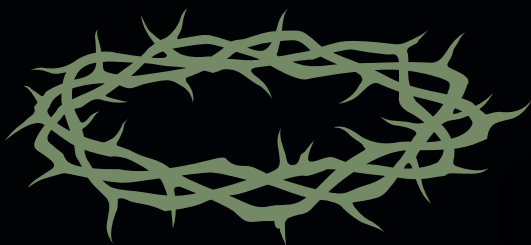


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Seven Last Words

12 Apr 2025

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Seven Last Words

12 April, 7.30pm Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh

BYRD Ne irascaris, Domine

KIDANE Be Still (Scottish Premiere)

MACMILLAN Seven Last Words from the Cross

SCO Chorus

SCO Strings

Gregory Batsleer Conductor

The concert will last approximately 1 hour, 10 minutes. Please note there will be no interval.



*Photography will be taking place at this concert for promotional purposes.
Please get in touch if you have any questions or concerns.*

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Elita Poulter

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Margarida Castro

Percussion

Iain Sandilands

Afonso Fesch
Principal First Violin



WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

BYRD (c.1540-1623)

Ne irascaris, Domine (1581)

**Ne irascaris, Domine
Civitas sancti tui**

DANIEL KIDANE (b. 1986)

Be Still (2020)
(Scottish Premiere)

MACMILLAN (b. 1959)

Seven Last Words from the Cross (1993)

I. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

II. Woman, behold thy Son!... Behold, thy Mother!

III. Verily, I say unto you, today thou shalt be with me in Paradise

IV. Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?

V. I thirst

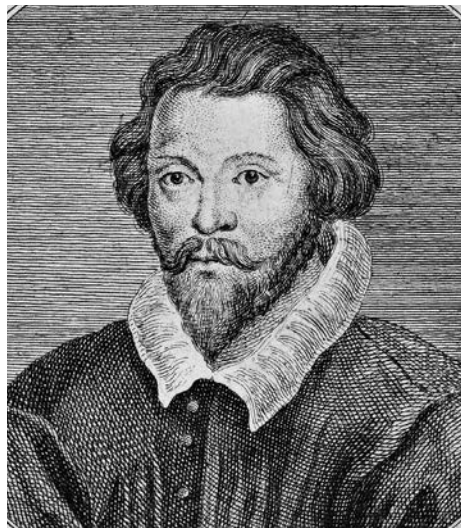
VI. It is finished

VII. Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit

Faith and supplication, endings and beginnings, loss and renewal. Though written in three different centuries (and, indeed, encompassing more than half a millennium of musical time between them), the three pieces in tonight's concert explore some of the profoundest questions to preoccupy humankind – of our relationships with ourselves, each other, and an Almighty creator. The concert's two outer works explore specifically Catholic themes, but there's a broader focus, too, that transcends questions of faith or secularity – and a timely reminder, as we head into the solemn days of Holy Week, that if spring is to bring rebirth to the world, the world has to have suffered death and destruction first.

We begin with the concert's earliest piece. William Byrd was a hugely respected and accomplished Renaissance composer who created music across many styles and forms, from sacred liturgical works to secular songs and madrigals, from keyboard music to a rich catalogue of works for viol consort. He also happened to be a practising Catholic at a time when not falling in line with Protestant Anglicanism – established under Henry VIII, then re-established under his daughter, Elizabeth I – could lead to persecution and punishment. Byrd wrote music for Anglican services, but he also composed a substantial number of Catholic choral works in Latin, intended for private (or even secret) use. Byrd trod a dangerous high-wire, his unwavering loyalty to Catholicism apparently overlooked because of his high status as a musician, and because of his friendly and respectful relations with the royal court, not least Elizabeth herself.

Byrd's richly conceived double motet *Ne irascaris, Domine*, written in 1581



William Byrd

In Byrd's time, those resonances were slightly different, however. In many ways, *Ne irascaris, Domine* represents the composer's personal and private expression of despair over the fate of Catholicism under the domination of the Protestant church in England.

and published in 1589, in many ways encapsulates his precarious and fragile position. Its text, taken from Isaiah 64:10, laments the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the sixth century BCE. It expresses the fear that God has abandoned his chosen people: they beg Him to return to them, and to return them to their homeland. Contemporary resonances with devastated regions and displaced peoples are unavoidable. In Byrd's time, those resonances were slightly different, however. In many ways, *Ne irascaris, Domine* represents the composer's personal and private expression of despair over the fate of Catholicism under the domination of the Protestant church in England.

