lombard rhythm, popular in Italy in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Joachim Quantz called it the *lombardischen Geschmacht*, and wrote that it began in Italy in 1722, and “seems to resemble Scottish music.”

The slow unfolding melody is occasionally interrupted by Sir MacMillan’s signature ornamentations, and reflects back upon Gaelic psalm singing again. In Gaelic psalm singing a presenter will begin the melody and the congregation will follow at their own pace, adding their own imitations. In “The Gallant Weaver,” Sir MacMillan dictates what each voice will sing, but the effect is an imitative texture that hints at the free rhythm of Gaelic psalm singing. At its densest texture, there are two instances of half-note triples that add an extra layer to the texture Sir MacMillan intended to create.

[Knot work is] mentioned a lot in connection with Celtic design, and you can see the connections in music. There’s something about Gaelic psalm singing which has that similar sense of heterophany…It’s wonderful music where a presenter would lead off as a leader, and the congregation would follow him, but actually doing it in a very improvisational way. They would improvise on the line, and do their own ornamentation of line and that’s a fascinating thing for a composer. Lutoslawski did that all the time in his string music. So it’s kind of a canonic thing going on. And maybe the congregations in the western isles think they’re singing in unison, but they’re not, thankfully, because it wouldn’t be as interesting. You can hear the individual voices, maybe one will linger over a pitch, another will have his own form of ornamentation, and it just makes this incredible design, a bit like knot work, but it makes a texture out of the melody, which I think has been a big thing for me.242

The effectiveness of the musical knot-work Sir MacMillan creates rests in the economy of material he uses. He maintains simplicity in the melody, and does not stray too far in the development of it through the course of the piece. There is a sweetness in the uncomplicated piece — the written crescendos follow the natural contour of the melody, the first presentation of the melody is sung tranquillo by three sopranos high in their register, the first-inversion chords slowly rock back and forth. Sir MacMillan reflected on this compositional idea of simplicity by saying,

I’m beginning to find that the simplest options turn out to be the best. Pare everything down, in this case you could talk about melody and a sequence of chords repeating first inversion chords, basically that’s all there is. And I’m finding that, especially with choral music, if you can really force yourself to limit options down to basic principles you can communicate a lot more clearly.\footnote{James MacMillan, interview, July 20, 2015.}

The simple principles of “The Gallant Weaver,” highlight certain features of Scottish style. The text is able to be heard clearly, and the delivery of Burns’ poetry is of primary importance. The ornamental turns in the melody glisten and add to the folk quality of the melody. The drone-like chords in the lower voices create the feeling of the sustained Scottish drone, but the chord changes prevent the gesture from being heavy-handed. The melody hints at being pentatonic in the first phrase, but the presence of the G# and final D in the second phrase settles us in a folk mode.

Despite the simplicity in its composition, in practice there are many things that make it a challenging piece to tackle. The opening phrases are very high for the sopranos, whether sung by soloists or the whole section.\footnote{When asked his preference, Sir MacMillan said, “I’ve heard it mostly done with solos but sometimes not, depends on the choir you know. Good to be flexible.” James MacMillan, interview with the author, Glasgow, July 20, 2015.} The balance of registers for the supporting voices can be difficult, and the breath control for the long lines overall is quite a challenge as well. The dynamics never rise above a mezzo forte, and most of the time are piano.

It’s not easy to sing. And there’s always the little look of terror in those three girls’ faces because it’s very exposed. The other tricky thing about it is that the first inversion chords are very difficult to control, to make them measured in the same way so that the right kind of balance and weight against the lines above, so there’s got to be a lot of skillful control. They’re all low in their voices and to control the pitch is quite tricky, so it’s not an easy piece, but it seems to attract a lot of choirs, a lot of professionals and amateur choirs seem to want to do it.\footnote{James MacMillan, interview, July 20, 2015.}
In “The Gallant Weaver,” Sir MacMillan presents the listener with a piece that has challenge for seasoned singers, yet is as naturally pleasing as any folk tune. The interweaving of texture enhances the folk-style melody. Pentatonicism, ornamentations, dones, and Scotch snaps allude to a familiar folk style, and yet are just different enough to throw expectations.

**Sir James MacMillan and Scottish choral music**

The life of classical music in Scotland is evidenced in a variety of music festivals throughout the small country. The first Edinburgh International Festival in 1947, now the largest arts festival in the world, led to other prominent festivals, including the St. Magnus Festival, Mayfest, and Perth Festival of the Arts. In 1968, a project at the Scottish Music Archive in Glasgow (now the Scottish Music Information Centre) began to document Scotland’s music, and is still continuing to the present day. Sir MacMillan himself has begun a festival in his own hometown called The Cumnock Tryst.

[T]his is a new, and small festival that I’ve established in Ayreshire, in my old town, and we had the first one last year [2014], and the second one is this October – it will always be in every early October, the first extended weekend in October. And we bring some of the great musicians of the country and hopefully abroad to the place to perform. But there has to be a sense of ownership about it, so it’s imperative that local people are involved as much as possible...so that’s exciting for people, to be on the map culturally. It’s a little part of Scotland that’s been overlooked, it’s an area of multiple deprivation, it’s not where you expect an arts festival to happen, so that’s another impulse to do it. Why should people like that not have a festival where all the well-to-do, well-off areas of Scotland do get festivals?...So the people are actually enthused by being involved and active in the festival, there’s a lot of doing to be done in the community associated with this, it’s not just them receiving. They provide volunteers, so there’s a general excitement about it.  

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246 Elliot.

By his own words, Sir MacMillan acknowledges the influence Scottish music has had on his development as a musician and composer. At various times in his life he has made an intentional effort to incorporate Scottish elements into his works either through subject matter, text, or musical gesture. Now these features are a part of his subconscious, regularly giving a Scottish flavor to his music.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to describe the use of extra-musical themes in Sir James MacMillan’s choral works. A secondary purpose was to determine to what extent these themes align with the intention of the composer. This study has included insight from the composer himself into the works analyzed. There were two questions that focused this study.

1. Are the three themes of spirituality, Scottish identity, and social consciousness discussed in previous research on Sir James MacMillan acknowledged and affirmed by the composer?

2. Do these three themes apply to his choral works?

In answer to the first question, having spoken with the composer, the theme of spirituality, and in particular Catholic religion, is of utmost importance to Sir MacMillan as a composer and as a human. Of second importance is the theme of Scottish identity, exhibited in his compositional voice through Scottish musical archetypes. The third theme, social consciousness, while certainly evidenced in some earlier works, is not as important; or rather, social consciousness is not as important as a stand-alone value. It is the opinion of this researcher that this theme is the result of the motivations and values inherent in the combination of the first two, and a desire of the composer to bring together the heart and the head in all things, but particularly his music. It is the combination of values, history, and motivations that contribute to the unique personhood of Sir MacMillan.

The English Catholic literary giant J. R. R. Tolkien once wrote about his Lord of the Rings:

One writes such a story not out of the leaves of trees still to be observed, nor by means of botany and soil-science; but it grows like a seed in the
dark out of the leaf-mould of the mind: out of all that has been seen or thought or read, that has long ago been forgotten, descending into the deeps. No doubt there is much selection, as with a gardener: what one throws on one’s personal compost-heap; and my mould is evidently made largely of linguistic matter.248

There is a growing and maturing in every individual’s life that produces a synthesis, a composite of what has been sown into the plot of their mind and heart. Sir James MacMillan composes out of the same process. Early on in this process, the pieces of the composite are more solid, definable. Sir MacMillan knew, consciously, that he wanted to make *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* sound Scottish. He composed, intentionally, *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* with traces of liturgical music. There certainly were many extra-musical, or even pre-musical inspirations behind a lot of the music that I used to write. For example, I mentioned that *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*, it’s a kind of tone poem, and in some ways quite a traditional formula that’s come straight from the nineteenth century that was an attempt to paint some kind of picture, or tell a story even, and sound, which is a Romantic notion, I suppose. I was aware at the time of writing that it may have been anachronistic for a composer in the late twentieth century to do such a thing, maybe, I’ll leave that for others to decide, but certainly the idea of responding to a story and that was a particular historical event or process which certainly sparked something off in the writing process, so it obviously works. It’s not just me who says that, and composers quite clearly have been influenced by very different things, the strangest things, throughout history, and particularly in their own time that might have nothing to do with music…in fact one of my more recent pieces is called *Woman of the Apocalypse* is a big orchestral piece again, inspired by images from the apocalypse.249

I must admit that I’m getting much more interested in writing abstract music when it comes to orchestral and instrumental music. So there are things like the *Fourth Symphony*, which is being done at the PROMS soon, the third of August, the *Second Percussion Concerto*. The first percussion concerto is called *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, so there’s a whole range of extra-musical dimensions there to do with theology and liturgy and so on, but the second piece is just called *Second Percussion Concerto*, so I suppose there’s an indication there that something’s changed, although I didn’t really notice it

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changing. But I do notice a lot of my pieces called Third String Quartet or Horn Quintet, that sort of thing.\textsuperscript{250}

The organic growth of these newer compositions reflect a maturation of style in Sir MacMillan. The components are still there, but have been deconstructed in his subconscious to produce original works with certain flavors, the strongest of which are his Catholic spirituality and Scottish identity. Alongside both of these elements is a desire for an amalgamation of heart and head that is of great value to Sir MacMillan.

There has to always be this internal dialogue between the head and the heart, you can’t really have one without the other. And I see a lot of composers who are overbalanced one or the other. If the heart reigns, and there’s no intellectual rigor supplying the backbone to that music, the whole thing can collapse in ah a mess of heart-on-sleeve indulgence, whereas if you do have something profound and indeed emotional to communicate, you’ve got to have the intellectual tools to do it. Similarly, if one simply sees music as an abstract form akin to mathematics and architecture and design, then one of the great problems of a lot of modern music is that it follows a rather arid path into the closed world of the academy. And fences went round; that fencing that would be the purely intellectual and academic study of contemporary music. Both seem to be overbalanced one over the other. If there could be some fusion of the heart and the head, then I think that’s the way forward. And the music that I like of my time is quite clearly being undertaken and written by composers who have realized that. Maybe they’d get it wrong sometimes, but have tried to fuse some sort of amalgam of what the intellect is capable of in musical terms, and what the human heart is capable of communicating in human terms too.\textsuperscript{251}

In answer to the second question, then, these themes of Catholic spirituality and Scottish identity are present in Sir MacMillan’s choral works, and early on they were quite overt. These concrete elements begin to decompose over time into the “leaf-mould” described by Tolkien. Sir MacMillan describes it in various ways, using words like “instinctive,” and “subconsciously” throughout our interviews. He said, “liturgy’s

\textsuperscript{250} MacMillan, interview, July 17, 2015.

\textsuperscript{251} MacMillan, interview, July 21, 2015.
something I’m quite at ease with so I kind of know my way around it,” and “I suppose I have an instinctive feel for what a natural theatrical and dramatic span might be.”

For the future, Sir MacMillan rarely looks far ahead. As he continues to write, and write increasingly for choral ensembles, he looks for listeners with an open mind. These listeners will have minds open to new aural experiences, and they will have hearts ready to engage things that deeply matter to one another.

I never think beyond the recent piece. I have some plans, and I’ve got plans and ambitions to write certain pieces over the next few decades but beyond that I’m not sure. And in a sense I think it’s a mistake to try to second guess your audience. The audience is made up of individuals, all from very, very different experiences of music, contemporary music, classical music. Very different views of what works and what doesn’t; however, that’s not to say that composers should not have some kind of ideal listener in mind. And that ideal listener I think is someone who is hungry and open and thirsty for experiences they’ve not yet had in music. Now that’s tricky in what is, essentially, a museum culture. Classical music is a museum culture. We’ve talked, and we will always talk about the music that is important to us and that is from the deep, deep past. There’s nothing wrong with that but if the culture is to continue it has to have a living soul and it needs people who are hungry to hear things they haven’t heard before. And composers tend to be like that. I’ve grown up with composers who are desperate to hear the newest thing or to try something that no one else has tried before, and sometimes you don’t meet…people like that in the general audience…But I think if you meet people who can overcome that and are genuinely curious, and indeed excited about the unknown, then that’s a person you can engage with.

