

### James MacMillan: *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* (2000)

*Born – 1959 Kilwinning, Ayrshire, Scotland, living in Glasgow*

**Written for** – the BBC commissioned this for the first Evensong of the new millennium (January 5, 2000) at Wells Cathedral; dedicated to Joyce MacMillan

**We discovered him** – in 1999, when composer Robert Maggio suggested we listen to MacMillan's *Seven Last Words*, which we loved and subsequently performed with Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia in 2002. The composer attended the performance, initiating a friendship that has led to The Crossing's dedication to singing his music.

**In this piece** – MacMillan writes in a manner that is now instantaneously recognizable to those even remotely familiar with his style: the simple chordal sections of tranquility (Mary says, "ah, now I know") juxtaposed with ecstatic organ ornaments (the dove pierces her heart), the palm-on-the-keyboard-crashing-organ, with fortissimo choral responses (here, signifying God is all things; collectively, the pitches in each phrase of the Doxology are all twelve notes of the chromatic scale), the ostinato two-chord patterns, the low-to-high-to-low structure so often found in his sacred works. In the *Nunc dimittis*, we hear a slow ascent from the lowest bass notes to an "arrival" – Simeon's wait comes to an end – at a chant-like melody of Semitic flavor (yet, typical of MacMillan, also, with Scottish-inspired ornaments). The work's true arrival, however, comes at the stunning pianissimo as the voices fan out from a unison to a wash of notes, singing "To be a light, to lighten the Gentiles," which relaxes – indeed, falls lovingly – into the new Doxology, one of yearning upward and forward.

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#### Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For He hath regarded : the lowliness of His handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed.

For He that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is His name.

And His mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations.

He hath shewed strength with His arm : He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich He hath sent empty away.

He remembering His mercy hath holpen His servant Israel : as He

promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

- Luke 1:46-55 (trans. Book of Common Prayer, 1662)

#### Nunc dimittis

Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace : according to Thy word.

For mine eyes have seen : Thy salvation,

Which thou hast prepared : before the face of all people;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles : and to be the glory of Thy people Israel.

- Luke 1:29-32 (trans. Book of Common Prayer, 1662)

*the night has many hours...*



# THE CROSSING

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D O N A L D N A L L Y — C O N D U C T O R

In Concert at the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

Saturday, October 6 2007, 8pm

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## THE CROSSING

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Karen Blanchard

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Maren Montalbano Brehm

Jennifer Check

Brian Ming Chu

Jeff Dinsmore

Ryan Fleming

Steven Gearhart

Chris Hodges

Leslie Johnson

Vincent Metallo

Robert Phillips

Lourin Plant

Susan Polack

Rebecca Siler

Daniel Spratlan

Erin Westmaas

Rebecca Whitlow

Shari Alise Wilson

Steven Ziegler

Scott Dettra, organ

John Grecia, accompanist

Donald Nally, conductor

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank the congregation and staff of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, Music Director Mark Anderson and Reverend Cindy Jarvis.

We're very grateful to the following who have made financial contributions to help make this concert possible:

Lois and John Dinsmore

Nancy and William Brosius

Lindsey and Knud Christiansen

Gordon W. Lapp

Kathy Taylor and John Sprogel

Vera and John Murray Wilson

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## PROGRAM

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*my beloved will come today*

**Creator of the Stars of Night** ..... Gabriel Jackson

*one comes at night*

**Vier kleine Finalsätze zu "Es ist ein Schnitter, heisst der Tod"** ..... Erhard Karkoschka

(Four small ending sentences on "There is a reaper, called Death")

- I. Es ist ein Schnitter (There is a reaper)
- II. Was heut' noch grün (What is green today)
- III. Viel hunderttausend ungezählt (Many hundreds uncounted)
- IV. Trutz Tod! Komm her (I defy you death! Come here)

*yes, he is near*

**Remember, O Lord**..... Jonathan Harvey

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## INTERMISSION

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*the night has many hours*

**I Lie** ..... David Lang

*each one sadder than the next*

**Tag des Jahrs (Day of the Years)** ..... Kaija Saariaho

- I. Die Frühling (Spring)
- II. Der Sommer (Summer)
- III. Der Herbst (Autumn)
- IV. Der Winter (Winter)

*I run out barefoot*

**Magnificat and Nunc dimittis** ..... James MacMillan

### Gabriel Jackson: Creator of the Stars of Night (2000)

*Born – 1962 Bermuda, living in London*

**Written for** – the choir of St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh

**We discovered him** – in 2002 while searching for a contemporary replacement for the traditional Advent Responsory (beginning Advent Lessons and Carols) and found his haunting I looked from afar in Blackwell's music store in Oxford.

