



James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* wins coveted Diapason d'Or for Choral Music on The Sixteen's own label CORO

Last night (22 November) the winners of the Diapason d'Or de l'Année were announced at a ceremony broadcast live on France Musique from the Maison de la Radio. The Sixteen, its conductor and founder Harry Christophers and Britten Sinfonia were awarded the Diapason d'Or for Musique Chorale (Choral Music) of James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* on The Sixteen's own record label Coro.

The much-lauded choral setting by Sir James MacMillan of the *Stabat mater* was commissioned by the Genesis Foundation for Harry Christophers and The Sixteen. The work received its world premiere in October 2016 at London's Barbican Centre performed by The Sixteen and Britten Sinfonia, in a continuation of their close relationship with MacMillan and was released on Coro in March 2017 (Catalogue Number: COR16150).

MacMillan followed such composers as Pergolesi, Rossini, Dvořák, Szymanowski and Poulenc in setting the stark and searing 13th-century liturgical text, which meditates on the suffering of Mary standing at the foot of the Cross. Few living composers communicate with the emotional directness of MacMillan and his belief that 'beauty is at the heart of our Christian faith' is profoundly present in his new setting of the *Stabat mater*. Arguably one of the most powerful poems in the liturgy, only a small number of composers have tackled the *Stabat mater* in the last 30 years and the musical world has waited a long time for a substantial setting. In James MacMillan's version, we are witness to a new and intensely personal work which encapsulates the dramatic power of the poem in a way no other composer has done to date.

The work marked the culmination of a project run by the Genesis Foundation over a period of three years, *Stabat mater: Spirit, Strength & Sorrow*. Sir James MacMillan and Harry Christophers had already mentored three outstanding young composers – Alissa Firsova, Tõnu Kõrvits and Matthew Martin – as they prepared their own, a cappella choral settings of the *Stabat mater*, premiered at LSO St Luke's in London in June 2014 and subsequently recorded for the CORO label.

Harry Christophers, Founder and Conductor of The Sixteen, commented:

'This is very much the culmination of a fifteen-year association between The Sixteen and James MacMillan. For me James ranks amongst a trio of truly great composers of sacred music, the other two being Victoria and Poulenc. They have a common focus in their total commitment to the Catholic faith but what makes them so exceptional is their intensely personal approach to the Scriptures. Sixty years after Poulenc's powerful setting, we are witness to a new and equally personal work which encapsulates the power of the poem in a way no other composer has done to date. James digs deep underneath the surface of this 13th-century Marian hymn meditating on Mary's suffering as she stands at the foot of the cross. The demands made on my singers are extraordinary; not only are they harmonically complicated, but they are also technically demanding. The strings of the Britten Sinfonia played with such sensitivity and vigour constantly portraying the bold and dramatic canvases. After every recording session, we all felt as emotionally drained,

but in a very positive way. I am also blessed with a quite brilliant production team - Mark Brown, producer and Mike Hatch, engineer - who are always eager to achieve the most natural sound possible and the church of St Augustine's Kilburn in North London proved to be the ideal acoustic.'

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Notes to Editors

The Sixteen

Whether performing a simple medieval hymn or expressing the complex musical and emotional language of a contemporary choral composition, The Sixteen does so with qualities common to all great ensembles. Tonal warmth, rhythmic precision and immaculate intonation are clearly essential to the mix. But it is the courage and intensity with which The Sixteen makes music that speak above all to so many people. The Sixteen gave its first concert in 1979 under the direction of Founder and Conductor Harry Christophers CBE. Their pioneering work since has made a profound impact on the performance of choral music and attracted a large new audience, not least as 'The Voices of Classic FM' and through BBC television's Sacred Music series. The voices and period-instrument players of The Sixteen are at home in over five centuries of music, a breadth reflected in their annual Choral Pilgrimage to Britain's great cathedrals and sacred spaces, regular appearances at the world's leading concert halls, and award-winning recordings for The Sixteen's CORO and other labels. Recent highlights include the world premiere of James MacMillan's Stabat mater, commissioned for The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, an ambitious ongoing series of Handel oratorios, and a debut tour of China. Visit www.thesixteen.com to find out more.

