

HAMER
SINGERS

Jonathan Grieves-Smith

before the morning star

music by

James MacMillan & Robert Ramsey



St Ignatius Church, Church St, Richmond
Sunday 31 March 2019, 3.30 pm

In establishing the Hamer Singers, we acknowledge our collective debt and homage to the Hamer family's longstanding dedication and legacy to music and the arts in Melbourne.

This concert is being held on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, and we wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners. We would also like to pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.

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Jonathan Grieves-Smith *conductor*
Sophie Spencer *trumpet*

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PROGRAMME

James MacMillan	<i>Data est mihi</i>
James MacMillan	<i>Dominus dabit benignitatem</i>
Robert Ramsey	When David Heard
James MacMillan	<i>Factus est repente</i>
James MacMillan	<i>Mitte manum tuam</i>
Robert Ramsey	How are the mighty fallen
James MacMillan	<i>Sedebit Dominus Rex</i>
Robert Ramsey	Sleep, fleshly birth
James MacMillan	<i>Videns Dominus</i>
James MacMillan	<i>In splendoribus sanctorum</i>

BALTIC WAY FREEDOM CONCERT

August 23rd, 7:30pm, St Patrick's Cathedral

On August 23rd 1989, 2-million citizens of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania created an unbroken 675km human chain, stretching from Tallinn, through Riga to Vilnius, it has become known as the Baltic Way. This peaceful demonstration expressed the intense commitment of the peoples of the three Baltic states to restore their independence from the Soviet Union and re-establish their right to self-determination.

On August 23rd 2019, its 30th anniversary, the Hamer Singers, and their guests, remember and celebrate the Baltic Way with powerful and exquisite music from the renowned singing traditions of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

This will be an unforgettable and beautiful evening of music and memory in the soaring beauty of St Patrick's Cathedral.

Further and developing news at
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before the morning star

Just over three and a half centuries separate the births of the two Scottish composers whose works we will hear in this afternoon's concert, Robert Ramsey (c.1590-1644) and James MacMillan (b. 1959). They share not only a common country of birth but also a commitment to writing choral music inspired by spiritual matters. It's this commitment to the spiritual which gives shape to the programme presented today. The differences between them, however, are striking. Virtually nothing is known of Ramsey's life, whereas MacMillan must be among the best-known of today's composers of fine music and information about his life and work is readily available.

About Ramsey's beginnings we know nothing, neither his place nor date of birth. And we have no evidence for when he came south of the border, but he is recorded as having graduated as Bachelor of Music at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1616. There he was organist at the College from 1626 and Master of the Children from 1633 to his death in 1644. It is thought that most of his English settings of liturgical texts were written for performance in Trinity College. It has been suggested that his Latin liturgical settings, however, were composed for Peterhouse, Cambridge. The three English settings presented in today's programme are among his most renowned and all are laments on a tragic death. The first two are instances involving a biblical character (Jonathan or Absolon) which also may well be the inspiration of the third piece, a lamentation over the death of a young contemporary of Ramsey's, Henry, Prince of Wales, who died in 1612.

In the notes below, and starting with Ramsey, the titles of today's programme are grouped under their respective composer with each title prefixed by a number to indicate its place in the programme.

Robert Ramsey

When David heard

This motet is a setting of the biblical text from the second Book of Samuel (2:18:33). This passage was also famously set by two of Ramsey's contemporaries, Thomas Tomkins and Thomas Weelkes, and expresses David's lament over the death of his son Absolon. Ramsey's setting is for six-part choir that opens in imitative counterpoint which then moves to chordal harmonies ('over the gate, and wept') with, at times, the upper voices answering the lower ones. A brief passage of counterpoint is then heard before the final bars cast in block harmonies ('Absolon, my son, my son'). This setting demonstrates the composer's keenness to exploit the opportunities for contrasts in sonority and his use of the madrigalian technique of word-painting (the ascending melodic lines at 'he went up to his chamber').

When David heard that Absolon was slain,
he went up to his chamber over the gate and wept,
and as he went, thus he said:
O my son Absolon, would to God I had died for thee
O Absolon, my son Absolon

How are the mighty fallen

This is another six-part setting of a text taken from the same Book of Samuel (2:1:25-27) as *When David heard*. It is another lamentation by David, this time over the death of Saul and his son Jonathan, though only Jonathan's name is mentioned in the scriptural passage chosen by Ramsey. The vocal writing of *How are the mighty fallen* is similar to that we found in *When David heard*. The contrapuntal opening is marked by tight imitation of the vocal lines. These are followed by a brief chordal passage ('in the midst of the battle') echoing perhaps the sounds of war. But this is quickly interrupted by the keening over Jonathan's slain body. Each of the vocal lines in this section features a melodic drop of a sixth deploring Jonathan's death. Some word-painting then follows to depict the text, 'thou wast slain in thy high places', with short, rising scales. Then after a full cadence, three bars of block harmonies ('O Jonathan') introduce a passage of descending scales mirroring the grief and desolation of David over Jonathan's death. This lengthy outpouring of woe comes to a half close before the final section, which picks up the words of the opening 'How are the mighty fallen', begins. The opening music is not recapitulated, but its manner is; namely, the tight contrapuntal writing reappears together with the usually narrow range of the melodic intervals in each voice part. Some of the battlefield block harmonies also reappear, but now the weapons of war have themselves been disarmed, a realisation that, by the final cadence, there may be some solace to be found in the grim situation.