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254 Ibid.
### APPENDIX A
#### TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Gallant Weaver</strong></th>
<th><strong>Scots Dialect</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where Cart rins rowin to the sea,</td>
<td>Rins: pole or cross-bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By mony a flow’r and spreading tree,</td>
<td>Mony: many</td>
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<tr>
<td>There lives a lad, the lad for me,</td>
<td>Lad: young man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is the gallant Weaver.</td>
<td>Auhgt: eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh I had wooers aught or nine,</td>
<td>Gie/Gied: give/gave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They gied me rings and ribbons fine,</td>
<td>Tine: go astray, lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I was feared my heart would tine,</td>
<td>Tocher-band: marriage settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I gied it to the Weaver.</td>
<td>Simmer: summer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My daddie sign’d the tocher-band
To gie the lad that has the land,
But to my heart I’ll add my hand,
And give it to the Weaver.
While birds rejoice in leafy bowers;
While bees delight in op’ning flowers;
While corn grows green in simmer showers,
I love my gallant Weaver.
1. The arrest of Jesus

Jesus went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley where there was a garden which
he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus
often met there with his disciples. So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers
from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them,

‘Whom, whom do you seek?’

They answered him,

‘Jesus of Nazareth.’

Jesus said to them,

‘Ego eimi.’

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

When he said to them, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them,

‘Whom, whom do you seek?’

And they said,

‘Jesus of Nazareth.’

Jesus answered them,

‘I told you that I am he; so, if you seek me, let these men go their way, go their way.’

This was to fulfill the word which he had spoken, ‘Of these whom you gave me have I lost
not one.’ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s slave and
cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter,
‘Put, put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?

\[\text{Accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes:} ~ \text{hoc est enim corpus meum quod provobis tradetur. Accipite et bibite ex eo omnes: hic est enim calix sanguinis mei novi et aeterna testamenti, qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum, hoc facite in meam commemorationem.}\]

Take, eat this all of you, for this is my body which is given for you. Take, drink this all of you, for this is the cup of my blood of the new and everlasting covenant, which shall be shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.

2. Jesus before Annas and Caiaphas. Peter disowns him

So the band of soldiers and their captain and their officers seized Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had given counsel that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in. The maid who kept the door said to Peter,

‘Are you not also one of this man’s disciples?’

And he said,

‘I am not.’

Now the servants and officers made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves; Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself. The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him,
‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why, do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said.’

When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, ‘Is that how you answer the high priest?’

Jesus answered him,

If I, if I have spoken wrongly, if I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?’

Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him,

‘Are you not also one of his disciples?’

He denied it and said,

‘I am not.’

One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked him,

‘Did I not see you in the garden with him?’

Peter again denied it; and at once the cock crowed.

_Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam._
You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church

3. Jesus before Pilate
Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was early, and they themselves did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said,

‘What accusation do you bring against this man?’
They answered him,
‘If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over.’

Pilate said to them,
‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.’

The Jews said to him,
‘It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.’

This was to fulfill the word which Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die.

Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him,
‘Are you the King of the Jews?’

Jesus answered him,
‘Do, you say this of your own accord, or did others say it, or did others say it about me?’

Pilate answered him,
‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?
Jesus answered him,
‘My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews, but my kingship is not from the world.’

Pilate said to him,
‘So you are a king?’

Jesus answered him,
‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Ev’ryone who is of the truth hears my voice.’

Ego eimi.
Pilate said to him,

‘What is truth?’

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again, and told them,

‘I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?’

They cried out again,

‘Not this man, but Barabbas!’

Now Barabbas was a robber. Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple robe; they came up to him, saying,

‘Hail! King of the Jews!’

And struck him with their hands.

Pilate went out again, and said to them,

‘See, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him.’

So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them,

‘Behold, the man!’

When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out,

‘Crucify him!’

Pilate said to them,

‘Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him.’

The Jews answered him,

‘We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.’
When Pilate heard these words, he was the more afraid; he entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus,

‘Where are you from?’

But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate therefore said to him,

‘You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have pow’r to release you, and pow’r to have you crucified?’

Jesus answered him,

‘You would have no pow’r over me unless it had been giv’n to you from above; therefore he who deliver’d me to you has the greater sin.’

Judas, the vile merchant, sought out the Lord with a kiss; he, like an innocent lamb, refused not the kiss of Judas: for a few coins he delivered Christ to the Jews. It had been better for him if he had never been born.

4. Jesus is condemned to death

Upon this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out,

‘If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend; ev’ryone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.’

When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgement seat at a place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now, it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews,

‘Behold, your king!’

They cried out,

‘Away with him, crucify him’

Pilate said to them,
'Shall I crucify your king?'

The chief priests answered,

'We have no king but Caesar.'

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

_Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato passus et sepultus est._ He was crucified for us: He suffered under Pontius Pilate and was buried.

**Part II**

5. The crucifixion

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross to the place called the place of a skull, which is in Hebrew Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate,

'Do not write “The King of the Jews”, but “This man said I am King of the Jews.”'

Pilate answered,

'What I have written, I have written.'

_Astiterunt reges terrae et principes convenerunt in unum adversus Dominum et adversus Christum eius._ The kings of the earth have stood up, and princes have met together, against the Lord, and against his anointed.

6. Christ’s garments divided
When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; and also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another,

‘Let us not tear it but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.’

This was to fulfill the scripture, ‘They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.’ So the soldiers did this.

*Peccantem me quotidie et non me paenitentem, timor mortis conturbat quia in inferno nulla est redemption miserere mei Deus et salva me!*

While I am sinning every day, and yet do not repent, the fear of death overwhelms me, for in hell there is no redemption. Have mercy on me, God, and save me.

7. Jesus and his Mother

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother,

‘Woman, behold your son,’

Then he said to his disciple,

‘Behold, your mother!’

Luly, lulla.

And from that house the disciple took her to his home.

*Stabat Mater dolorosa Juxta crucem lacrimosa Dum pendebat Filius. Cujus animam gementem. Con tristatem et dolentem, Per transivit gladius. O quam tristis et afflictis Fuit illa benedicta Mater Unigeniti!*

The grieving Mother stood beside the cross weeping where her Son was hanging. Through her weeping soul, compassionate and grieving, a sword passed. O how sad and afflicted was that blessed Mother of the Only-begotten!

Lully lulla., my dear darling

Fiat mihi
Be it done to me…

Lullalay, lully, lulla

My son, my boy, your sacred head is wounded.

8. The Reproaches

My people, What have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!

I led you out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom, but you led your Saviour to the cross.

_Hagios o Theos, Sanctus Deus, _
_Hagios Ischyros Sanctus Fortis, _
_Hagios Athanatos, eleison hymnas. _
_Sanctus Immortalis miserere nobis._

Holy is God, Holy is God,
Holy and strong, Holy and strong,
Holy immortal One, have mercy on us,
Holy immortal One, have mercy on us.

For forty years I led you through the desert. I fed you with manna from heaven and brought you to a land of plenty; but you led your Saviour to the cross.

_Hagios o Theos…_

What more could I have done for you? I planted you as my fairest vine, but you yielded only bitterness: when I was thirsty you gave me vinegar to drink, and you pierced your Saviour with a lance.

_Hagios o Theos…_

For your sake I scourged your captors and their firstborn sons, but you brought your scourges down on me.

My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!
I led you from slavery to freedom, and drowned your captors in the sea, but you handed me over to your high priests. I open’d the sea before you, but you open’d my side with a spear.

I led you on your way in a pillar of cloud, but you led me to Pilate’s court. I bore you up with manna in the desert, but you struck me down and scourged me. I gave you saving water from the rock but you gave me gall and vinegar to drink. For you I struck down the kings of Canaan, but you struck down my head with a reed. I gave you a royal scepter, but you gave me a crown of thorns. I raised you to the height of majesty, but you have raised me high on a cross.

9. The death of Jesus

*Christus factus est pro nobis Obediens usque ad mortem Mortem autem crucis*

Christ became obedient for us unto death, even unto death on a cross.

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture),

‘I thirst.’ A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop

And held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, ‘It is finished.’

And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

10. Sanctus Immortalis, miserere nobis

NO TEXT
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION 1

Friday, July 17; 2:00 p.m.

A: Well hello, Sir MacMillan, thank you so much for having me here. I’d like to just jump in and talk right about choral music and you. Can you tell me a bit about singing with Bert Richardson’s choir?

M: Oh, well, that’s going back, a bit; just call me James. Well, I mean Bert was my classroom teacher way back in the nineteen seventies in Ayrshire in a little place called Cumnock. Recently I’ve established a festival back there because it was a very important place for me growing up, lots of music happening and it’s nice to be able to go back. It’s a tiny little place, it’s only about ten thousand in the town, maybe now a few thousand round about. So the school was, well it seemed big at the time, but looking back it must have seemed a small country school, but he loved choral music and he himself introduced a lot of the important repertoire to me and to my colleagues and friends at the school who sang a lot of early polyphony, some Bach, some Telemann, et cetera. I think it was very important for me, both, not just in a general musical sense, but switching my own mind onto writing choral music.

A: So what other choral works of other composers have meant something to you? You mentioned Bach and Telemann, any specific works jump out to you?
M: Well, I remember at the time, working with Bert on one of the prescribed scores for our studies, I think it was for A-level course, was Bach’s *Magnificat*, so, as far as the Bach is concerned, that is very prominent in my mind, and the two Passions but also some of the cantatas as well. I’ve always maintained looking back on it that the study of counterpoint was crucial for me, and I would imagine for most composers I think. Not that you need to absorb the styles if it was going to be your own but to absorb something of the principles of handling complexity. So Bach’s counterpoint, whether it be choral, or also the study of fugue was very important to me. And the earlier contrapuntalists like Palestrina who figures in much of the curriculum, and it’s how you learn your species counterpoint when you study Palestrina. But also for me it was people like Byrd who became a very important figure for me, for lots of other reasons. Gibbons. Probably through Byrd and Gibbons some of the earlier British contrapuntalists, Tallis, the Eaton Choirbook people, and people like the Scots, Robert Carver and so on who were to come to mean a lot. So that study of counterpoint allowed me to see that it’s important in the way a composer handles complexity. It doesn’t need to be line against line, it could be idea against idea, layer against layer, rhythm against rhythm, tonality against tonality, the principles of this lie in the study of these figures, I think, from the past.

A: You mentioned Byrd then, just having some other reasons behind why that became powerful to you?

M: Byrd, Tallis. But I think Byrd as a Catholic composer writing in England at a very difficult time. For Catholics, it’s amazing even today to think that the four, three, and five
part masses were written for secret use, and if you were found carrying a copy you could be arrested at the time, if you were seen with the score. And that has resonances today, not just for Catholics, but for Christians who increasingly, maybe not so much in the West yet, find themselves in situations of persecution. But he is a kind of a beacon figure for a Catholic composer, especially in this country that he followed his faith unto near death, that when a lot of his compatriots and co-religious would be put to death because of their faith. So that’s the kinds of extra-musical reasons that support it.

A: What do you remember about your earliest choral works?

M: Well, the first piece of choral music I wrote was a Missa Brevis, which I kind of forgot about and left in in a drawer, until I discovered it. I didn’t completely forget about it, but I came across it in recent years and I’ve published it, I’ve given it to Boosey & Hawkes, so that’s my Missa Brevis. I was seventeen when I wrote that, in fact the Sanctus was sung at school with a group of friends. I remember singing it and conducting it, and so when I hear that, the Sanctus in particular, it takes me back to studying with Bert Richardson.

