

Singing the Same Song: Bridging the Sacred/Secular Boundary in the Mass Settings of James MacMillan

The significant rise of secularization in Britain at the end of the twentieth- and beginning of the twenty-first centuries caused an increased schism between religious and secular communities. Popular figures such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens actively sought to encourage people that belief in God was an absurd and outdated psychological phenomenon, a hangover from a by-gone era. Despite, or possibly because of this hostility, sacred music has not only endured but become extremely popular in the UK, with composers such as Tavener, Pärt and Górecki achieving the kind record sales usually reserved for performers of pop music.

One of Scotland's most successful composers, James MacMillan (b. 1959), has flourished in composing primarily sacred music within this theologically divided environment. Unlike many other contemporary composers of religious music, MacMillan's theological approach does not focus solely on the transcendent. At the heart of so much of his music lies a palpable sense of tension and release, conflict and resolution. However, the greatest point of distinction between MacMillan and other composers of sacred music lies in the great emphasis he places on reconciling the cultural fissure between the sacred and the secular. This is achieved by one of the most frequently employed techniques that occurs in MacMillan's work: musical self-quotation. Given the degree to which MacMillan employs this technique, it is surprising that no extensive research has explored this significant feature in his work.

Evidence of this practice can be found in four of the composer's mass settings. MacMillan has written five masses, one in each decade since the 1970s, including: *Missa Brevis* (1977 rev. 2007); two congregational settings, *St Anne's Mass* and *The Galloway Mass* (1985 and 1996 respectively); *Mass*, which he wrote for the Choir of Westminster Cathedral (2000); and a third congregational setting, *Mass of Blessed John Henry Newman* (2010), written for the papal visit to Glasgow that took place in September 2010. With the exception of the youthful *Missa Brevis*, all of MacMillan's masses share a common thread in expressing a desire to draw different communities together, either by including musical material quoted from his other works, both sacred and secular, or by using original material, which is later adapted into other genres. This is an ancient practice that dates back centuries, to the parody masses of fifteenth-century composers, who often took secular chansons as the musical impetus for musical mass settings. However, MacMillan's intention is different to these predecessors: in sharing this common musical material across various cultures, he deliberately offers instances of audible recognition to his audiences, bringing the church into the concert hall and vice versa.

It is important to state from the outset that all of MacMillan's masses are liturgical, and three of the four discussed here are congregational rather than choral. While he has written several religious works for the concert hall, most notably his *St John Passion* (2007), his masses serve a liturgical function rather than a performance opportunity. Therefore in the majority of cases, listeners will become familiar with his mass settings only by hearing them or singing them at mass¹. The chronology of MacMillan's masses, excluding the *Missa Brevis*, reflects the significance and frequency of his musical quotations from these works, and for this reason it makes sense to address the masses in reverse chronological order.

MacMillan's most recent mass currently shares musical material with just one other work. *Mass of Blessed John Henry Newman* has a musical association with *Seraph* (2010), the second of MacMillan's trumpet concertos, written for Alison Balsom and the Scottish Ensemble. The Agnus Dei from the papal, congregational setting features in the concerto, which is unsurprising, given that the two works were written in the same year.

However, while this recent mass shares material with just one other work (so far), the setting he wrote for the choir of Westminster Cathedral a decade earlier, simply entitled *Mass*, contains references to two other works, one from an earlier cantata, *Quickenings* (1998), the other from a later *a cappella* choral work, *Sun-Dogs* (2006). These two references should be treated very differently, not only because one occurs in a work written before the composition of *Mass* while the other appears in a later work, but also because only one of these

¹ Two exceptions to this are *Mass*, which was written for and recorded by the Choir of Westminster Cathedral (Hyperion Records, 2001: CDA67219), and *Missa Brevis*, recorded by Capella Nova (Linn Records, 2007: CKD 301). The fact that these masses were recorded means they can be heard in any context with a CD player, sacred or secular. However, none of the congregational masses has been recorded.

quotations was consciously included. When I asked the composer whether or not he was aware of self-quoting in *Mass*, he stated he was not. However, the dominant five-note motif found in every movement of *Mass* is clearly evident in ‘Poppies’, the third movement of *Quickening*. The distinctive, slightly angular shape of this melody makes it easy to identify in each work:

Example 1a. MacMillan: *Quickening*, Movement III ‘Poppies’, bb. 166–167 (treble part only)



Example 1b. MacMillan: *Mass*, ‘Gloria’, bb. 1–2



There are two possible reasons for this inadvertent self-quotation in *Mass*. The first is simply the proximity of the composition and premiere performances of the two works. Although *Quickening* was composed in 1998 it was only premiered in late 1999², less than a year before *Mass* was first performed³. It is therefore reasonable to assume certain musical ideas from the former subliminally translated into the latter. Second, and perhaps more significantly, when *Quickening* was premiered, the boys’ choir comprised the choristers of Westminster Cathedral. Evidently the characteristically ‘continental’ sound of the choristers remained in MacMillan’s mind after hearing the premiere of *Quickening*, and this influenced the composition of *Mass*. In other words, there is no specific extra-musical relationship between the two works.