How are the mighty fall'n in the midst of battle
O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places
O Jonathan, woe is me for thee
O Jonathan, my brother Jonathan, very kind hast thou been to me:
thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women
How are the mighty fall'n, and the weapons of war destroyed

Sleep, fleshly birth

The third of the Robert Ramsey works presented today is a setting not of a scriptural text but of a poem by an unknown writer. The work is better described as a madrigal intended for domestic use rather than an anthem. In a similar vein, Ramsey is known to have produced a collection of songs entitled *Dialogues of Sorrow upon the Death of the Late Prince Henry*. This collection is an extended dramatic madrigal in six movements composed for voices and viols. Unfortunately, two of the six vocal parts are missing and the work remains unperformable. *Sleep, fleshly birth*, however, is not part of the *Dialogues of Sorrow*, but is clearly linked to the same tragic death of the eighteen-year-old prince. The work is in six vocal parts and falls into four sections. The first section is a blend of chordal harmonies and some short-breathed imitative writing. The occasional discord points up the doleful tenor of this text. The brief second section in triple time sets the upper voices against the lower ones in a stately dance. The third section begins with block harmonies before breaking up into smooth-flowing polyphony. The melodic lines are mostly in descending patterns in which the flowers and tears of the mourners are intermingled. The fourth and final section (which is sung

twice) is cast in a similar mould to previous sections where block harmonies give way to some close imitative writing. The text now moves towards a positive conclusion ('till soul and body meet to join again') and the music matches it with a calm series of clear-voiced harmonies.

Sleep fleshly birth, in peaceful earth
And let thine ears list to the music of the spheres
While we around this fairy ground
They doleful obit keeping, make marble melt with weeping.
With num'rous feet, we'll part and meet.
Then chorus-like in a ring thy praises sing
While show'rs of flow'rs bestrew thee,
We'll thus with tears bedew thee
Rest in soft peace, sweet youth, and there remain
'till soul and body meet to join again.

James MacMillan

Sir James MacMillan was born in Ayrshire, Scotland, in 1959. He studied music at Edinburgh University and took doctoral studies in composition at Durham University with John Casken. After working as a lecturer at Manchester University, MacMillan returned to Scotland and has settled in Glasgow. His fame as a composer was dramatically launched with the much-acclaimed 1990 BBC Proms commission *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*. This success was closely followed by *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, a percussion concerto written in 1992 for his fellow Scot, Evelyn Glennie. His prolific compositional output is a mixture of many genres: choral, orchestral, operas, concertos, chamber music, solo instrumental works. His works for choir, whether unaccompanied, or with either organ or orchestral accompaniment, appear all throughout his life. At times these choral works have a liturgical basis; at others they are extra-liturgical, but usually with a spiritual essence. The seven motets that we will hear today, *The Strathclyde Motets* (first set), all owe their origin to the Roman Catholic liturgy and were first performed in either MacMillan's parish church in Glasgow, St Columba's, or in the chaplaincy centre of Strathclyde University. They are settings in Latin of the Communion antiphon set down for various feasts in the Church's liturgical calendar. The composer notes that the motets may be sung either in their liturgical context within the Eucharist, or as items in programmes designed for the concert hall. All except the last item in today's programme are to be sung *a cappella*.

MacMillan has often spoken about music, not so much about specific pieces of music because he regards music as self-referential, but more philosophically, and even theologically about music. Music, he says, has the ability 'to enter into the crevices of your soul'. Listeners to *The Strathclyde Motets*, whether believers or not, may well find their souls welcoming sounds that excite or reanimate strong personal responses.

Data est mihi omnis potestas

The text of this Communion motet (Matthew 28:18,19) is set down for Ascension Day. It is written for eight-part choir. Structurally it is a sequence of alternating tempi: the opening is a slow-paced, arresting proclamation followed by a passage of quicker melismas on the word 'Alleluia'. Returning to the opening tempo, the choir, at a lower dynamic level and in straightforward harmonies, sings the text of the great commission to Jesus' followers to go forth, teaching and baptising all nations. The Alleluias then return at the earlier quick tempo, but at a reduced dynamic level and in a more restricted vocal range. The motet concludes with four strongly accented Alleluias in block chords which echo the opening texture of the motet.