**In this piece** – Jackson's "melodic minimalism" leads him toward drones or pedal points over which melodic, highly rhythmic lines converge. Dissonances are sparingly used and carefully placed. Characteristically, the atmosphere reflects the text; he pays little attention to descriptive or poetic words. In *Creator of the Stars*, his sparse texture and chant-like melodies build from a quiet reverence until the work erupts into a joyful celebration.

Creator of the stars of night,  
Thy people's everlasting light,  
Jesu, Redeemer save us all,  
And hear Thy servants when they call.

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Thou camest, Bridegroom of the Bride,  
As drew the world to evening tide,  
Proceeding from a virgin shrine,  
The spotless Victim all divine.

At Thy great name, exalted now,  
All knees must bend, all hearts must bow;  
And things in heav'n and earth shall own  
That Thou art Lord and King alone.

To God the Father, God the Son,  
And God the Spirit, Three in One,  
Laud, honour, might and glory be  
From age to age eternally. Amen.

- *Conditor alme siderum*, 7th century Advent Vespers Hymn,  
trans. J.M. Neale

### Erhard Karkoschka: Vier kleine Finalsätze zu "Es ist ein Schnitter, heisst der Tod" (1980)

*Born - 1923 Moravská Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, living in Stuttgart*

**We discovered him** – combing the stacks of Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania for new and interesting works.

**In this piece** – Karkoschka's command of many compositional styles is heard in an eclectic yet tradition-based language. The piece is in four movements, following the verses of the Lutheran chorale on which it is based. Each verse sounds as if it begins in a shattered or disorganized state and is then re-assembled; the effect is like watching, in reverse, a film of a vase smashing, the many pieces of crystal coming together to reform the complete vessel. These miniature structures serve the verses well, while the entire chorale, revealed over four movements, progresses from a narrative description of death's impersonal inevitability to an antagonistic challenge born out of faith. All along, the warning remains: "Beware, fair little flower," the theme of which invites the many lovely references to flowers cut down with dispassionate equity.

In the first movement, we hear fragmented, unmetered solo voices weakly trying to form the chorale tune, but only able to do so collectively. The next movement divides the choir in two; within each half the pitches and vowels are determined but each singer moves slightly independently; the technique creates blocks of gnarling sound, perhaps inspired by the electronic-music background of the composer (a history he shares with Kaija Saariaho). In the third, Karkoschka discards aleatoric techniques, and through fast, accented patterns, seems to mimic Death's frantic, obsessive, mowing down of his victims. Out of this emerges the melody of a Bach chorale, soaring above the texture, reinforcing this very Lutheran philosophy; "come God, and end our wait – knowing that You will triumph, we no longer fear Death." Finally, the last movement finds the singers calling out, speaking and yelling at Death – taunting him – and finally moving to complete phrases of the Lutheran chorale toward which each movement has yearned.

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## NOTES AND TEXTS

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I. Es ist ein Schnitter, heißt der Tod,  
hat G'walt vom großen Gott.  
Heut wetzt er das Messer,  
es schneid't schon viel besser,  
bald wird er drein schneiden,  
wir müssen's nur leiden –  
Hüt' dich, schön's Blümelein!

II. Was heut noch grün und frisch dasteht,  
wird morgen weggemäht.  
Die edel Narzissel,  
die englische Schülssel,  
die schön' Hyazinth,  
die türkische Bind:  
Hüt dich, schön's Blümelein!

III. Viel hunderttausend ungezählt,  
was unter die Sichel hinfällt:  
rot Rosen, weiss Liljen,  
beid' wird er austilgen,  
ihr Kaiserkronen,  
man wird euch nicht schonen:  
Hüt dich, schön's Blümelein!

Solo soprano: O Menschenkind  
nur deine Sünd  
hat dieses angerichtet.  
Da du durch die Missetat  
warest ganz vermichtet.

IV. Trutz, Tod! Komm her, ich fürcht' dich nit!  
Trutz, komm und tu ein Schnitt!  
Wenn er mich verletzet,  
so werd ich versetzt,  
ich will es erwarten,  
im himmlischen Garten:  
Hüt dich, schön's Blümelein!

I. There is a reaper, called Death.  
He has been given the power from God almighty.  
Today, he is sharpening his blade –  
this will give a fine cut!  
Soon, he will start mowing  
and we'll have to endure it.  
Beware, fair little flower!