Byrd achieves this through some of his most complex, expressive music. *Ne irascaris, Domine* falls into two parts, the first conveying the exiles' pleas for divine

mercy, while the second laments the loss of their homeland. It's full, too, of intricate examples of word painting, whereby Byrd shapes the music to reflect the meanings of the text he's setting. In the first part, for example, time seems to slow as the voices reach 'Ecce, respice, populus tuus omnes nos' ('Behold, look upon us, we are Thy people'), as though the singers have unified in expressing the main purpose of their plea. The opening section ends with a towering accumulation of lines repeating 'Populus tuus omnes nos' ('We are Thy people'), as though countless hordes are expressing their anguish.

Part two (*Civitas sancti tui*) stresses the empty, desolate landscape through apparently endless repetitions of 'facta est deserta' (literally 'has been made deserted'). It closes with an extended lament based on the words 'Jerusalem desolata est' ('Jerusalem has been



Daniel Kidane

devastated') that works downwards from the highest voices through no fewer than 54 repetitions, as though a feeling of profound loss simply cannot be overcome.

We move into a more secular musical landscape for tonight's second piece. London-born Daniel Kidane is quickly gaining international prominence as a composer: his *Woke* opened the 2019 Last Night of the Proms, and he's written extensively for chorus. His *We'll Sing*, for example, was commissioned by the Huddersfield Choral Society in 2020, using words by Poet Laureate Simon Armitage to reflect on choir members' experiences of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Kidane currently teaches at Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music and at the University of Cambridge, and has been known to draw on popular dance forms – jungle, grime, dubstep and R&B, for example – in his music.

Written towards the end of 2020, *Be Still* is a reflective piece on the year gone by. In a year where lockdowns became a thing, the idea of time became more apparent to me as everyday markers, such as meeting with friends and family, travelling or attending concerts, vanished.

Be Still was premiered on 19 February 2021, in an online concert given by the Manchester Camerata, conducted by Pekka Kuusisto. Kidane writes about the piece:

Written towards the end of 2020, Be Still is a reflective piece on the year gone by. In a year where lockdowns became a thing, the idea of time became more apparent to me as everyday markers, such as meeting with friends and family, travelling or attending concerts, vanished.

Whilst writing Be Still the opening lines of TS Eliot's 'Burnt Norton', the first of his Four Quartets, came to mind:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.

And as I look back at the year and attempt to fix in my mind events, they slither away from my grasp – like clouds passing by in the sky.

The 'seven last words' are the final utterances of the crucified Christ on the cross, gathered from across the four Biblical Gospels. Though the assembled text doesn't occupy a specific liturgical role, it's frequently used – wholly or in part – in Good Friday sermons, and offers profound insights into the mind and preoccupations of the dying Christ, exploring themes of suffering and deliverance from an unusually personal standpoint.

The seven last words have also become something of a mainstay for classical composers – most famously Joseph Haydn, who produced a purely instrumental work based on them, first for orchestra, then adapted for string quartet, keyboard, and even as an oratorio with sung texts. Earlier and later composers as diverse as Schütz, Pergolesi, Gounod, Franck and Gubaidulina have also produced their own eclectic responses to the texts.

Sir James MacMillan's *Seven Last Words from the Cross* is widely considered one of the composer's masterpieces. He writes about the piece:

Seven Last Words from the Cross was commissioned by BBC Television and first screened in seven nightly episodes during Holy Week 1994, performed by Cappella Nova and the BT Scottish Ensemble under Alan Tavener.

The traditional text of the Seven Last Words from the Cross is based on a compilation from all four gospels to form a sequential presentation of the last seven sentences uttered by Christ.

I. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (St Luke)

The work begins with a cadential figure from the end of the clarinet quintet Tuireadh (lament), repeated over and over, upon which the rest of the music gradually builds. Violin 'fanfares' emerge when the men start singing the Palm Sunday Exclamation Hosanna to the Son of David. Finally, another idea unfolds – a plainsong monotone with the words from one of the Good Friday Responsaries for Tenebrae.

II. Woman, Behold Thy Son!... Behold, Thy Mother! (St John)

Again a repeated cadential figure forms the basis of this movement, this time evoking memories of Bach's Passion chorales. The choir and ensemble operate according to different procedures – the choir repeating the words 'Woman, Behold Thy Son' to a shifting three-bar phrase, the strings becoming gradually more frantic as the music evolves. They both give way to an exhausted 'Behold, Thy Mother'.

III. Verily, I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with me in Paradise (St Luke)

Christ's words are kept until the very end of the movement when they are sung by two high sopranos, accompanied by high violins. The rest of the piece is a setting of the Good Friday Versicle Ecce Lignum Crucis. During the liturgy this is normally sung three times, each time at a higher pitch as the cross is slowly unveiled and revealed to the people. Here also the music begins with two basses, rises with the tenors and then again with two altos. A high violin solo features throughout.

IV. Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani (St Matthew and St Luke)

The music rises tortuously from low to high



Sir James MacMillan

Sir James MacMillan's *Seven Last Words from the Cross* is widely considered one of the composer's masterpieces.

before the choir delivers an impassioned, full-throated lament above which the strings float and glide. The movement eventually subsides through a downward canonic motion to end as it began.