Data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo et in terra, alleluia. Euntes, docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, alleluia.

All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth, alleluia; go therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, alleluia.

Dominus dabit benignitatem

The text of this Communion motet (Psalm 84:13) is set down for the first Sunday in Advent. Like the first motet it is written for eight-part choir. Here, though, the mood and the tone is quite hushed, except climax just before the end. A six-bar pattern of slowly moving chords in the lower voices appears and reappears throughout. These chords frequently support a rather free melodic line in the sopranos which reminds the listener of elements of Scottish folk music so dear to the composer.

Dominus dabit benignitatem: et terra nostra dabit fructum suum. Amen.

The Lord will bestow his loving kindness, and our land will yield its fruit. Amen.

Factus est repente

The text of this Communion motet (Acts 2:2,4) is set down for the feast of Pentecost. It is again a setting for eight parts and its sound-world is reminiscent of the first motet *Data est mihi*. A declamatory opening statement for full choir represents the tongues of fire coming down from heaven on the day of Pentecost. The tempo then picks up and a dance-like passage leads to a soft, slow-paced, cadential Alleluia. The ending returns to the spirit and energy of the opening as the great works of God ('magnalia Dei') are evoked. There is a strong build-up through the final Alleluias, but the last Alleluia is no more than an echo of the mighty display which has preceded it.

Factus est repente de cælo sonus advenientis spiritus vehementis, ubierant sedentes, alleluia; et repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto, loquentes magnalia Dei, alleluia.

Suddenly, a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, in the place where they were sitting, alleluia; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke of the great things God had done, alleluia.

Mitte manum tuam

The text of this Communion motet (John 20:27) is set down for the second Sunday of Easter. This is a four-part setting where much of the music is a vehicle for the word 'Alleluia'. The basses lead off with a plainsong-like melody that bears more than a faint likeness to the original Latin chant of this text. The pace of the setting is measured and, except at one point, the Alleluias are not the exuberant ones we hear elsewhere in these motets. Chains of common chords are one feature in the vocal writing; so too are crushed notes that fall on the beat at various times in all the parts. The motet ends in a *diminuendo* on the final Alleluias.

Mitte manum tuam et cognosce loca clavorum, alleluia: et noli esse incredulus sed fedelius, alleluia.

Stretch forth your hand, and feel the place where the nails were, alleluia: and be not doubtful but believing, alleluia.

Sedebit Dominus Rex

The text of this Communion motet (Psalm 28:10b, 11b) is set down for the feast of Christ the King. This feastday was introduced into the Roman Catholic calendar in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. In the reorganisation of the calendar after Vatican II the feast was moved to the last Sunday after Pentecost, namely at the end of the liturgical year. The motet is written for up to nine parts and falls into three sections. The first, marked Adagio, is a full-voiced celebration of the Lord's sovereignty, with the sopranos and then the tenors delivering an ornamental melodic line of somewhat limited range. This section ends quietly. The second section is a setting of an English text. It is the prayer which the priest at the Eucharist of this day prays after Communion has been received. Here it is sung by the altos whilst the other voices accompany them with softly hummed chords. The third section is a direct recapitulation of the first.

*Sedebit Dominus Rex in æternum: Dominus benedicet populo suo in pace.
Lord, you give us Christ, the King of all creation, as food for everlasting life. Help us to live by the Gospel, and bring us to the joy of his kingdom.*

The Lord will sit on his throne forever; the Lord will bless his people in peace.
Lord, you give us Christ, etc.

Videns Dominus

The text of this Communion motet (John 11: 33,35,43,44,39) is set down for the fifth Sunday in Lent. The motet is written for up to six parts. It opens with two close canons between, firstly, the sopranos and tenors, and then the altos and basses. A duet for the sopranos and altos in the melismatic idiom of the first canon follows and then falls silent. Tenors and basses lead off the next section introducing the summons by Jesus to Lazarus. 'Lazare, Lazare' for full choir singing Jesus' words *pianissimo* has nothing peremptory about it, but is more an ululation, echoing the keening of the other mourners at Lazarus' tomb. Even Jesus' command to come forth ('veni foras') is no louder than *mezzo forte*. The silences cutting through these calls are as pregnant as any vocal sounds, or indeed are more so. After the calls have become louder and more insistent, and after another silence, Lazarus finally emerges from his tomb, bound hand and foot. The coda lays down the plain fact that Lazarus had been dead for three days and the choir reports this bald fact simply and gently.

Videns Dominus flentes sorores Lazari ad monumentum, lacrimatus est coram Judæis, et clamabat: Lazare, veni foras. Et prodiit ligatis manibus et pedibus, qui fuerat quatrduanus mortuus.