A: Do you think about choral music differently from composing other works?

M: I suppose so. In some ways, there are different, more subtle attributes to choral music, but you sometimes don’t notice outside the choral world. But having worked with choirs and singers all my life I begin to know the little things that work for choirs that don’t
seem very important perhaps, objectively to people outside the choral world, but the tiniest little thing can make such a difference to texture and even practical things.

A: Could you give me some examples?

M: Yes. I’m writing stuff just now there’s a couple of sketches up there for some motets and I’m thinking in particular about how to get words over, I suppose you can see, “I saw water” is the text, and I’m very keen to get those words across, but I’m wanting to portray water in the other voices, so the tenors and basses will sing those open fifths. But the altos and sopranos, and I’ll write it using ad libitum scoring, not so much improvise in those flowing lines, but they will sing them freely and individually so that the lines are kind of tumbling, watery lines will actually create a texture. And choral textures is something that I’ve always been fascinated by, and always fascinated at how difficult it is to achieve a particular kind of texture, or sound coloring from choirs. Because in essence they are, it is a much more limited palette than an orchestral one. However, it’s that limitation that in essence is the provocation and inspiration for me to go up a little bit further and find new ways of getting sounds and more expression, more highlights, more innovation even, from choral works using techniques that can seem very, very simple compared to some of the complex and complicated instrumental techniques that other composers use. So I suppose I’m aware of another dimension in choral music. I still think that the same compositional and creative instinct is at work but there are some technical approaches that have to be different.
A: It seems like over the past ten, fifteen years there’s been much more of your choral music published than previously. Is there any particular reason why that’s the case?

M: There’s more of it now than ever before. I’ve settled into a groove of writing quite a lot of choral music. It does come very naturally to me, very fluidly and fluently so people have caught on to this and they ask me for pieces. And they usually ask me for little pieces, you know pieces between three minutes, five minutes, seven minutes, and I like doing that. They kind of punctuate the bigger pieces. I’m writing a Stabat Mater just now, for The Sixteen, it’s a big piece. But I’ve stopped work on it just to concentrate on these little motets. There’s five possible motets and it’s almost as if that when you stop a big piece, there’s a kind of bubble over or a kind of echo ah that still needs to be addressed in some way and can be tackled in a smaller piece like these little pieces.

A: Do you find doing those little pieces helps clear your mind to go back to the big piece later on?

M: I think so. Yes, and sometimes there can be connections. I think there’s some, for example there’s harmonic process that is common to both the first of these and something I’ve been doing in the Stabat Mater. So they kind of cross-fertilize.

A: Ah, so what is the process of selecting texts for you?
M: Well, usually for choral music, the people who ask me to write them have a very clear idea of what they want it for, so I would say most of the time the text is usually suggested by the commissioner like the Stabat Mater. These five texts here are being written for the dedication of a chapel, a newly built chapel which will open in December, and there’s a very specific liturgy to go with that, which I didn’t know anything about. Most people have never been to dedications of chapels, so a little bit of digging was required, and I required the help of the priest who will be coordinating it so he’s put together the five moments that I’ve been required to write music for. The first one, for example, you can just have a look at it actually, is the entrance to the church then there’s a blessing and sprinkling of the water. And some of them are particular versicles that are associated with those parts of the liturgy, and so on. So that kind of thing can happen.

I had a piece done at the St. Alban’s festival organ festival on Wednesday night, and I had free reign of that choice but the context was music from very early days, and mostly UK, mostly from Columba’s Iona, and of course Columba, Saint Columba, was a poet in the seventh century, and a lot of his words were being sung in the original or affected chant lines so I went to those sources and found a text by Columba or some of his monks that would suit, so I chose that one. So usually if there’s a liturgical reason it’s something we come to negotiation about what the text might be, but I mean, liturgy’s something I’m quite at ease with so I kind of know my way around it. If it’s not liturgical or if it’s secular then it can be other reasons. I’ve set lots of strange texts, some secular love poems, and there’s a piece called *After Virtue*, which basically the last paragraph of Al-Alasdair MacIntyre’s book on moral philosophy, and no one asked me to set that. No one thought of it, would have even thought about it, least of all the author Alasdair
MacIntyre. It’s a piece of prose, philosophy really, but I set that to music, and it’s an unusual piece but it’s something that I’ve very pleased with.

A: So when you’re looking back over your career, can you see different periods or is it, do you see it as much more graded and smooth transitions?

M: I don’t see it as different periods yet, I see it as a continuum. I don’t notice things changing, but I do realize that things have changed, or do change, but it’s more to do with a kind of gradual evolution of style and technique and priorities.

A: When do you feel like you began to find your voice as a composer?

M: Yesterday? Ah, it’s hard to say, really. I mentioned this Missa Brevis that I wrote when I was seventeen, when I re-found it, like thirty years later, I was actually quite impressed with it, in the sense that I knew my way around the choir, in a simple way I suppose. Maybe there was something then, that was the seedbed of things to come. Nevertheless there are certain pieces of music that seemed to begin things for me. And the period at the end of the nineteen eighties that seemed to have been quite important, that’s when I wrote pieces like The Confession of Isobel Gowdie which was a piece commissioned by the PROMS and which has to be said has been a major, was a major event for me, perhaps because broadcast widely and it was on television in the UK it seemed to lead to other things. But there was certainly a kind of renewed energy about my music. I remember thinking round about that time when there was a lot of music
being written, a big piano concerto which turned out to be the first of three so far, called *The Berserking*, a piece called *Tryst* which is an orchestral piece, it kind of kick-started me into a number of directions, so it was a very fertile time for me, looking back.

A: You mentioned that you can’t see it changing but you notice that things have changed. What do you see as something that has changed over time?

M: Things that have changed. Well, I suppose the big issue about language. I’m probably not the best person to answer the question but you know there’s been a moving in and out of tonality but it’s not time-specific. There are times in the nineteen eighties when I could, looking back, see my music was going in certain directions and influenced by certain modernist composers like Lutoslawski, and Berio, and so on. And there are other times where I felt their influences and impact on the wane more. I suppose the ongoing debate that composers have with themselves or amongst themselves is always about (certainly in the last fifty or sixty years) tonality, and how valid is tonality? How do we deal with the claims of Schoenberg and so on who thought that tonality had exhausted itself? How do we cope with that? Do we take on board, do we ignore it? We all react in different ways, sometimes very different ways within the same composer over a period of time. So I suppose the necessity that choral music has to be rooted, much more rooted for practical reasons, in a modality perhaps, and certainly in a tonality. Those tonalities and modalities are there as well in orchestral music but I can afford to stretch the layered effect of tonalities more so than in the choral music. So it’s all to do with an attitude to complexity and tonal complexity when one weaves between tonality and the absence of
tonality. That hasn’t answered the question, right? I still find myself going back to the simplest solutions sometimes, and yet some of the other pieces there are very complex passages too.

A: So from time to time you’ve removed some pieces from publication. What sort of thing precipitates you deciding to, that this piece will no longer be in publication?

M: Couple of things. I mean actually, there’s not much that’s been removed, but basically I didn’t think they were competent for one reason or another. Or in the case of one piece that used an electric acoustic component, that simply the technology had moved on and had left the piece looking kind of jaded and aged. Having used computer technology in the nineteen eighties, and I wasn’t very good at it. So it’s withdrawn, but there were instrumental parts in it, so I might actually go back to it, to find maybe another way of doing it that doesn’t require technology.

A: Certain authors have identified extra-musical themes in your composition, do you see any of those being, um, or do you see any extra musical things coming into play when you start writing?

M: There certainly were many extra-musical, or even pre-musical inspirations behind a lot of the music that I used to write. For example, I mentioned that *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*, it’s a kind of tone poem, and in some ways quite a traditional formula that’s come straight from the nineteenth century that was an attempt to paint some kind of
picture, or tell a story even, and sound, which is a Romantic notion, I suppose. I was aware at the time of writing that it may have been anachronistic for a composer in the late twentieth century to do such a thing, maybe, I’ll leave that for others to decide, but certainly the idea of responding to a story and that was a particular historical event or process which certainly sparked something off in the writing process, so it obviously works. It’s not just me who says that, and composers quite clearly have been influenced by very different things, the strangest things, throughout history, and particularly in their own time that might have nothing to do with music. Having said all that, and also I never want to give up on the idea of tone poem, in fact one of my more recent pieces is called *Woman of the Apocalypse* is a big orchestral piece again, inspired by images from the apocalypse, I must admit that I’m getting much more interested in writing abstract music when it comes to orchestral and instrumental music. So there are things like the *Fourth Symphony*, which is being done at the PROMS soon, the third of August, the *Second Percussion Concerto*. The first percussion concerto is called *Veni Veni Emmanuel*, so there’s a whole range of extra-musical dimensions there to do with theology and liturgy and so on, but the second piece is just called *Second Percussion Concerto*, so I suppose there’s an indication there that something’s changed, although I didn’t really notice it changing. But I do notice a lot of my pieces called *Third String Quartet* or *Horn Quintet*, that sort of thing.

A: So do you see yourself as having a mission as a composer, do you see yourself has having a particular purpose in your role as a composer?
M: I don’t think so. I really don’t know what motivates me, to be honest. But that motivation has always been there. It’s a kind of itch in my soul that needs to be activated, and it was there right from the first day I was given an instrument. I wanted to write and create music; didn’t know what that would mean though, when I was ten, didn’t know how it would impact, but certainly that desire to write music would be there, whether I had a role or a mission or not. Having been a composer all these years you do kind of track a sense of how you relate to your culture and sometimes it can be quite depressing, because the popular culture has pushed the serious arts, nevermind music, to the periphery, and it can seem anachronistic to the general public that there is such a thing as a concert composer. “Hasn’t all the best music been written?”, goes the idea. And I suppose for people who don’t go to concerts, there’s no other reason why they would think otherwise. But I’ve always been interested in composers who did try to engage with their community, and there’s been a particular strain in British composers over the last hundred years that has prioritized that in different ways. When you think about Ralph Vaughan Williams through to Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett and Peter Maxwell Davies they used to write for their communities, their congregations, they would write for children, they’d write for amateurs, workers collectives. They would set up festivals in places that they felt associated with, or felt dear to them. Aldeburgh, or in the case of Maxwell Davies up in Orkney, for me it’s this place Ayreshire. I mean, it’s not a sense of mission, but there’s a sense of trying to reengage with communities you feel you have common roots with. So I do not write a lot of music for children, I do write a lot of music for church choirs; writing music for congregations has been an ongoing fascination for me. I think it’s good that a composer can be useful, and that doesn’t downgrade the art in
any way. Because a lot of people would think that, and I have a lot of discussions with my colleagues in mainland Europe for example who, for whom that tradition doesn’t really exist and they think it’s a lesser task, a lesser art, to write for an amateur chorus, for example. Or, whereas the British way has not been that, it’s been, to see it as a particular kind of thing, very different from some of the other things we do, but no less valuable, and not necessarily unrelated to all the other things we do.

A: There’s been a lot of older influence in your music, chant having been a particular influence. In talking about bringing concert music to modern audiences, how does something like chant still carry weight and power, or does it at all?