The musical connection between *Mass* and *Sun-Dogs* is by contrast conscious, more explicit and bears an important theological association. It is in the fourth movement of *Sun-Dogs* that this connection is both verbally and musically evident. The text is by poet Michael Symmons Roberts, MacMillan’s most frequent collaborator, and the most significant lines of this movement are repeated over and over in a kind of mantra or chant-like state: “One offers bread, part chewed, soft with saliva; the other a punctured orange, sweet spittle matting on the soft hair round its muzzle”. MacMillan recognizes the Eucharistic implications of these lines and emphasizes this aspect. This movement has the longest duration by far (approximately seven minutes; the entire work lasts c. twenty minutes) and it is the only movement to contain additional lines of text chosen by MacMillan. These lines are taken from the Eucharistic Prayer in the Roman Missal, which are sung in Latin in *senza misura* bars, with the voices starting at different times, forming an aural ‘backdrop’ to “One offers bread...”:

Accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes: hoc est enim corpus meum, quod pro vobis tradetur.
(Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body, which was given for you).

Accipite et bibite ex eo omnes: hic est enim calix sanguinis mei novi et aeterni testamenti, qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum, hoc facite in eam commemorationem.
(Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this cup is my blood of the new and everlasting covenant, which was shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of me).

This section of the movement contains an audibly recognizable musical connection with the Eucharistic Prayer movement of *Mass* (Exx. 2a and 2b). MacMillan self-quotes the plainchant-like material, and although in *Sun-Dogs* it is sung at a significantly slower tempo, the quotation is explicit enough for any listener familiar with *Mass* to instantly make the connection, enhancing their comprehension of *Sun-Dogs*’ often cryptic text.

² *Quickening* was premiered at the BBC Proms, in the Royal Albert Hall, 5th September 1999.

³ *Mass* was premiered at Mass in Westminster Cathedral, 22nd June 2000.

Just four years before *Mass* came the second of MacMillan's congregational settings, *The Galloway Mass*. It is clear that MacMillan took this mass and its relationship to his clarinet concerto, *Ninian*, as a model for *Mass of Blessed John Henry Newman* and *Seraph*: in each case, a congregational mass prominently shares material with a concerto. Speaking specifically about *The Galloway Mass* and *Ninian*, MacMillan reveals his intention to establish a musical and theological link between the two works:

Example 2a. MacMillan: *Sun-Dogs*, Movement IV 'Sometimes, like Tobias', senza misura bar after fig. B

Chamber choir *mp-mf*

S
A
T
B

One offers bread, part chewed, soft with sa-li - va; The other a punctured

orange, sweet spittle matting on the soft hair round its muz - zle. One offers bread,

Example 2b. MacMillan: *Mass*, 'Eucharistic Prayer', bb. 3-4

S
A
T
B

Let your spirit come upon these gifts to make them ho - - ly

so that they may become the body and blood of our Lord Je - sus Christ.

Ninian takes musical themes from the Mass, for example the Gloria of the Mass has a recurring plainsong shape which appears reharmonized in the third movement of the Clarinet Concerto. There was a deliberate attempt to connect the two musically, to fill *Ninian* with the music of *The Galloway Mass*, to connect past and present in the way that the Bishop and the people who asked me for the mass connect past and present. So there's a musical connection, but there is also a timeless theological connection as well.⁴

However, as well as these musical and theological connections, MacMillan explains his enjoyment in establishing a societal connection between different social groups as well:

There's also an attempt I think to reach into communities and make links between them. I wrote *The Galloway Mass* for the people in Ayrshire and in Galloway, and I wrote *Ninian* for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the clarinetist John Cushing. I have a curious sense of fun about linking those very different communities. As it happens John Cushing came down to hear *The Galloway Mass* being sung. Having heard that transformed version of it in *Ninian* he found it a strange, unsettling experience but a beautiful experience as well. Similarly many people from Ayrshire, when they heard about *Ninian*, came to the performance and began to hear themes that they had been singing as part of the Mass. This kind of playfulness with communities, making connections between people who would never normally have anything to do with each other, is something that appeals to me.⁵

The various sections of *The Galloway Mass* use a common theme, and it is this same theme that is unobtrusively heard in both the first and third movements of *Ninian* (Exx. 3a and 3b).

Example 3a. MacMillan: *The Galloway Mass*, 'Agnus Dei', bb. 6–13

Musical score for Example 3a, showing vocal lines with lyrics: "Lamb of God, you take a way the sins of the world, have mercy on us." The score consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time, with lyrics written below the notes.