When the Lord saw the sisters of Lazarus in tears near the tomb, he wept in the presence of the Jews and cried: 'Lazarus, come forth'. And out he came, hands and feet bound, the man who had been dead for four days.

In splendoribus sanctorum

The text of this Communion motet (Psalm 109:3) is set down for the Midnight Mass at Christmas. It is written for four parts with a trumpet *obbligato*. The structure of this motet calls for some comment. The composer asks that the choir sing the four blocks of its music, each one separated by a lengthy pause, a total of three or four times. Towards the end of each choral block the trumpet is cued to play one of its four solo parts. In the course of the repetitions by the choir the trumpeter is free to play whichever of the solo parts he or she chooses. The piece finishes with the trumpeter playing cadential figures from any of the solo parts. The vocal lines in the upper voices are characterised by the organum effect of parallel open fifths. The bass line is predominantly a drone on the note F. The simplicity of the means employed in this motet masks the power of the effect it creates over its duration.

In splendoribus sanctorum ex utero ante luciferum genuite.

Amidst the splendours of the heavenly sanctuary, from the womb, before the morning star, I have begotten you.

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HAMER SINGERS has swiftly established a reputation for musical excellence and bold artistic planning.

Established in 2017, with Jonathan Grieves-Smith as Artistic Director, Hamer Singers is a passionate advocate for the visions of contemporary composers, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, David Lang, James MacMillan, Ugis Praulins, and Arvo Pärt, and of the great composers of the past, Thomas Tallis, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Jakob Handl, Tomas Luis da Victoria, and Orlando Gibbons.

In 2019 Hamer Singers celebrate James MacMillan in St Ignatius, celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Baltic Way in what will be an extraordinary evening in St Patrick's Cathedral on August 23rd, and, late in the year, on a summer's evening in leafy North Melbourne, will celebrate the beauty and history of the Ukrainian Cathedral in an exquisite programme of music from the Ukraine and its neighbours.



Photo: Nicolas Gilbert

JONATHAN GRIEVES-SMITH is internationally renowned for compelling performances and rigorous artistic leadership. He is Artistic Director of Hallelujah Junction, Australia's professional choir, and of the Hamer Singers, and has held the titles of Chorus Master to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Director of Music at Trinity College, the University of Melbourne, Music Director of Brighton Festival Chorus, the Hallé Choir, and the Huddersfield Choral Society.

Acclaimed as an outstanding conductor of music from the Baroque and Classical periods, he is also a passionate advocate for new music, commissioning and premiering such composers as Brett Dean, David Lang, James MacMillan, Gavin Bryars, Gabriel Jackson, Arvo Pärt, John Tavener, Alfred Schnittke and Lou Harrison. He has conducted the BBC Singers, Orchestre National de Lille, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Coro dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Europa Cantat, and Flemish Federation of Young Choirs.

In concerts and recordings in major festivals with the world's leading orchestras, he has collaborated intensively with conductors, including Sir Simon Rattle, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Sir Roger Norrington, Pierre Boulez, Stephen Layton, Sir Andrew Davis, Mark Wigglesworth, and Valery Gergiev.



Photo: Pia Johnson

SOPHIE SPENCER is in her second year at the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) under the tutelage of Yoram Levy and Tristram Williams. Sophie commenced her Bachelor of Music (Performance) degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2017, where she was the recipient of a Sydney University Sydney Scholars Award and the J.J. Kelly Memorial Scholarship. She studied with Andrew Evans in

2017, and has studied with David Elton since 2013.

Sophie toured with the Australian World Orchestra in 2018 to India, and has played casually with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the Opera Australia Orchestra. Last year, she performed alongside Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra musicians in an ANAM Side-by-Side project. Since 2014, Sophie has performed in Australian Youth Orchestra (AYO) programs, performing as Principal Trumpet at AYO'S 2018-19 National Music Camp and February Season, and in its July Season in 2018. She also participated in AYO's 2018 Adelaide Symphony Orchestra Fellowship Program.

As a soloist, Sophie has won several state and national championships, both on trumpet and soprano cornet. She was also awarded first place in the 2016 Sydney Eisteddfod, and received an International Trumpet Guild Young Artist Award.



CHRISTOPHER WILLCOCK is an Australian-born Jesuit priest and composer. Most of his compositional activity has been in the area of liturgical music, but he has also written much concert music, including for such ensembles as the Tallis Scholars, the Choir of Merton College, Oxford, and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

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Hamer Singers is proudly supported by **Hamer Family Fund**, a sub-fund of Australian Communities Foundation; the City of Yarra's Community Grants Program, and receives funds from Creative Partnerships Australia through the Australian Cultural Fund.



Hamer Singers acknowledges with thanks the following for their tax-deductible donations in support of our activities:

Lyndi Brennan
Haig Burnell
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