M: I don’t think I use old techniques, but as you say I am very interested in the older music, and it’s an attitude of mind, I think that that regards music, and indeed culture as a kind of continuum through history. And there was a time, maybe fifty, sixty, seventy years ago, or maybe even a little bit older, where composers and many involved in the arts, and indeed culture generally and philosophy and politics thought that the links to the past were going to stop, and perhaps should stop. Because if you think about it what happened in in Europe especially after 1945, there must have been a feeling that culture had come to an end, that the world, our culture had been a failure and led directly to the Third Reich and the Holocaust, and you can understand all these young idealist people wanting to begin again sometimes from scratch, untainted by a culture, a civilization that ended in Auschwitz. So you can imagine that it would have been a rational and understandable view to see previous culture, previous music even, as tainted in some
way, and that they had to begin again, so they began with a blank canvas in all things, not just music. You can see the desire to begin from scratch in many aspects of our life, but it was a mistake. And a nihilistic mistake to see culture as being debased and broken in that way. Whereas, I think an artist like myself would prefer to see a continuum through history, and for our culture, so that you recognize the past as important. Yes, there have been some wrong turnings politically and so on, but the past has great lessons for us, and culture we can absorb so much from the past and perhaps remake it in new ways. But if you put a dam up in history, if you actually build a dam to keep everything not flowing, you parch the land. And that parching of our culture has been disastrous. And so I am much more open to a continuum of the past such as it could be chant, it could also be the principles of sonata form, for example, or something that is clearly of great value and substance that can be continued. I suppose a respect for tradition in music and other things has been something that has driven me.

A: To what extent do symbolism or semiotics come into play in your compositions?

M: Sometimes. Ah there are deliberate things, deliberate signals made in the music, although it’s quite hard to do that actually. One of the, the funniest pieces, the most humorous pieces I’ve written is full of signs and symbols – it’s an organ concerto called *A Scotch Bestiary*, and it’s a kind of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, *Enigma Variations*, *Carnival of the Animals* type of thing. So deliberate attempts to portray animals, but actually they are rather humans in animal form, bit like what Disney and Warner Bros. do. In fact, I wrote it for the opening of the organ in Disney Hall in California, so that
was the reason it’s kind of cartoon music. If you listen to cartoon music that’s full of
signals and signs and deliberate, quite simple picture painting, and it’s quite fun to do
that. Beyond that, I don’t know – how would you?

A: Well, ah, some composers have talked about there being certain emotions tied to
different modes, or certain effects and I just wondered what you might think about that.

M: I don’t think of that consciously. I think it’s something that may happen
subconsciously.

A: Alright. Could you speak about your recent award of knighthood?

M: Well, it was a big surprise. Astonishing really, we didn’t expect it. But, I’m greatly
honored. It’s a very, very happy thing to have happened, it doesn’t happen in music very
often to be honest, in classical music. So with the goodwill I’ve had from fellow
musicians and those involved in music, I realize that it does mean something and I feel
it’s a recognition that classical music still matters to British culture.

A: Right. You mentioned earlier in this interview, and also in your public statement about
the Cumnock Tryst, could you tell me a little bit more about what you’re doing with
them?
M: Well this is a new, and small festival that I've established in Ayreshire, in my old
town, and we had the first one last year, and the second one is this October – it will
always be in every early October, the first extended weekend in October. And we bring
some of the great musicians of the country and hopefully abroad to the place to perform.
But there has to be a sense of ownership about it, so it’s imperative that local people are
involved as much as possible. And not just being, I mean they love coming to the
concerts. We had The Sixteen last year for our first concert, we’ve got The King’s
Singers this year, Nicola Benedetti is our patron, and she performed last year, she’ll be
performing again next year. I’m involved in inviting some great musicians to come
perform for us, so that’s exciting for people, to be on the map culturally. It’s a little part
of Scotland that’s been overlooked, it’s an area of multiple deprivation, it’s not where
you expect an arts festival to happen, so that’s another impulse to do it. Why should
people like that not have a festival where all the well-to-do, well-off areas of Scotland do
get festivals? So we go into schools, we perform for schools, we get school children to
write music that we then perform, we form the festival chorus, they will perform with the
professional performers, we’ll do an inaugural concert this year with the Faure Requiem.
So the people are actually enthused by being involved and active in the festival, there’s a
lot of doing to be done in the community associated with this, it’s not just them receiving.
They provide volunteers, so there’s a general excitement about it. It’s a small thing, and
may remain small. I’m quite happy for it to remain small because even small festivals
cost a lot of money, and that’s been a big learning curve for me, as someone who’s never
really thought about money very much now has to plan and cost things, and badger
people for money.
Interview, Monday, July 20, 2015 2:00 p.m.

A: I want to start out with a few basic questions again. What works of your own have been either a landmark or defining moments for you?

M: It’s difficult to say, really, because sometimes at the time you feel as if there’s an important piece that has changed things in one way or another, and sometimes later you realize that there are other things that are important, that kind of have a longer beginning as it were. *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* I think we mentioned it the other day is a piece that seemed to bring my music to a lot of people’s attention because my music wasn’t really known until then beyond Scotland, and the broadcast of the work at the PROMS, the television, televising of it seemed to kick-start a process which led to other things so I still see that as a very important piece. There are other pieces that have taken a longer time to build something like *Seven Last Words from the Cross*, it did seem a big piece at the time, but it was only gradually I began to realize that the piece was being performed a lot, mostly Easter time or during Holy Week, and in very different places. I think Mitos [Andaya] for example, did her doctoral studies in that, and people like Mitos pioneered the piece and did the early performances of it in the United States, and it’s now quite a regular happening to have it performed there and elsewhere.
A: So some authors have classified your works into three categories: Catholicism, Scottish identity, and social consciousness, but what do you think about that sort of classification?

M: I think the last one is superfluous to be honest; it’s just a journalistic hook for people who are looking for something that they can relate to and they don’t really get the music. Or they think they have to explain the music in a different, have to explain the music in a less abstract way for a general audience. There are a couple of pieces that you could say relate to some kind of social awareness, in a contemporary sense, but I’m just the same as anybody else. I don’t think that’s very noteworthy. One can be affected by events and processes in one’s own time and one can respond to it or not in music. I haven’t done it too often, but I like to think like most people I have a heart, and that can be a motivating factor in making music too, sometimes. But the issue is, and I think we touched on it the other day, music is the most abstract of the arts. It’s the one thing that doesn’t need all these other things when it comes down to it, even the religion or theology, although that’s another matter and I’ll have to come to that in a minute, and Scotland. I mean ok, so I grew up in Scotland, and can’t help but be affected by the experience of hearing music here, and Scottish traditional music, and making an evaluation of that kind of tradition, et cetera. But I always intermix, and that mix is a purely musical one in the end. The first one though, is harder to bat away, not that I would want to, but there’s a whole range of reasons there why that can be important, or has to be important. First of all, there’s liturgy, and a lot of the music I’ve written is for liturgy, or could be used for liturgy, both in the Catholic church but in other churches as well now. I’m delighted it is used, the
music is used in a whole range of different denominations, and then beyond the pew and liturgical there are those works which are written for the concert hall, which have a religious subject matter. So you could say they were sacred, but they’re not used for sacred purposes. Maybe some metaphysical purpose, or I don’t know if metaphysics and purpose ah are connected, but certainly in the same way, a Bach passion. When one usually hears a Bach passion or indeed the Handel’s *Messiah* in a secular context, and the people will respond to it in different ways, some will perceive it as a spiritual experience, others will not, although we use different criteria to account for how spiritual it is. And then there are other pieces of mine which definitely have been influenced by theological thought in some way, and I’m still fascinated by that. I think that’s a valid pursuit, and it keeps my mind active, and hopefully keeps my soul active as well. So it’s a complicated answer to a lot of things that are said about, some of them are more important than others.

A: Moving on towards taking about The Gallant Weaver, when did you begin to investigate Scottish music?

M: Well I suppose in a sense people, especially in my generation which might have been the last actually, grew up with the sound of Scottish music in the background. We learned to dance Scottish country dances at school. I think that’s still done, thankfully, I think people can still do that in primary school, middle school. And I always thought that was a joyous experience, exciting, lighthearted. So I was always aware of Scottish country dance music, which is a very specific thing, not necessarily connected with the folk revival, all the traditional music revival. But it’s always been there, and it fuels social
music making in Scottish communities, and has done. You would hear it in the radio, you’d hear your parents playing it either on a record or at the piano sometimes, but then it’s concurrent with the folk revival which is a North American thing as much as a British thing. There was a rediscovery in Scotland of our Scottish roots and a principled and sometimes academic study of what that music was and what it meant. You began to, in the nineteen seventies and there on, hear a lot of that music being brought back for concert purposes, folk music concerts and that sort of thing. But there was a revival of it in a way, amongst composers as well, composers began to be interested in Scottish traditional music. Not in necessarily a kind of antiquarian way, not making a genuflection to the past, but in a way to rediscover what their roots were. But being composers they didn’t want to just put the music in inverted commas like a quotation mark, they started to do things with it. If you look at a lot of my colleague Scottish composers – people like Judith Weir and Peter Maxwell Davies in a sense, although he’s English he lives in Scotland, and William Sweeney and Edward McGuire, Lyell Creswell who’s a New Zealander who has settled in Scotland – they were composers who were fascinated by the Scottish tradition and made their own explorations in it. Sometimes you can hear the origins and it’s deliberately heard, but other times it was more a sense of a development taking a musical object trouvé, specifically from our own tradition and history, but making something new out of it. So there was a wide-spread interest in Scottish traditional music, not just from composers but in a popular sense as well over the last fifty years I would say.

A: What was your experience during the referendum of last year in Scotland?
M: I found it very unpleasant. I didn’t enjoy it at all, and there’s still a bit of a residue from that. It was divisive, it led to friendships ending, it caused splits in families, and it may continue to do that. I tried to keep out of it, but it was hard. Eventually I had to write an article about nationalism and the arts for *The Scotsman*, which kind of flared up and it meant I was involved whether I wanted it or not. No, I wouldn’t like to repeat that experience.

A: So what is Scottish musical style to you? You talked about having the country dances, but if you were to distill it down, how would you describe it?

M: Well the first thing to consider, is the fact that Scotland missed out for a couple of centuries on the European classical development experience, and there’s a couple of reasons for that. It has to be said that the nature of the Scottish reformation was quite hard line and attempted to simplify a lot of liturgy, and indeed liturgical music at a time when other parts of Europe (not just Catholic Europe), there were quite profound and significant developments in liturgical music leading to Bach in northern Europe but also right through the counter Reformation, Palestrina through to Monteverdi and so on. Scotland missed out on those developments because of a particular kind of theological strand. Shortly afterwards, with the union of the crowns, which I’m not making a value judgement about, it meant that just at the time when the royal courts of Europe and the ducal courts and the aristocratic courts and indeed the ecclesiastical courts of Europe were becoming the centers for huge musical developments, Scotland got rid of their
courts. They got rid of the most important court, the royal court, which left Edinburgh and went to London, taking all its musicians with it. So in a sense, this double whammy as we might say, has had repercussions in Scotland. It meant we didn’t have a classical music at the time when classical music was beginning to develop in other countries in Europe. Into that vacuum developed the very intricate forms of bagpipe playing called *pibroch*, which is our classical music. And other forms of music filled that vacuum. Wonderful, strange, complex music like Gaelic psalm singing, which is a highly developed, highly ornamented form of singing the psalms in the free churches in the west which has attracted a lot of attention internationally and contemporaneously because it’s so strange. And obviously the social music making at the time flourished, the music for dancing, music for social interaction, the little music. *Ceòl mòr* and *ceòl beag* is what we call it in Gaelic. *Ceòl mòr* is the big music, and *ceòl beag* is the little music. The little music has always been very strong and had a social function. Those musics are marked by certain archetypes. There are drones in Scottish music because of the pipes, there’s a lot of ornamentation of line, whether it’s the pipes or the way that the fiddle is played, but even vocal music is highly ornamented. So this is all Scottish. There’s a modality about Scottish music. You get in Gaelic music from the isles, and the west, northwest, pentatonicism. All those things are not unrelated to other indigenous vernacular musics you find in other countries but they do have a Scottish flavor and I accept that as unmistakable, and I’m still quite fascinated by those.