Example 3b. MacMillan: *Ninian*, Movement III 'A Mystical Vision of the Christ-child', bb. 161–169 (Horn 1, Trumpet 2 and Viola parts only)

Musical score for Example 3b, showing instrumental parts for Horn 1, Trumpet 2, and Viola. The score consists of three staves of music in 3/4 time, with dynamic markings like *mp* and *ff* indicated.

⁴ MacMillan, quoted in: Johnson, Julian and Catherine Sutton. 1997. 'Raising Sparks: On the Music of James MacMillan'. *Tempo*, New Ser., No. 202 (October 1997), p. 25.

⁵ Ibid.

Ninian represents the first of several sacred-to-secular crossovers from *The Galloway Mass*, for MacMillan reused this theme again for ‘Celtic Hymn’, the third piece of *Northern Skies* (a cycle of seven easy pieces for cello and piano), and a piece for unaccompanied solo clarinet, *From Galloway*.

The final, most significant and earliest of MacMillan’s cross-reference masses is the *St Anne’s Mass*, whose musical material is found in a remarkably large number of works spanning a twenty-five year period. It is specifically the Sanctus of this mass that has experienced so many permutations in its various musical incarnations. However, this Sanctus itself was adapted from an even earlier work. In 1984, one year prior to the *St Anne’s Mass*, MacMillan wrote *The Tryst*, a love song in the style of a Celtic ballad. The composer himself performed this work with folk group The Whistlebinkies, and even recorded it on one of the band’s albums, *Timber Timbre*.

The melody of *The Tryst* has subsequently become the most self-quoted material of MacMillan’s music. However, its place within the context of the *St Anne’s Mass* is the reason for its longevity. MacMillan has frequently mentioned turning a romantic love song into a love song for the Church, and it is through its association with various denominations of Christians that the melody has become so well known, not least because it is published in *Laudate*⁶, a popular hymnbook, widely disseminated across not only Catholic churches but also in other Christian denominations in the UK. Its inclusion in this book has facilitated its considerable and widespread popularity among church-goers. In addition at Westminster Cathedral, the central headquarters of the Catholic Church in the UK, the *St Anne’s Mass* is regularly used congregationally, to the extent that a special license from music publishers Boosey & Hawkes was arranged, allowing it to be printed in the orders of service.

Example 4a. MacMillan: *St Anne’s Mass*, ‘Sanctus’, bb. 1–18)

Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly - Lord, God of - power and. might. Heav'n and
 earth are_ full of your glo-ry. Ho - san - na in_ the_ high - est. Bles-sed is he, O... etc.

Several years after the mass came three works in close succession: *Búsqueda* (1988) a music-theatre piece, *After The Tryst* (1988) a miniature for violin and piano, and *Tryst* (1989) a twenty-five minute orchestral tone poem. It is clear from the titles of these latter two works that at this stage in the evolution of the melody, MacMillan was referring to the original context of the love song *The Tryst*, rather than the liturgical nature of the *St Anne’s Mass*. In *Búsqueda* however, the religious association of the melody is supported by the inclusion of liturgical texts: MacMillan takes the form of the Roman Mass – Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Benedictus, and Agnus Dei – as a structure for the work, interspersing these sacred texts with poems of the Mothers of the Plaza di Mayo in Argentina. When the melody of *The Tryst* is heard in the final Agnus Dei section, it offers an ambiguous meaning, implying either a love song – this time the love song of a mother to her lost child, rather than a romantic love song – or a reference to the mass, or both.

In 1991 it reappeared in another two works: *Tuireadh*, a clarinet quintet written in response to the victims of the Alpha Piper oil rig disaster of 1988; and *Scots Song*, an arrangement of *The Tryst*, for voice and piano. In 1997 MacMillan used a fragment of the melody for the part-song *The Gallant Weaver*, written as a wedding present, and again, a fragment of it occurs in his *Cello Sonata No. 1* (1999), so that within a fifteen-year period, it had been reincarnated in a wide variety of genres: folk ballad; congregational mass; chamber piece for voice, violin, or cello with piano accompaniment; clarinet quintet; music theatre piece; and an orchestral tone poem.

⁶ MacMillan’s Sanctus from the *St Anne’s Mass* is Hymn No. 586 in: *Laudate*, 1999. Stephen Dean (ed.) Suffolk: Decani Music.