II. What stands there green and fresh today,  
will be trimmed away tomorrow:  
The noble Narcissus,  
the English Key,  
the beautiful Hyacinth,  
the Turkish Bandage.  
Beware, fair little flower!

III. Many hundreds, many thousands, uncounted  
under the sickle fall,  
equally distributed:  
red roses, white lilies,  
Kaiser Crowns,  
You hardly know their names.  
Beware, fair little flower!

Solo soprano: O little man,  
only your sin  
has caused this.  
Through this crime  
you were entirely destroyed.

IV. I defy you, Death!  
Come here, I don't fear you!  
Does it injure me?  
I look forward to being  
In the heavenly garden  
Come here and make your cut!  
Beware, fair little flower!

- Johann Rist (1607-1667), melody: Mainz: 1626, printed with the note "sung in Regensburg, where a noble young flower was cracked off unexpectedly in January 1637" (referring to the Thirty Years War). Soprano solo text by Rist, 1641, Melody: J.S. Bach (1685-1750).

### Jonathan Harvey: Remember, O Lord (2003)

*Born – 1939 Sutton Coldfield, living in London*

**Written for** – the Golden Jubilee of Elizabeth II, as a contemporary equivalent to Herbert Howells' *Behold God, our Defender* (written for her coronation), commissioned by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster and premiered at Westminster Abbey by its choir.

**We discovered him** – ten years ago when looking for contemporary anthems for the choir of Saint Mark's Church and have subsequently introduced to Philadelphia works such as *I love the Lord*, *The Angels*, *Thou mastering me God*, and his setting of Eliot's *The Dove Descending*.

**In this piece** – Harvey meets the daunting challenge of writing music for a Queen for whom every major British composer has written music – Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten, William Walton, James MacMillan. Harvey is characteristically pensive; rich, dark, and grave colors begin and return throughout to weight the piece, allowing silences between short sections to give an air of thoughtful majesty. Out of these colors rise simple ascending melodic scales that reach up to the heavens. The work is one of age and wisdom, focusing on the waiting of one monarch for the understanding of another greater than she.

Remember, O Lord, what Thou hast wrought in us  
and not what we deserve;  
and as Thou hast called us to Thy service,  
make us worthy of our calling;  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

- Prayer from the Leonine Sacramentary (7th c.), trans. Armitage Robinson

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## NOTES AND TEXTS

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### David Lang: I Lie (2001)

*Born – 1957 Los Angeles, living in New York*

**Written for** – Kitka, an Oakland-based women’s chorus focused largely on Eastern European women’s vocal traditions; written as a wedding gift

**We discovered him** – through his intriguing work *The Passing Measures*, for amplified orchestra, written and recorded by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. We then studied all of his choral works to find those suitable to *The Crossing*.

**In this work** – Lang is characteristically minimalist (*The Passing Measures*, mentioned above, employs essentially two chords over a forty-five minute span). Yet, the structure feels as if Lang is at first actively engaging us to follow the journey through various versions of the five notes, then moving us into a mental space of contemplation in which only small shifts occur; it is like a sleepless night transcribed into music, a languid mood in a world of sadness. Indeed, the title of our concert comes from this work, as we discover how frustratingly beautiful the wait can be.

Leyg ikh mir in bet arayn  
Un lesh mir oys dos fayer  
Kumen vet er haynt tsu mir  
Der vos iz mire tayer

Banen loyfn tsvey a tog  
Eyne kumt in ovnt  
Kh’her dos klingen – glin glin glon  
Yo, er iz shoyn noent

Shtundn hot di nakht gor fil  
Eyns der tsveyter triber  
Eyne iz a fraye nor  
Ven es kumt mayn liber

Ikh her men geyt, men klapt in tir,  
Men ruft mikh on baym nomen  
Ikh loyf arop a borvese  
Yo! er iz gekumen!

I lie in bed  
and turn out the light  
my beloved will come today

The trains come twice a day  
one comes at night  
hear them clanging - glin, glin, glon  
Yes, he is near

The night has many hours  
each one sadder than the next  
only one is happy  
when my beloved comes

Someone comes, someone knocks  
someone calls my name  
I run out barefoot  
Yes, he has come

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*We are grateful to the following women from the 2007 Spoleto Festival Choir for joining us on David Lang’s “I Lie.”  
Marcella Caprario, Veronica Chapman-Smith, Jen Moss, Christine Nass, and Michele Zuckman*

### Kaija Saariaho: *Tag des Jahrs* (2000)

*Born – 1952 Helsinki, Finland, living in Paris*

**Written for** – Tapiola Chamber Choir (a famed Finnish ensemble) and first performed with Tapiola and Helsinki Chamber Choirs; dedicated to the composer's mother. The electronic part was realized at Civitella Ramieri Center, Italy.