A: What do you think makes it uniquely Scottish of these things that seem to appear in different places?
M: Mmm. Good question. Well, there is a local specific-ness about the way that the Scottish accent shapes a lot of the vocal music. And I think I think that there’s something, the voice that shapes it and with the voice comes accent and delivery and I think that probably feeds into the specific design of the music in Scotland. But you can, as you say, trace parallels, there are lots of folk cultures with five-note scales, pentatonic scales, there’s lots of folk cultures with ornamentation. The ornamentation that we have comes from our voices but also the instruments specific and thought about the Scottish, such as the pipes, the kind of archetypal Scottish sound. So in a kind of archetypal way you can play it and that feeds the general tenor of things.

A: Have you ever played pipes?

M: No.

A: So is there intentional use of this Scottish musical idiom in your works?

M: There was. It was very intentional and very conscious in the early days such as when I was writing *Isobel Gowdie*. But what I think has happened is that I’ve done it so much that it’s become subconscious and second nature, so that I do it almost without thinking. So I mean it’s part of my cultural make-up. As I was saying, I grew up with it in the background, and I’ve made a study of it. But I’ve done it so much that it becomes almost
an unthinking process. So the influence is the Scottishness is subliminal; it’s under the skin now without having to think too much about it.

A: You mentioned some modal aspects being in Scottish music as well, and you use modes quite often.

M: Yep

A: Could you talk a little bit more about using modes for your own works and then specifically for “The Gallant Weaver?”

M: I don’t think about modes in a very conscious way. I don’t have a chart of modes where I say, I’ll use this one. It’s really much more instinctive than that. It’s something that emerges from the compositional process, maybe thinking about the words, or if there are not words involved, the mood, and the feeling that is required. But it is a natural instinct, and it is one that seems to happen quite a lot. Even when I’m writing sacred works that are not necessarily specifically associated with Scotland. Certainly with something like “The Gallant Weaver,” it seemed a natural choice. I’ve written a couple of secular Scottish settings, some Burns. So in the way of the music the likes of Burns would have known and would have used to set his own words, because he found a lot of melodies. Some people even say that Robert Burns was a composer, that he wrote his own melodies. And he’s obviously from the same part of the world as I am, in Ayreshire. So there seems to be something deep in the cultural waters as it were that draws me back
to the text but also an appropriate use of some of the Scottishisms that we’ve been talking about.

A: Do you have other Robert Burns settings?

M: There’s a piece called “So Deep,” which is a setting of “My Love Is like a Red Red Rose.” Is there another one? There’s one that I thought was Burns, called “Lassie, wad you lo’e me?” Lassie would you love me, which is more anonymous, but it’s the same kind of linguistic style. There’s a piece, quite a big, through composed work which is an ode to Mary, Queen of Scots, which Burns wrote. It’s a big piece, using just five musicians though – two singers and a piano trio – so that that was the most, probably the most significant Burns setting I’ve done.

A: What else were you working on at the time that you wrote “The Gallant Weaver,” do you remember?

M: Well, my first symphony come out that year, completely unconnected. The thing is, a lot of the orchestral music would go one way, and still does, and I could almost change direction and style and even modal implication when I was writing a choral work. I wanted it to sound like a traditional piece. I wanted it to have an echo of the modalities or the simplicities associated with Scottish folk music. Although it is actually quite complex, “The Gallant Weaver,” it takes the melody and weaves it like knot work as it were through three lines, three women’s voices. So you do hear the melody, but it’s like
heterophony if anything. It creates a texture. So it’s the texture rather than the melodic line that impacts more. But that texture is shaped by its particular Scottish modality.

A: Was this an original melody or was it based on a pre-existing folk song?

M: No, it’s original. But I deliberately tried to, when I write these original Scottish melodies, make it sound as if it might indeed be something that has existed for a long while, because I’ve sung and performed a lot of traditional Scottish music. I feel drawn to it, and there’s something about the folk melodic line that sits well in my subconscious somewhere. And I do think it’s quite a conscious thing sometimes to try to recreate it, and even confuse people so that they would think it was a traditional melody.

A: Do you remember anything about the text, could you talk about it a little bit?

M: Well, I remember the circumstances of the composition. It was written for Paisley University, which is now called, it’s changed its name to University of the West of Scotland. And in the mid nineteen nineties it was based in Paisley, which is a town just south of Glasgow, an old weaving town. And it so it was written for some sort of graduation ceremony, and they invited one of the local Paisley choirs, (the abbey choir is very good) to come and sing it. So I was looking for a secular piece that would mark the occasion in a highly appropriate way, to take a poem very much associated with the traditions and the history of Paisley itself, the weaving industry, which would have been quite a major thing at that time.
A: So has this been one of the melodies that has ended up returning in later forms, or are you not sure?

M: I don’t think so, not yet anyway, but now that you’ve suggested it I might have a look at it again later today. Actually it is one of my most sung pieces which goes back to what you were saying earlier. I write these choral pieces quite quickly, and then it’s only years later you realize just how much that they’ve been done, and they’re performed a lot. So it’s probably one of the most performed secular choral pieces of mine.

A: Do you think that has anything to do with it being so folk song-like, it might be more accessible for choirs who are having a harder time with more difficult pieces?

M: Possibly, yes. It’s not easy to sing. And there’s always the little look of terror in those three girls’ faces because it’s very exposed. The other tricky thing about it is that the first inversion chords are very difficult to control, to make them measured in the same way so that the right kind of balance and weight against the lines above, so there’s got to be a lot of skillful control. They’re all low in their voices and to control the pitch is quite tricky, so it’s not an easy piece, but it seems to attract a lot of choirs, a lot of professionals and amateur choirs seem to want to do it.

A: There’s imitation throughout the piece, and you mentioned knot work very briefly. Is that the image you were going for with those?
M: I think so, yes. It’s mentioned a lot in connection with Celtic design, and I mean you can see the connections in music. There’s something about Gaelic psalm singing which has that similar sense of heterophany. Do you know what that is? Gaelic psalm singing? It’s wonderful music where a presenter would lead off as a leader, and the congregation would follow him, but actually doing it in a very improvisational way. They would improvise on the line, and do their own ornamentation of line and that’s a fascinating thing for a composer. Lutoslawski did that all the time in his string music. So it’s kind of a canonic thing going on. And maybe the congregations in the western isles think they’re singing in unison, but they’re not, thankfully, because it wouldn’t be as interesting. You can hear the individual voices, maybe one will linger over a pitch, another will have his own form of ornamentation, and it just makes this incredible design, a bit like knot work, but it makes a texture out of the melody, which I think has been a big thing for me.

A: How do you imagine the sound that comes out of this piece – the way it’s written out here just has soprano one and two and three, it’s not particularly indicated that it’s solos.

M: That’s true actually. I’ve heard it mostly done with solos but sometimes not, depends on the choir you know. Good to be flexible.

A: So is there anything else about this particular piece that you found?
M: I still do this a lot with the melodic line you know, there is a canonic thing going on but it’s very simple, but it’s just staggering the sequence really. I find myself doing that a lot, it’s a way you can make a texture into a melody, it’s something that I’ve always found an attractive, an enjoyable thing to involve myself in, compositionally. And beyond that, just the simplicity for choral music. I’m beginning to find that the simplest options turn out to be the best. Pare everything down, in this case you could talk about melody and a sequence of chords repeating first inversion chords, basically that’s all there is. And I’m finding that, especially with choral music, if you can really force yourself to limit options down to basic principles you can communicate a lot more clearly.

A: Let’s move on to talking about “A Child’s Prayer.” Tell me what you remember about writing this piece.

M: That massacre had happened the year before or something, ninety-five, something, ninety-six, and I hadn’t thought about responding to it at all but there was a service of remembrance being organized at Westminster Abbey in London. And then director of music, Martin Neary, contacted me about writing something that could feature the work from a Scottish composer because of Dunblane. The text is probably the earliest prayer I ever remember. I remember being taught it at school, age six or something, by nuns who were preparing me for my first communion, and it’s stayed in my mind ever since. So much so that it’s the text that runs through my mind after receiving the Eucharist every Sunday. And it’s simple, it’s just something like the Our Father or the Hail Mary. It just
runs, it kind of clicks into action at certain points when you need it, when it’s appropriate. It was my childhood prayer, and therefore I just decided to use it to mark the rather terrible assault on innocents that had happened in the nineteen nineties. Again, musically it just needed to be simple, some kind of repetitive pattern, such as the welcome, welcome chords. This is another one that does get performed a lot. It’s funny, both of these pieces are not things – I didn’t spend a lot of time on it, but I didn’t think they would become some of my most sung pieces, most performed pieces. But they have and I think it might be because of that – there’s an element of simplicity in the design, although one is written for a very difficult situation, and they do revolve around human love of sorts.

A: The first line of that prayer is the “Welcome Jesu,” but then the way you’ve set it is broken between the choir at the bottom singing “welcome,” and then the “Jesu” part at the top. Is there any specific reason behind that?

M: I think the first word stood out as something that had to be a kind of totem. And certainly in the reception of the Eucharist that’s what your reaction is, of the communicant as if you’re opening yourself up to God, and so you are welcoming a divine presence. That’s the key word I think; if it indeed is a Eucharistic prayer, and it’s used Eucharistically. There’s the key word that has to run permanently throughout the whole thing.
A: There’s basically three chords that are being repeated throughout in the welcome chords but then when we add the Jesu part, that only happens with every two chords.

M: Oh yes. Well, again, it’s this forced limitation question. It’s like squeezing out as much kind of harmonic variations, harmonic possibilities as you can from a limited idea, something that has a three about it, and something that has a two about it, there’s a kind of isorhythmic thing going on so that you are hearing something being repeated but actually it’s being repeated in such a way that is evolving. The aligning isn’t happening in a simple repetitive way.

A: This joyous section just bursts out of the whole piece, can you talk about that section a little bit?

M: Well it needed a sort of contrast I think, after the serenity of the opening. Yes, joy can be serene, and ultimately it is, but I think that there was scope there to push the spiritual envelope to a bit beyond the intimacy of the initial serenity. To create something of great considerable contrast I suppose that, looking back on it, that was the intention: to make a structure that brought about contrast even within such a simple prayer. Joy is the word that stands out in the prayer, I think, when you reflect on it.

A: The welcome part just completely drops out and then just ends with the two solos there.
A: Why that choice?

M: Well, the welcome music is repetitive, it’s going around in a kind of circle really of three chords. Although there is some repetitiveness about the duet material in the beginning, it is much more of an evolutionary music. It’s growing, it’s not as contained, it can go anywhere, it could develop. I think it needed to be the element that gave the music its finality, let it round everything off in a final rise, to its top register, the final shape that ended with its own kind of serenity, and unison.

A: That’s great. I’m going to call that our time for today.
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT 3

Tuesday, July 21, 2015 2:00 p.m.

ALVEY: Yesterday we were talking about the classifications that other authors have come up with, and you said that some were manufactured, but some happened to be more important than others.

MACMILLAN: Mmhmm

A: Could you talk about which those might be, and what has been significant in your writing?