It then endured its longest period without revival: eight years between 1999 and 2007. This might be considered a type of gestation period, for when it reemerged in 2007 in the *St John Passion*, its early religious connection with the *St Anne's Mass* Sanctus was reinforced. This theme appears audibly and triumphantly as a brass chorale in the purely orchestral concluding movement of the work (Ex. 4b). It must be stressed that by the time he completed the *St John Passion*, congregations had been singing the Sanctus of the *St Anne's Mass* for over two decades, and it was within this context more than any of the other 'Tryst works' that it gained popularity and familiarity. In the context of the Passion therefore, it is reasonable to interpret it in almost exactly the same as Bach's chorales in his settings of the St John and St Matthew Passions, as well as his plethora of cantatas – i.e. as a clear beacon of recognition for the congregation/audience. *Miserere* (2009) is simply a choral re-working of this final movement of the *St John Passion*, with the additional inclusion of plainchant.

Example 4b. MacMillan: *St John Passion*, Movement X 'Sanctus Immortalis, miserere nobis', bb. 57–66 (Horn parts only)

The image displays a musical score for two horns (Hn 1 and Hn 2) and piano accompaniment. The score is in 6/8 time and features a key signature of one flat. The horn parts are marked 'mp solemn, tenuto, sonore' and 'a 2'. The piano accompaniment includes a triplet of eighth notes marked 'f' and a section marked 'p'.

While the self-quotations in these various works provide a structural coherence across MacMillan's entire oeuvre, it is particularly with his congregational settings, especially the *St Anne's Mass*, that MacMillan seems to unite sacred and secular societies. By taking a melody sung by a congregation and placing it in the new context of a non-liturgical work, the composer invites those church members into the concert hall by offering them an element of aural familiarity.

He also invites those who have no connection with any religious body but who have heard his works in concerts to explore the origins of this musical material. The aim is not to pack concert halls with congregations, nor to convert every music-lover to Christianity. Rather, these cross-genre musical quotations help establish a degree of communication between different communities.

The mass settings discussed here represent just one strand of much larger network of self-quotations in MacMillan's oeuvre, and they can be seen to represent another side of the composer's Catholicism, namely a respect for tradition and evolution from the past, rather than attempting to break away from it, as high modernism has sought to do. A considerable portion of his compositional output expresses a concern to combine not only the sacred and secular but also the past and the present through the inclusion of self-quotation. At the time of writing MacMillan was only fifty-one years old. It will be interesting to see how and if these musical references to his younger self and his concern to unite different communities continue in his more mature years.

Santrauka

Giedant tą pačią giesmę: sakralinės/pasaulietinės ribos peržengimas Jameso MacMillano mišiose

Reikšmingas sekuliarizacijos plitimas D. Britanijoje XX a. pabaigoje ir XXI a. pradžioje sukėlė ryškią schizmą tarp religinių ir pasaulietišku bendruomenių. James MacMillanas (g. 1950), vienas žymiausių D. Britanijos kompozitorių, sėkmingai kuria sakralinę muziką šioje teologiškai susiskaldžiusioje aplinkoje.

Skirtingai negu daugelis dabartinių sakralinės muzikos kompozitorių, MacMillano teologinis požiūris nesukoncentruotas į grynai transcendentalią patirtį. Jo muzikoje junti įtampą ir palengvėjimą, konfliktą ir ryžtą. Tačiau didžiausias skirtumas tarp MacMillano ir kitų sakralinės muzikos kompozitorių slypi jo pastangoje panaikinti kultūrinę spragą tarp sakralinio ir pasaulietinio požiūrio. Tai pasiekama naudojant vieną jo mėgstamiausių technikų – savo muzikos citavimą.

Šios praktikos įrodymų galime aptikti kompozitoriaus mišių oranžuotėse. MacMillanas yra parašęs 5 mišias, po vieną kas dešimtmetį nuo 1970 m., tarp jų: *Missa Brevis* (1977 m., red. 2007 m.); dvi kongregacijos aranžuotės, *Šv. Onos mišios* ir *Galloway mišios* (1985 m. ir 1996 m.); *Mišios* Vestminsterio katedros chorui (2000 m.); trečia kongregacinė aranžuotė, Palaimintojo Johno Henry'io Newmano mišios (2010 m.), parašytos 2010 m. rugsėjo mėn. įvykusio popiežiaus vizito į Glazgovą garbei. Išskyrus jaunatvišką *Missa brevis*, visos MacMillano mišios siekia suartinti skirtingas bendruomenes per muzikinę medžiagą, cituotą iš kitų jo kūrinių, tiek sakralinę, tiek pasaulietinę, arba naudojant originalią medžiagą, įtrauktą į kitus kūrinius. Dalydamasis šia paprasta originalia medžiaga įvairių kultūrų terpėje, MacMillanas siūlo girdimus pripažinimo pavyzdžius savo klausytojams, kviesdamas Bažnyčią į koncertų salę (ir atvirkščiai).

Pranešimo tikslas – išanalizuoti ir nušviesti šiuos saviraiškos pavyzdžius MacMillano mišių aranžuotėse ir aptarti būdus, kurie galėtų sujungti sakralinį ir pasaulietinį pradus.