**We discovered her** – when we heard a performance of her opera *L'amour de loin* (written for Salzburg Festival) in Helsinki and became intrigued with her very individual language and the juxtapositions and paradoxes in the music.

**In this piece** – Saariaho has created an electronic soundscape that is an integral ingredient, making *Tag des Jahrs* the most "modernist" sounding of the works before us this evening. Without it, the musical material is that of simple melody (characteristically focused on sighing semitones) and close harmonies in which dissonance is treated as a part of the fabric and not as an expressive punctuation. With the soundscape, however, the choral part becomes one element in an entire world of "thought" which seems to be both within and without. We hear rain, white noise, whispering; distorted bells remind us that we are in a place where the tension between noise and sound (and therefore music) is paramount. A voice is heard speaking the words sung; later the voice will recite one of the four poems describing the seasons which make up the four movements of the work. These poems were written by German Romantic poet Hölderlin in his last years, which he spent in schizophrenia, writing under the nom de plum, Scardinelli (perhaps his own joke, as scardinare meaning "unhinged" in Italian). Many of the poems he wrote at this time were fluff – technically clever lyrics musing on the passing seasons, with the occasional hint of darkness. Holderlin knew that to write such things, pleasing and relieving his visitors, as he was discarding or ignoring, a lifetime of plumbing the depths of human emotion and fate.

These poems suit Saariaho well, for her art is about the converging planes of emotion and multi-layered structures of thought, and therefore of sound. So, while in the third movement (Autumn) we hear a man reciting the text, on closer examination we realize that he is not actually saying the words, but rather the words are deconstructed and re-assembled from the syllables that make them up, as if the words are just mechanical combinations of sounds that by themselves mean nothing – or everything. This is a good way of describing the overall work, in that it will mean something quite different to each listener. Each may have their own reaction to the collective aural experience, an experience in which the choir is but one ingredient, albeit a more commonly recognizable expressive ingredient, in a larger landscape sensual sounds. Saariaho's language may be a bit unusual to our ears, it may combine textures we are unused to hearing together, it may challenge us to new ways of thinking about hearing in the concert hall, but it is not foreign; it is driven with an energy we all recognize as primary and human, with a poise and composure that is at once brutally honest and yet elegant, and with a sweetness about her topic – perhaps a bittersweetness – which has been a part of the metaphoric language of the turning of the seasons since long before the poet of Solomon's court wrote, "For, lo, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone."

### I. Der Frühling

Wenn neu das Licht der Erde sich gezeiget,  
Von Frühlingsregen glänzt das grüne  
    Thal und munter  
Der Blüten Weiß am hellen Strom hinunter,  
Nachdem ein heitrer Tag zu  
    Menschen sich geneiget.

Die Sichtbarkeit gewinnt von  
    hellen Unterschieden,  
Der Frühlingshimmel weilt mit seinem Frieden,  
Daß ungestört der Mensch des  
    Jahres Reiz betrachtet,  
Und auf Vollkommenheit des Lebens achtet.

- Mit Unterthänigkeit, Scardanelli  
d. 15. Merz 1842

### I. Spring

When the light of the world appears anew,  
the green dale shines from  
    Spring's rain, and, alive,  
the bleeding white lights stream down  
after a cheerful day  
To people tending the earth.

Visibility wins over with illustrious light  
the Spring sky with its peace,  
attracting the person of the year  
who notices the perfection of life.

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### II. Der Sommer

Die Tage gehn vorbei mit sanffter  
    Lüffte Rauschen,  
Wenn mit der Wolke sie der  
    Felder Pracht vertauschen,  
Des Thales Ende trifft der Berge Dämmerungen,  
Dort, wo des Stromes Wellen  
    sich hinabgeschlungen.

Der Wälder Schatten sieht umhergebreitet,  
Wo auch der Bach entfernt hinuntergleitet,  
Und sichtbar ist der Ferne Bild in Stunden,  
Wenn sich der Mensch zu  
    diesem Sinn gefunden.

- Scardanelli, d. 24. Mai 1758

### II. Summer

The days go by with tender rustling breezes  
exchanging clouds for  
    meadows of splendour;  
the valley's horizon meets the hills twilight  
yonder, where the river's rills  
    wind downward.

The forest's shadow casts long, seen from  
Far way, where the brook's  
    waves glide downward,  
and distant places shine, in those hours  
when Men find themselves in such senses.