M: As far as the manufactured thing, well maybe not manufactured, but certainly less important or stating the obvious, the Scottish composer thing. That has to be unpacked. Yes, I am a composer from Scotland. For purely musical interest, the points worth mentioning are I think what we talked about yesterday was just how the Scottish traditional repertoire and historical music feeds into the work of a living composer, and I’m not alone in that. There’s various composers that have picked up on the importance, and indeed the beauty, of the influence of traditional music. The social conscience thing, I think it’s unremarkable. If an artist didn’t have a social conscience there might be some problem, but it doesn’t necessarily need to feed into the music all the time, or indeed the art. It can sometimes. With music it’s more difficult because as we said yesterday, it’s an
it’s an abstract form, essentially. Except you know when music and text combine, you can you can reach a wider group of people and touch on some subjects that are not necessarily abstract, such as politics and so on. Some of my other early music did use political texts or quasi-political texts, or texts that signified some contemporary residence. There’s a piece called *Cantos Sagrados*, a choral piece, which sets, amongst others, poems by Ariel Dorfman the Argentine poet – quite political, his works writing about The Disappeared and so on. There’s another piece called *Búsqueda*, which is the Spanish word for search, which is settings of poems by the mothers of the Disappeared, again from Argentina. And a piece called *The Exorcism of Rio Sumpúl*, which is just an orchestral piece, or an instrumental piece, and that’s where it starts getting trickier. How do you address political matters in pure sound? It is a kind of tone poem based on an event, in Guatemala I think it was or El Salvador, where there was a helicopter attack. There are elements of that that are quite easy to turn into music in a sense, you know the violins, and the helicopters and the sense of redemption that came from as well in the end. But that’s part of the joy of being a composer sometimes, to see or to wonder out loud sometimes in one’s own work how you actually do relate to the world round about you. For artists involved in the other arts it might be a bit more straightforward. If they’re dealing with text, dealing with image, they can, in fact, immediately address the world about them but for a musician you know there’s a few more steps still to be done before you can come to the conclusion that it’s valuable or possible. I’ve certainly had to live with that, and realize that sometimes it works, sometimes it can never work. Then the theological aspect is something that is certainly worth finding out because it’s been quite
a significant, and continues to be, a significant factor in the way that I think about lots of
things.

A: You and your wife are lay Dominicans, is that right?

M: Yes

A: How does that function, what does that mean for your life?

M: Well, some of the orders, especially ancient ones have what they call third order. So
the first order, rather sexistly, are the friars, the monks. The second order, the nuns, the
sisters, and the third order is simply lay people. That is, people in married life or single
life that are not part of the religious, community as such, but want to follow the charisms
of whatever. It works for the Benedictines, it works for the Dominicans, it works for the
Franciscans, there’s a third order of Jesuits now. So lay people operating in the world as
lay people, but are attracted by some aspect or charism of the founder or founders of the
order. So for us, it was Dominic who founded the order in the thirteenth century, and
leading Dominican saints such as Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest minds of Western
civilization, Catherine of Siena who was a great figure. She, although as well as being ah
patron saint of Italy, is actually the patron saint of the lay Dominicans. She was a lay
Dominican; that is, she wasn’t a nun. She was just a normal lay person in society but
followed Dominic in his path. Fra Angelico, the painter, was a Dominican. It’s just the
order that we got the most as students and still maintain a close link with. The parish that
we go to mass here in Glasgow’s a Dominican parish, it’s run by Dominicans. So we’ve always been close, and I suppose at various stages tried to follow the third order life. It’s more difficult now, became more difficult. My daughter had a little, extremely disabled child, and we’ve had to sort of abandon quite a lot of our extracurricular work just to help. But she was in a little while ago, Sarah’s now five and she’ll be fine, but it took a lot of extra help. So we had to park the lay Dominican life, although we’re still very, very close to the Dominican family. We still regard us as a Dominican family.

A: You mentioned previously that you had been investigating or exploring, understanding liturgy, that it took up a good deal of time in your own personal study. Could you talk about that experience?

M: Well, I suppose on one level I’ve always been involved with liturgy. If you’re a musician you tend to get roped in, and to help with musical matters in church life, and that’s certainly the case with me. Ever since I was a little boy, as soon as I was able to play the keyboard, you’d be drafted into help at parish, at school events that involved church music, and that continued. Because I go to Mass every week, I see liturgy and I’m able to reflect on it. And you can’t help but see the very close relationship between music and ritual in the Catholic church. The tradition, this wonderful wealth of music and tradition associated with the liturgy. Going back through some of our great composers, Bruckner, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Monteverdi, Palestrina, they all wrote music for liturgy. And even in our own time there are composers still writing music for liturgy, whether it be Catholic or otherwise. Messiaen, a Catholic composer who died not so long
ago, was a liturgical animal as well. He didn’t write a lot of choral music for liturgy strangely, and disappointingly actually. Although he wrote a lot of choral music, it was extra-liturgical as it were; but he wrote a lot of organ music because he lived his life, he was at home, in the organ loft, improvising and creating music for liturgy. So there’s a whole wealth and tradition there of music and ritual, Catholic ritual being connected. One feeds the other. Certainly music feeds the rituals that are important to the prayer life of the church, so it’s inevitable that you would be drawn in as a composer to help with the liturgy, either as a composer or even just as a jobbing musician Sunday on Sunday.

Beyond that though, someone like me can’t help but be shaped and influenced by liturgy in other matters so that, for example, liturgy spills out. My interest in liturgy spills out of just purely liturgical music, which actually is quite a small part of my work, to be honest, but it spills into all my other stuff, like the settings of the passions, which are quasi-liturgical, para-liturgical, or certainly have roots in liturgy. And in works like Seven Last Words, and so on, which are based on liturgies, have their, have their impetus of being and root of being in liturgy, although they tend to be heard and performed purely and simply as concert works now. That’s the way of it, same with Bach as well. So there’s that – liturgy spilling out into concert music, but then there’s liturgy and theology, which is a source of a lot of my reading on life, the things that matter to me. Eventually that kind of spills over into how I think about making the abstract nature of music. These kind of books here, there’s a number of different things. That’s a marvelous book by Roger Scruton, the philosopher about the religious dimension of Wagner’s music, and in particular Tristan and Isolde. It’s an unusual, and I would say, an unorthodox reading of religion but it certainly is exploring some very important issues.
In the writing of my recent symphony, the *Fourth Symphony*, which is, as I say is a purely musical abstract work, I did read around a lot of what liturgy was about. The two very different books, one is quite difficult, impenetrable, philosophical study of liturgy and culture, and the other is more of a kind of exploration of the roots of liturgy. But in their different ways they provided a kind of bedrock for my thinking before I started writing the piece of music.

I suppose what was important to me, I began to realize, is if liturgy is such a big thing for me, and it has been practically, but also in my reading and thoughts, then could it impact on a purely abstract work? And it should, really. But how, how it does is a matter that I’m still working out. And in the *Fourth Symphony*, I at least acknowledge that there’s something, there’s an attempt to try to absorb a lifetime of interest and involvement in liturgy into what I do as an abstract composer. So the *Fourth Symphony* isn’t liturgical music, but it’s imbued with a kind of memory or experience of ritual that one associates with liturgy. And there’s no need to say as much as that, even in the program note, although I do mention certain types of rituals associated with liturgy. That become the basis of the musical germination, as it were, of the work.

A: In an interview with Rebecca Taverner, you said, “What I do is write music, so that in a sense, I see it as flowing from a kind of Dominican charism and therefore it’s probably best to avoid the word preacher, and see it in terms of the word witness.”

M: Yea.
A: Could you explain that distinction between those two things?

M: Well you probably notice those two letters after a Dominican’s name, OP. It’s Latin, *Ordinis Praedicare*-something or other. Basically, it’s the order of preachers. So the Dominicans are known for their preaching because Dominic was a great preacher, and the initial, the first generations of Dominicans were itinerant preachers that went out into the world and spread the word of God, so that idea of preaching is actually central to what the Dominicans are about. But of course in our own world, in our own time, there are associations in the secular mind at least, about the word “preaching.” Preachiness is regarded as quite negative. And if one is a Christian composer or a religious composer of any sort, then, there is a tension I think, in the secular world about what your motivation is, at least what your purpose is, what you see your purpose is. I never think of myself as trying to proselytize through music, but that’s not necessarily the be-all and end-all of preaching. Another way of talking about preaching is bearing witness to the truth, and to divine truths, and there are ways and means that that can be done beyond words. But obviously the word is important to a culture like Christianity, because the written word is important. The Christ is revealed as the word of God, it’s man made flesh, man made into a speaking, writing, talking individual that gets ideas across. So the Word of God is very central to what the Christian message is all about. But so, I think, are the other arts, and that’s when it gets slightly more complicated, a little bit messier, and less easy to define, because my art isn’t essentially words. Although I love words. One has to look at what choral music is. Even people who are not necessarily religious, in fact some of the most skeptical minded music lovers that we know, still are people who will use the word
spiritual in terms of describing the impact of music in their lives. They talk about music being a spiritual art form, and that music being a spiritual experience. That means something to them, and so we should maybe explore what it does mean. One meaning is that we have a lot more in common than we think, and it’s that love of music that opens up common truths about the spiritual nature of music. There is something about music that does touch us in the crevices of our souls that releases something. And someone from a Catholic or Christian tradition has a means of understanding what that is, others would reject it, but they know that there’s a similar, they recognize a similar impact in the power of music. So when I write these pieces that are inspired by theology, I’m simply acknowledging something secular and even non-religious people, non-religious music lovers have accepted–that music is a spiritual force.

A: How do you see Catholic musicians, or even the Catholic church, interacting with other Christian denominations, with other faiths?

M: Well, we live in a time when there’s so much more understanding that ever, and I’m glad that’s happened. There’s a confluence of ideas between people of faith and people of no faith, people of different faiths, different experiences of the same faith. Those dialogues are opening up and there’s so much, even within the Christian traditions, the different denominations are able to now speak to each other about that we didn’t know about until maybe the last fifty, sixty years.

A: What do you see as the role or a potential role for a religious artist today?
M: I find it very, very difficult to answer that question. When you talk about role, it seems that there’s a kind of pre-ordained purpose, and I don’t know what that is. I write on instinct that is natural to me, but I have to acknowledge, through my life, through a particular kind of seeing of the world that I do know what motivates me and there are religious and metaphysical questions that provoke me to be the kind of artist I am. I’m delighted that I live in a society that is tolerant and open to that, especially in a secular society, a musical milieu, which recognizes and values the Judeo-Christian roots of that music culture. And there’s so much in the Judeo-Christian culture that has shaped the direction of music. Even secularists, skeptical people who love music and know music and can understand the roots of music will recognize that, and generally because of that knowledge, tend to be understanding that religion is a primal force sometimes that has had huge impact and huge inspiration on people throughout the generations and centuries, even to the present day.

A: Do you see these sorts of conversations between people as being something new, something recent?

M: Well, you may find the book by Jonathan Arnold very interesting because he explores the various different ways that sacred music exists in the modern world. It covers everything from liturgy and music for praise to the concert hall, where there is no real religious dimension at all, except that people are coming to hear works that would be very different indeed if it hadn’t been for the very specific Christian or religious
inspiration that made the music come about in the first place. So the kind of books that are being written to explore the relationship between music and theology are opening up new vistas of understanding in academia, but also for the general audience, that may not have been explored in such detail until now.

A: *St John Passion.*

M: Mmhmm

A: This was the first passion that you wrote, correct?

M: Yea.

A: You’ve added St. Luke to it now. What other passion works have been an influence to you before you started this? You’ve mentioned Bach *St Matthew* before, I don’t know that any of us could probably get away from that one at all -

M: That’s true

A: - but what other ones?