CORO

CORO is the award-winning record label of Harry Christophers and The Sixteen. Formed in 2001, CORO releases all of the ensemble's new recordings. The label currently boasts over 170 titles, including Allegri's Miserere and Tallis's Spem in Alium; an extensive collection of Bach and Handel titles including Mass in B minor, Lutheran Masses, Messiah, Saul and Jephtha; Requiems by Victoria, Brahms and Fauré; three volumes of Monteverdi's Selva morale e spirituale and his Vespers of 1610. The label has released premiere recordings of works by Antonio Teixeira, James MacMillan, Will Todd, Tarik O'Regan, Matthew Martin and Roxanna Panufnik to name but a few, and has worked with the Britten Sinfonia, BBC Philharmonic and Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, all of whom feature on CORO recordings. The launch of CORO DVD in 2008 allowed the label to release Series One of the BBC's groundbreaking Sacred Music as well as four of the subsequent programmes in the series. Founder and Conductor, Harry Christophers, is also Artistic Director of Boston's celebrated Handel and Haydn Society and since 2010 CORO has released all their recordings.

Sir James MacMillan

James MacMillan is the pre-eminent Scottish composer of his generation. He first attracted attention with the acclaimed BBC Proms premiere of The Confession of Isobel Gowdie (1990). His percussion concerto Veni, Veni Emmanuel (1992) has received close to 500 performances worldwide by orchestras including London Symphony Orchestra, New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics and Cleveland Orchestra. Other major works include the cantata Seven Last Words from the Cross (1993), Quickening (1998) for soloists, children's choir, mixed choir and orchestra, the operas Inès de Castro (2001) and The Sacrifice (2005-06), and St John Passion (2007). He was featured composer at Edinburgh Festival (1993), Southbank Centre (1997), BBC's Barbican Composer Weekend (2005) and Grafenegg Festival (2012). His

interpreters include soloists Evelyn Glennie, Colin Currie, Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Vadim Repin, conductors Leonard Slatkin, Sir Andrew Davis, Marin Alsop and Donald Runnicles, and choreographer Christopher Wheeldon. His recordings can be found on BMG/RCA Red Seal, BIS, Chandos, Naxos, Hyperion, CORO, Linn and Challenge Classics. Recent highlights include premieres of MacMillan's *Woman of the Apocalypse*, *St Luke Passion*, *Little Mass* and *Percussion Concerto No.2*.

Genesis Foundation

Established by John Studzinski in 2001, the Genesis Foundation works in partnership with the leaders of prestigious UK arts organisations such as LAMDA, the National Theatre, Royal Court, The Sixteen and the Young Vic. Its largest funding commitment is to programmes that support directors, playwrights, actors and musicians in the early stages of their professional lives. Genesis Sixteen, the UK's first fully funded programme of its kind, nurtures the next generation of talented choral ensemble singers. Now in its seventh year, Genesis Sixteen has provided training for more than 100 18-23 year olds.

The theme of art & faith increasingly characterises aspects of the Foundation's work with choral commissions and the sponsorship of the British Museum's current *Living with Gods* exhibition (Nov 2017-April 2018). Harry Christophers and The Sixteen have performed and recorded the Genesis Foundation's sacred music commissions these past ten years including its most recent commission, James MacMillan's *Stabat mater*, premiered in Autumn 2016.

Britten Sinfonia

Britten Sinfonia is one of the world's most celebrated and pioneering ensembles, renowned for the quality of its performances and an intelligent approach to concert programming that is centred on the development of its players. Unusually it does not have a principal conductor or director but chooses to collaborate with a range of the finest international guest artists from across the musical spectrum as suited to each particular project. Founded in 1992, the orchestra is inspired by the ethos of Benjamin Britten through world-class performances of the highest quality, illuminating and distinctive programmes where the old meets the new, and projects in the local community as well as in the world's finest halls. Britten Sinfonia is Associate Ensemble at London's Barbican Centre, Resident Orchestra at Saffron Hall, has long-standing residencies in Cambridge (where it is the University's Ensemble-in Residence) and Norwich and makes regular guest appearances at UK festivals including the BBC Proms. Its blossoming international profile has recently included acclaimed tours to India and China. Britten Sinfonia is a BBC Radio 3 broadcast partner, and records regularly for Harmonia Mundi and Hyperion.