

2015/2016 CONCERT SERIES



NEW DIRECTIONS IN MUSIC



THE MUSIC OF JAMES MACMILLAN



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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

We truly have a soft spot for Sir James MacMillan at Soundstreams. While it may be true that no composer can be all things to all people, he is able to profoundly touch a wide range of communities through his work as a composer, conductor, educator, and activist. We have collaborated with MacMillan several times over 15 years — Soundstreams first featured him and his music in 2001 along with that of James Rolfe.

What stands out most to me is his deep compassion for humanity, and his concern for suffering no matter who is experiencing it, or where on this earth. This compassion comes through strongly in MacMillan's music, whether he is celebrating his vital Scottish roots, or expressing his profound spiritual beliefs in a work like *Seven Last Words from the Cross*. And while MacMillan has conducted one of his own works on a previous Soundstreams concert, this marks the first time he's conducting a complete program.

Canada can also lay claim to composers with a deep affinity for expressing spiritual truths in the form of R. Murray Schafer and James Rolfe. Given our history of pairing the two James back in 2001 (MacMillan and Rolfe), it is an extra pleasure to be able to present their music together again. We are also thrilled to bring back Schafer's *Three Hymns*, part of a much larger Soundstreams commission from 2004, *The Fall into Light*. I hope you will enjoy tonight's celebration of these three great choral masters!

Lawrence Cherney, Artistic Director

ABOUT SOUNDSTREAMS

Soundstreams is one of the world's leading contemporary music companies, and the biggest global presenter of new Canadian music. Under the direction of Artistic Director Lawrence Cherney, the company showcases the work of Canadian and international composers, with a focus on innovative thematic and experiential programming that provides context and contributes to the rich legacy of Canadian music at home and around the world.

In collaboration with the finest Canadian and international artists, Soundstreams presents an annual concert series in Toronto as well as national and international tours. Soundstreams also serves the larger community through our free Salon 21 series at The Gardiner Museum, composer training activities, SoundWave program for music lovers age 35 and under, and digital performance space, including concert recordings, SoundMakers website, and video content.

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THE MUSIC OF JAMES MACMILLAN

James MacMillan, conductor
Choir 21
Virtuoso String Orchestra



Tuesday, March 8, at 8:00 pm
Trinity-St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor Street West

PROGRAM

Knut Nystedt
(1915-2014, Norway)

Immortal Bach (1998)
Choir 21
Virtuoso String Orchestra

James MacMillan
(b. 1959, Scotland)

Gallant Weaver (2002)
Choir 21

James Rolfe
(b. 1961, Canada)

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd (2006)
Choir 21

R. Murray Schafer
(b. 1933, Canada)

Three Hymns (from *The Fall Into Light*) (2005)
Choir 21

INTERMISSION

James MacMillan
(b. 1959, Scotland)

Seven Last Words from the Cross (1995)
Choir 21
Virtuoso String Orchestra

1. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do
2. Woman, Behold Thy son! Behold, Thy Mother!
3. Verily, I say unto you, today thou shalt be with me in Paradise
4. Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?
5. I thirst
6. It is finished
7. Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit

Travel for James MacMillan is generously supported by the Scottish Government and the British Council.

This concert is dedicated to Judy Sarick, who passed away on February 15, 2016. Judy is survived by her husband, Hy Sarick, a former long-serving Soundstreams Board member. We wish to thank Judy for her many years of support — we will miss her greatly.

PROGRAM NOTE

By David Jaeger

Soundstreams welcomes back preeminent Scottish composer/conductor Sir James MacMillan. Our first collaboration with MacMillan was in 2001 when we presented the North American premiere of his *Raising Sparks*, a work that reflects the deep affinities between Christianity and Judaism. And in 2006 Soundstreams' University Voices toured his major choral composition revolving around St. Dominic, *Sun Dogs*, to several Canadian cities. Tonight, we're pleased to once again have MacMillan on the podium leading Choir 21 and the Virtuoso String Orchestra in a wide-ranging program that includes two of his compositions that underscore the foundations of his work: Roman Catholicism and his Scottish heritage.

MacMillan's a capella setting of Robert Burns's poem, *The Gallant Weaver*, was premiered by the Paisley Abbey Choir in 1997. It's a gentle setting of the poetry, with hints of Scottish folk music. The use of multiple separate voice parts within the choir creates a particularly effective "woven" texture, appropriate to the poem's subject.

One of MacMillan's most important works, *Seven Last Words from the Cross* was commissioned by BBC Television. The work was presented in 1994 in seven consecutive nightly BBC telecasts during Holy Week. The piece, composed for choir and string orchestra, comprises seven movements, one for each of the seven last statements uttered by Christ, as compiled from the four Gospels. Each movement portrays the progressive emotional and dramatic stages over the course of the Crucifixion. It is a powerful work, building gradually to an intense climax before its last breath is drawn in sighing strings. *Seven Last Words from the Cross* is also a deeply personal expression of MacMillan's faith.

Toronto composer James Rolfe met MacMillan in 2001 when they appeared together in Soundstreams' *Encounters* series at the Glenn Gould Studio. Tonight, MacMillan conducts Rolfe's eight-part choral setting of portions of Walt Whitman's long poem, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, a lament after the assassination of American President

Abraham Lincoln. The work was commissioned by Soundstreams for the 2006 University Voices tour. Tonight's performance of the piece is the first by a professional choir. Whitman's poem progresses from an expression of grief at the loss of Lincoln, America's "great star disappear'd," to an affirmation of the natural processes of renewal that occur each spring and an ultimate acceptance of "lovely and soothing death" as the friend that ends all human suffering.

R. Murray Schafer's *The Fall into Light* is an oratorio for multiple choirs, commissioned by Soundstreams and premiered in 2006. Schafer describes the work as, "A syncretic work based on texts from a wide variety of sources, gnostic, hermetic and mystical for the most part, but also with texts by Rilke, Nietzsche, and some personal reflections." Schafer adds that, "The whole work is a study of light within darkness as well as darkness within light." The *Three Hymns* drawn from this large work appear between the major dramatic sections, and function as moments of reflection on the dualism of light versus dark, good versus evil. They are often sung separately from the larger work, and can easily be presented by smaller choral groups.

To open the concert, we have a choral favourite, *Immortal Bach* by the late Norwegian composer Knut Nystedt. This work uses the first stanza of J.S. Bach's liturgical song, *Komm süßer Tod (Come, Sweet Death)* as sonic source material for the subsequent fantasy-like choral mutations that just might surprise you.

David Jaeger is a composer, producer and broadcaster based in Toronto. He was the creator & Executive Producer of the long-running CBC Radio Two contemporary music series, Two New Hours.

For more information about *The Music of James MacMillan*, including artist biographies and choral text, visit soundstreams.ca/blog

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