M: Well, I suppose because the Bach passions, the *Matthew* and the *John*, are so important and so central to the canon, it is a daunting prospect for a composer to turn to
the passion as a form. For that reason, because they were so present and imposing in our shared musical memory, I’ve circled around the passion narrative in different ways before settling to actually writing one. And so, I was trying it through writing *The Seven Last Words* but there’s also another piece called *Visitatio Sepulchri*, the visitation to the Sepulchre, which is based on a medieval liturgical drama of the woman encountering the angels at the tomb, so that was another way. But there’s other, more abstract ways, such as – there’s a piano trio of mine called *Fourteen Little Pictures*, which is essentially the fourteen stations of the cross. It was a way of painting, painting the Via Dolorosa in fourteen little miniature movements all stitched together to make a bigger piece. So there’s various ways I’ve been testing the ground for a passion setting, but eventually I settled to it. I decided to do the John first because it was the one that was most known to me. I had to really think carefully about what Bach did, how I could relate to that. I wasn’t writing it for the liturgy, but liturgy played its part. I wasn’t a Lutheran, so the chorale tradition wasn’t mine. So would there be, perhaps, ways in a purely musical sense that I could punctuate the narrative the way that Bach did? So in a purely structural sense, the narrative is broken up by these commentaries which are almost like detours into Latin motet territory. Those Latin motets at the end of each movement become the kind of punctuation points where the drama stops and in a sense we stand back, as we do with the chorales of Bach, and reflect on what we’ve just seen and heard. So there was something from Bach that I was allowed to absorb and redirect in my own way as a modernist, as a Catholic, for an audience that would be very mixed and essentially secular. So what language did I use? I decided to use the vernacular, which has problems in itself, I’ve got to admit. So I decided to use the Bach as a help, rather than a hindrance. He was like a
frightening ghost over our heads, it’s the same with everybody who writes a passion. It’s inescapable. But you can accept it, embrace aspects of it, even to the extent of quoting the big passion chorale, which I’ve done now in both my passions. “O sacred head sore wounded” as near as a kind of quotation and a kind of signifier at certain points in both passions.

A: You said that you were most familiar with John. In your eyes, what is the difference between these four Gospels? Do they bring a different color?

M: Oh I think so. It is of course the same story, but there are different aspects that are highlighted in the different versions, different aspects of the character of Jesus that come to the fore. Jesus the innocent is very clear in Luke’s Gospel. I think, even the way I’ve set it subliminally, there’s a different character who has come to mind. Same man, but there’s different aspects of the character. Perhaps different ways that Jesus can be seen, depending on who’s telling the story. I’m sure I’ll find out or make new discoveries about it when I turn to Mark and Matthew.

A: Could we talk a little bit more about those Scripture selections? Which translation did you use, or was it a combination?

M: I used one that was known to me. It’s a modern English version, Revised Standard. I use that for lots of things. But the text of the St John, the reason I used the St John is, and the reason I say I know it more than the others, is that it’s part of the liturgy every year.
On Good Friday it is the John passion that is recited on Good Friday in Catholic and Anglican churches, and indeed sung. The parish, we sing it in very, very simple plainsong we might have, and that sort of Gregorian or at least Dominican chant had a bearing on the way I would write the narration chorus, for example. A simple chant line, harmonized in different ways in every different movement. Year on year I do it; I am the narrator at the local parish church, the parish where we go to worship on Good Friday. I sing the narrator’s part, the priests sing the part of Christ, and there’s someone else that would do ancillary and some of the other parts so there’s three way sung dialogue, very very simple chant. I’ve just got into the way of doing that, I’ve done that for decades now. So that’s why I ah know the John better than others. Anybody who goes to a church on Good Friday would hear that rather than anything else. The way that one hears the other passions liturgically is that on Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday the week before, you would hear one of the other Gospel readings, one of the other passion accounts. I don’t know if you know, but in the liturgical life, there are cycles of three years so that there are different readings, different psalm settings used depending on what cycle. We’re actually in year B just now, so year two. At the end of year two there would be one of the other three. You tend to hear the other three, but in a cycle of three, whereas the John is always on Good Friday.

A: When you’re using this translation, did you have to make adjustments?

M: Not really, it felt very natural to me. I suppose the problem really, looking back, I didn’t see this coming, when music lovers go to hear the Bach passion settings, they’re
mostly hearing it in German, and particularly in kind of an archaic German, and there’s a lack of immediacy. And when you hear it in modern English, you’re suddenly, for some people, not just secular people but even religious people, it tends to feel as though you’re hearing it for the first time, there’s an immediacy about it. There’s also a problem; I don’t think it’s a problem, but I’ve run into a problem about the nature of the St John text.

You’re probably aware that the St John text is sometimes regarded by people who have a grind about it as anti-Semitic. We can’t solve this in one sentence, but there’s always the generations in history and we’ve got centuries of problems between Christians and Jews and gradually that’s being sorted out, thankfully, but historically the John text has always been singled out as the one that seems to be more problematical and now having done my St John I’m wondering why that is. Considering that there’s a lot in the Matthew text that could be much more problematical, the whole blood libel thing that no one ever mentions, and I wondered why that is. And I think it’s simply because in the translations, English translations, indeed the German translations, of the John text, the words “The Jews” just keeps on coming back in a way that allows our modern sensibilities “The Jews did this, the Jews did that.” And it’s quite clear that John or the Johnines who wrote the text were meaning a particular branch of Jewish society that took against Christ for social and political reasons or whatever. And the Johnines were Jews themselves, so I don’t think it was an act of anti-Semitism on their part, in that kind of visceral, tribal, racial sense that we understand it as a problem today, certainly in the last century. But I think modern audiences, especially those who are very sensitive about political correctness or otherwise of these things just hear the words “The Jews, the Jews, the Jews. Die Juden, die Juden,” continually and it makes them feel very, very nervous. And it’s as knee-jerk
as that, it’s almost as unthinking as that. I don’t want to play down people’s genuine concerns about anti-Semitism. There are reasons that, there are manifestations of anti-Semitism, but you don’t get them in the concert hall. You find them in certain places and here in the west of course, but certainly not with people like me. So I resented that at the time, because I’d run into some problems, but it seems to have sorted itself out. I also wondered, why is it, you know others like Arvo Pärt have written a St John Passion, why didn’t he have this problem? And the answer is, he set his in Latin, and no one registered, or it just went over their heads in a subliminal way. If you’re struck by the modern English text, and confronted with, not just the story but so many other dimensions that lie, possibly in the common psychology.

A: So how did you select the Latin motets to punctuate each movement?

M: Well I decided what the different sections would be on purely dramatic art levels. I’d get to the end of what I imagined to be section one or two or three, and then recalled, at that moment really, what there was in Good Friday liturgy that would, in a sense, allow me to comment on what we’ve just heard, at the same time slightly stepping back from it so that you’re absolutely able to take a breath, a little bit of a break, from the relentless nature of the story telling and just sort of pause with some loose references, loose threads that might arise. So there was a whole range of things through my knowledge of liturgy that at one point I just quote the Crucifixus from the Credo. “He was crucified for us, he was put to death for us,” just seemed to be right at the end, for the end of section four. There were other moments where Judas was mentioned, one of the responses from
Tenebrae mentions Judas, and he betrayed Christ; so I just remembered. So that’s the obvious choice, and so on. When the death of Christ happens, I just remembered there is Christus factus est which is straight out of Good Friday liturgy again. They suggest themselves at the right points for me.

A: This work was written in close proximity to your opera The Sacrifice.

M: Yes

A: You’ve mentioned before that there’s been kind of an overlap in style between these two? Could you talk a little bit more about that?

M: Well I was writing the passion during the rehearsal period for The Sacrifice, which was a bit scary in a way because rehearsals would begin – I was in Cardiff at the time, working with WNO, Welsh National Opera – our rehearsals would start at half past ten, but I knew that to push ahead with the passion setting at all, I’d really have to get up early so I’d rise at six, spend a few hours writing, then go straight into the rehearsal period which would last all day. Then begin again the same, next day. So I was hearing The Sacrifice in rehearsal and it was going in subliminally, sometimes subconsciously, other times very consciously. There are reasons for quotations of certain themes that had cropped up in the St John.
A: Can we talk about the instrumentation and the voicing for this piece a little bit? The first striking thing is that the Evangelist role is sung by a chamber choir. Can you talk about that, where did that come from?

M: There’s lots of reasons why I chose just one soloist. One of them was just simply economic. Some of my pieces that use lots of soloists, well, not just my pieces but lots of pieces that have lots of soloists are very, very expensive to put on. *Visitatio Sepulchri* has seven soloists and it’s never done because seven vocal fees solo fees are massively crippling. In fact, I’ve re-written that piece as a choir piece simply to get it done, and it works ok as a choir piece. So I thought who’s going to put this kind of piece on, who’s going to choose to perform the St John passion, my St John Passion? It will usually be the choirs and those who run the choirs. And that means that it’d have to be a good amateur choir or professional choir. And they’d have to think then about the expense of orchestras. The orchestra’s big. Bigish. Not huge. But if there’s lots of soloists, there might be a crippling budget there, so I decided just to limit it to one soloist, that’s Christ, a baritone. And then I had to think about other ways, how to compensate for that, how to re-think the voices. In the big chorus, there are actually characters presented. Pilate has a has a role: it’s a choral role, it’s the bass section. Therefore, I thought about the different kind of choral traditions that I’ve been involved with; the big choral writing is written specifically for those big symphonic choruses that you know in America, and we certainly know here. But I’m also aware of the liturgical world; the church world is a very different kind of choral sound, or can be. I thought that maybe the narrator’s choir could have that essence of liturgy that one associates with the church world. So it’s
slightly more emotionally detached, it’s a kind of chant-like delivery, it has that liturgical objectivity. It tells a story, but in a very dispassionate, objective way. The emotional turbulence in vocal terms at least are associated with the other chorus, and Christ himself, but mainly the other chorus. So that’s where the kind of almost operatic flavor exists. The liturgical, the detached, liturgical, cool simplicity is connected with the chamber choir. The turbulent, chaotic, violent, dramatic, theatrical music is the other choir, the big choir. And I think the opposition of the two was an important building factor for me, making two very different kinds of choral music.

A: Any particular reason why Christ is a baritone?

M: It was an easy choice. It’d been done before and with my St Luke it was the first thing I decided not to do. And I’ve given the voice of Christ to a children’s choir, ah, which is strange ah in itself. But you know, I’m getting to that stage in life where I’m beginning to repeat myself, not just in conversation, but in my work. And you know I’ve written three piano concertos and now two passions and I’m trying to find ways of not repeating myself. I’m involved in cycles of things. I don’t want to repeat myself, I want to find different ways of doing it. So if Christ is a baritone in this section in this work, he has to be something very different in this work, so he’s a baritone here, he’s a group of children here. And it gives that different characterization of Christ that I think is there in the various different Gospel writers.
A: You spoke briefly about the quotation from St. Matthew. And that appears in the Marian movement, so I was wondering why choose that moment, why a quotation from a Lutheran passion into the Marian movement?

M: Em. Let me think. It’s about Mary’s pains as a mother. Seeing her son dying, and the quote just comes at the very end actually. I do change the words so that it is connected with Mary. Just simply at the end, instead of “O sacred head so wounded”, I’m putting these words into Mary’s mouth, “Your sacred head is wounded.” And all the other stuff is taken from lullabies, really. The Stabat Mater is used throughout, or bits of it, but there’s a kind of lullaby aspect to the whole setting. Even taking from something from the Coventry carol, this kind of “lulla lullay,” which is a kind of lullaby from Mary to her son, and it’s just connecting beginning and end of life through Mary’s eyes.

A: I want to fast forward a bit, and make sure I get some of these other questions. In movement two Jesus is before Anas and Caiaphas and Peter disowning him.

M: Yea

A: And I thought that was an interesting juxtaposition between those two. Could you talk about that some?
M: I don’t know if I can say anything very sensible about it to be honest. They seem to have a natural span going through the text. I suppose I have an instinctive feel for what a natural theatrical and dramatic span might be. Sometimes it might follow one singular line, but in the case there it’s like a duo happening, the High Priest followed by Peter, the duality of the two situations, they’re not unconnected. In fact, Peter’s looking on. But it seems to be a natural way of kind of combining two very different aspects on the scenario that has been dealt with; one that had huge implications for Peter, of course, and the church.

A: And to close that particular movement with Tu es Petrus -

M: Well, there’s a kind of irony about it. Here is someone who’s betraying his friend and yet he was given the keys for the kingdom, and I think it’s a beautiful thing that Peter was chosen. Because he was a very flawed individual. He reminds me of all of us; he was a coward, a traitor, a man that couldn’t stand up for his friend, and yet he was made the foundation of the church. And you could say, in retrospect, that the church has been ah in crisis ever since Peter heard the cock crow. It’s just a natural way, and we have to deal with it; it’s almost as if it was pre-planned. I’m sure it was.

A: Movement three, when Jesus is before Pilate, this is by far the largest movement of the work. Is this particular movement of significance to the story, to you?
M: Well, speaking about it objectively, it needed a big dramatic movement. The–again, this is the operatic dimension. But at this stage in an opera, you’re getting into the living guts of the narrative, the story. You really have to be gripped by this point. You’ve introduced characters, you need to get this plot going. You need to get the drama going and the tension building. So a large section, unbroken—in fact it’s over twenty minutes, this section, a really big movement—seemed to be the right kind of dramatic choice to make. That’s essentially why I shaped it that way. Yes, there are lots, there are ten movements in the piece, and some of them are very short. But it needed a kind of unbroken, through-composed, working through of all the dramatic tensions that were at work at that point. And it takes us to the to the crux of the crucifixion, and the drama. I didn’t want to break it up by that stage.

A: Movement five, which is the beginning of part two, begins with this long orchestral introduction. Is this just an introduction to this section, or does it contain some of its own theatrical momentum in the story?

M: It’s quite a noisy affair, isn’t it? Quite tricky. Well, it’s linked with the choral ending, some of the thematic material is related to the motet material, some of the opening is related to the motet material, which is very violent. Astiterunt reges terrae, it’s about the kings of the earth being thrown down. I wanted to do basically a kind of ABC form so that there’d be a link between what you’d hear at the beginning and the end, and that the middle section would be given over to story-telling. I suppose that would be a purely musical reason. But it gave me an opportunity to begin the second part in a very dramatic,
striking way. Every performance of this has had an interval – I think that’s a mistake, actually, but it would make life very difficult for the performers. I mean that’s the way music organizations work. You need an interval. But it does seem strange, to be honest. Crucifixus pro nobis, then go for a red wine, settle back down for the rest of it. When I wrote my St Luke I decided not to make an interval so that the four parts just all run almost continuously. It makes it difficult to program. That means it’s seventy-five minutes unbroken. However, there are big pieces like that, Mahler symphonies and so on. But it means there can be no interval. And that’s a consideration for some. But I think that there has to be other considerations. I’d just once like to see the St John without interval, but I know that the stamina that is required for the players, the performers is immense in that piece, they just need a break.

A: Movement ten, the closing movement, is the only one without text or voices. What function do you see taking place, especially dramatically, during that movement?

M: Well ah, I always cite the example of Schumann’s songs. There’s a number of Schumann’s great lieder where the song is sung and the piano just keeps going. So it’s almost as if the piano is providing a postlude, a commentary, where the words stop but the story goes on, the song goes on but not using words. And to telescope that into a large scale form, seemed a natural thing to do here. We got to the “Christus factus est,” “he gave up his spirit,” in a sense, nothing else needs to be said, but perhaps emotionally, dramatically something did need to be said. The story needs to go on in pure sound – that’s what music is, after all. It’s a communication of feeling, the emotion beyond
words, and something as profound as the crucifixion. Well, we’ve just been getting words all the time for a long, long time; it needs some kind of change, a kind of clearing of the air. It didn’t seem ready to end at that point, it needed something else. In fact, I’ve done something similar, although not the same this time, but as a postlude movement. Schumann had the right idea, you know, even in a little thing like a song, sometimes the instrumentation needs to continue. Ah, there’s an incompleteness sometimes about the end of a poem, especially when you’re talking about music.

A: Right. I want to close some things out now. From your perspective, how has the landscape of contemporary composition kind of evolved and changed recently and where do you see it moving?

M: Well, it’s quite tricky to make an assessment from the heart of it all, I think. However, I happen to see number of things over the years as I’m getting on, and one is (it could be the basis of a talk I’m giving next month) the emergence, or re-emergence of choral music, as an important, a very important part of contemporary music. When I was twenty-something, yes there were choirs, but the composers didn’t really seem to involve themselves as much with choirs as they did with instrumentalists. And it’s partly to do with the nature of modernism, that it’s all about the angular and a kind of sonic and the making something new out of some combinations, and I sense voices, you can’t really do that very much. So the real sort of avant garde searchers as it were, the ones who would want to reinvent the wheel with every piece of music would see choral music as something that wasn’t really for them. Now something’s changed, and a number of
composers in the last few decades have come forward and have made choral music their specialty and their priority. It’s quite clear composers like Arvo Pärt, and Tavener love choirs, and it’s the same with me. In a sense I’ve been able to stop hiding my guilty secret. I love choirs so I’m delighted that choirs are being rediscovered by composers and there’s a whole range of composers I’ve been quite happy to follow that through, and both sides of the Atlantic. British and Americans particularly. The whole Mortin Lauridsen-Eric Whitacre phenomenon is very interesting. I don’t want to pass any judgment on that but there’s always something happening in the American choral world as well. In the UK there’s younger composers coming out forward that are similar in their motivations, people like Tarik O’Reagan, and Gabriel Jackson, but in a sense it’s never really gone away from British music. You know, Benjamin Britten, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, they were always keen to write choral music, but that tradition was eventually regarded as conservative by the true avant garde, and that’s why in a sense, the real pioneers from the sixties and seventies went a different way. So I see that as a very significant and notable development in contemporary music and one that suits me down to the ground.

As far as the development of aesthetic and line, which it’s been said by many that there’s been an outpouring of different directions in contemporary music, there’s no one way you can follow, which alarms some, delights others. It’s not necessarily an easy route to follow or an easy context to find yourself in because everything is available now, everything is permitted. What choices do you make in narrowing down your aesthetic parameters when it comes to language? There is an element of choice which has to be associated with any intellectual endeavor like writing music, that lies in more than just
instinct and just personal dimension. You have to make choices at crucial points about language and what language you choose. So some see the outpouring of language, outpouring of different aesthetics and styles as chaos, a kind of post-modern recipe for disaster et cetera, et cetera. And I can see that there’s a reason to be worried. Sometimes if there is no rigor in contemporary musical culture, the whole thing could collapse in the kind of blumange of styles, and there’s no coherence. So for me, and for people I’m interested in, there has to always be this internal dialogue between the head and the heart, you can’t really have one without the other. And I see a lot of composers who are overbalanced one or the other. If the heart reigns, and there’s no intellectual rigor supplying the backbone to that music, the whole thing can collapse in ah a mess of heart-on-sleeve indulgence, whereas if you do have something profound and indeed emotional to communicate, you’ve got to have the intellectual tools to do it. Similarly, if one simply sees music as an abstract form akin to mathematics and architecture and design, then one of the great problems of a lot of modern music is that it follows a rather arid path into the closed world of the academy. And fences went round; that fencing that would be the purely intellectual and academic study of contemporary music. Both seem to be overbalanced one over the other. If there could be some fusion of the heart and the head, then I think that’s the way forward. And the music that I like of my time is quite clearly being undertaken and written by composers who have realized that. Maybe they’d get it wrong sometimes, but have tried to fuse some sort of amalgam of what the intellect is capable of in musical terms, and what the human heart is capable of communicating in human terms too.
A: Right. So what mark do you hope your music leaves?

M: I have no idea. I never think beyond the recent piece. I have some plans, and I’ve got plans and ambitions to write certain pieces over the next few decades but beyond that I’m not sure. And in a sense I think it’s a mistake to try to second guess your audience. The audience is made up of individuals, all from very, very different experiences of music, contemporary music, classical music. Very different views of what works and what doesn’t; however, that’s not to say that composers should not have some kind of ideal listener in mind. And that ideal listener I think is someone who is hungry and open and thirsty for experiences they’ve not yet had in music. Now that’s tricky in what is, essentially, a museum culture. Classical music is a museum culture. We’ve talked, and we will always talk about the music that is important to us and that is from the deep, deep past. There’s nothing wrong with that but if the culture is to continue it has to have a living soul and it needs people who are hungry to hear things they haven’t heard before. And composers tend to be like that. I’ve grown up with composers who are desperate to hear the newest thing or to try something that no one else has tried before, and sometimes you don’t meet, well a lot of times you don’t meet people like that in the general audience. As you know, a lot of these big symphonic audiences can be very conservative – they know what they like, they like what they know and that’s it. And it’s very difficult sometimes to engage with that attitude. But I think if you meet people who can overcome that and are genuinely curious, and indeed excited about the unknown then that’s a person you can engage with.
A: Thank you so much.

M: You’re very welcome.
February 9, 2016

Bethany Lynn
Alvey University
of Miami 3720
Ponce de Leon
Blvd Coral Gables,
FL 33134 U.S.A.

RE: St. John Passion; The Gallant Weaver by James MacMillan

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SPIRITUALITY, SCOTTISH IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN SELECTED CHORAL WORKS OF JAMES MACMILLAN

Bethany Lynn Alvey - co-investigator
Dr. Corin Overland, principal investigator

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to describe the use of three extra-musical themes in three of James MacMillan's choral works. A secondary purpose is to determine to what extent these themes align with the intention of the composer.

The semi-structured interviews with the participant (James MacMillan) are meant to gain insight into his life, values, and compositional processes. This data will contribute to the analysis of three selected works in the doctoral essay as well as provide insight for analysis beyond the three representative works.

PROCEDURE:
The informed consent form will be submitted to the participant prior to the interview.

The participant acknowledges through his signature that he has read and understood the informed consent form and further agrees to its terms. The responses collected during interviews will be used for research and will be included in the co-investigator's doctoral essay. Three opportunities to review the data from interviews will be provided to the participant, but he is under no obligation to review the data should he choose not to.

RISKS:
No foreseeable risks or discomfort are anticipated by participating. Because the opportunity to provide a member check during this research will be conducted through email, security of the participant's correspondence cannot be guaranteed.

BENEFITS:
Although no benefits can be promised to the participant by taking part in this study, the information gathered and distributed later is intended to provide perspective and insight for conductors who are looking to program works by the participant, as well as other composers, researchers, and students.

ALTERNATIVES:
The participant has the alternative to not participate in this study. He may stop participating any time or he may refuse to any question. There is no penalty incurred should he choose to halt participation.
COSTS:

No costs are anticipated for the participant to incur in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The participant's name and any responses given during the interview process will be made public in the co-investigator's dissertation, which will be submitted to the faculty of the University of Miami during the Academic year 2015-2016 and will be available for educational purposes unless the participant indicates to either the principle investigator or the co-investigator that you would like to revise or withdraw a response. Should the participant need to make a revision or withdrawal, he should contact the investigators as early as possible.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

The participant's involvement is voluntary, and he has the right to withdraw from the study.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

The researcher will answer any questions regarding the study and will provide the participant with a copy of the consent form after it has been signed. If there are any further questions about the study, the participant may contact Bethany Alvey co-investigator, at (240) 298-6428 or b.wallace1@miami.edu, or Dr. Corin Overland, at (410) 688-8211 or c.overland@miami.edu. If the participant has any questions about his rights as a research participant, the participant may contact the Human Subjects Research Office (HSRO) at 305-243-3195.

Please print a copy of this consent documentation for your records.
Letter of Consent for Interview Subject

The following document is a letter of consent in which Sir James MacMillan grants the interviewer, Bethany Alvey, permission to include a transcription of the interview in her DMA essay, "Spirituality, Scottish Identity, and Social Consciousness in the Choral Works of James MacMillan." The interview is designed to explore your insights with regard to your compositional style in the choral genre.

You will be given the opportunity to read the transcription of the interview and to edit it and make changes if necessary. You are also encouraged to review the final draft of the essay, including the portions in which your interview excerpts appear.

You are welcome to provide additional comments or clarification after the email interview has taken place.

Thank you in advance for your attention and for your interest in this project.

Sincerely, Bethany Alvey

Signature of Consent
REFERENCES

James MacMillan


———. Interview with Bethany Lynn Alvey, Glasgow, July 20, 2015.

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