V. I thirst (St John)

The two words 'I thirst' are set to a static and slow-moving harmonic procedure which is deliberately bare and desolate. The interpolated text from the Good Friday Reproaches is heard whispered and distantly chanted.

VI. It is finished (St John)

The movement begins with hammer-blows which subside and out of which grows quiet choral material which is largely unaccompanied throughout. The three words act as a background for a more prominent text taken from the Good Friday Responsories.

VII. Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit (St Luke)

The first word is exclaimed in anguish three times before the music descends in resignation. The choir has finished – the work is subsequently completed by strings alone.

On setting such texts it is vital to maintain some emotional objectivity in order to control musical expression in the way that the Good Friday liturgy is a realistic containment of grief. Nevertheless it is inspiring when one witnesses people weep real tears on Good Friday as if the death of Christ was a personal tragedy. In this final movement, with its long instrumental postlude, the liturgical detachment breaks down and gives way to a more personal reflection: hence the resonance here of Scottish traditional lament music.

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LIBRETTO

WILLIAM BYRD (c.1540-1623)

Ne irascaris, Domine (1581)

Ne irascaris, Domine, satis, et ne ultra
memineris iniquitatis nostrae. Ecce respice
populus tuus omnes nos.

*Be not angry, O Lord, and remember our
iniquity no more. Behold, we are all your
people.*

Civitas sancti tui facta est deserta. Sion
deserta facta est, Jerusalem desolata est.

*Your holy city has become a wilderness. Zion
has become a wilderness, Jerusalem has been
made desolate.*

Isaiah 64: 9-10

JAMES MACMILLAN (b. 1959)

Seven Last Words from the Cross (1993)

I. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Luke 23: 34

Hosanna filio David,
benedictus qui venit in nomine Domine,
Rex Israel, Hosanna in excelsis!

*Hosanna to the Son of David,
blessed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord, The King of Israel, Hosanna in the
Highest!*

The Palm Sunday Exclamation

The life that I held dear I delivered into the hands of the unrighteous
and my inheritance has become for me like a lion in the forest.

My enemy spoke out against me,

'Come gather together and hasten to devour him!'

They placed me in a wasteland of desolation,
and all the earth mourned for me.

For there was no one who would acknowledge me or give me help.

Men rose up against me and spared not my life.

From the Good Friday Responsaries for Tenebrae

.....

II. Woman, behold thy Son!... Behold, thy Mother!

Woman, behold thy Son!... Behold, thy Mother!

John 19: 26-27

.....

III. Verily, I say unto you, today thou shalt be with me in Paradise

Ecce Lignum Crucis
in quo salus mundi pependit:
Venite adoremus.

*Behold the Wood of the Cross
on which The Saviour of the world was hung
Come let us adore him.*

Good Friday Versicle

Verily, I say unto you, today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.

Luke 23: 43

.....

IV. Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?

Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Matthew 27: 46

.....

V. I thirst

I thirst.

John 19: 28

Ego te potaviaqua salutis de petra:

*I gave you to drink of life-giving water from the
rock:*

et tu me postast felle et aceto.

and you gave me to drink of gall and vinegar.

From the Good Friday Reproaches

.....

VI. It is finished

It is finished.

John 19: 30

My eyes were blind with weeping,
For he that consoled me is far from me:
Consider all you people,
is there any sorrow like my sorrow?
All you who pass along this way take heed
and consider if there is any sorrow like mine.

From the Good Friday Responsories for Tenebrae

.....

VII. Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit

Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit.

Luke 23: 46

ENDS

Conductor/Chorus Director

GREGORY BATSLEER



Gregory Batsleer is acknowledged as one of the leading choral conductors of his generation, winning widespread recognition for his creativity and vision. Since taking on the role of SCO Chorus Director in 2009 he has led the development of the Chorus, overseeing vocal coaching, the SCO Young Singers' Programme and the emergence of regular *a capella* concerts. As well as preparing the Chorus for regular performances with the Orchestra, he has directed their successful appearances at the Edinburgh International Jazz, East Neuk, Glasgow Cathedral and St Andrews Voices Festivals, at Greyfriars Kirk and on the SCO Summer Tour.

In 2021 Gregory took up the position of Festival Director for the London Handel Festival. He leads the programming and development of the Festival, fulfilling its mission to bring Handel's music to the widest possible audiences. He has been Artistic Director of Huddersfield Choral Society since 2017 and was Chorus Director with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra from 2015-2021.

As guest conductor, Gregory has worked with many of the UK's leading orchestras and ensembles. Recent highlights include performances with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, RSNO, Hallé Orchestra, Black Dyke Band, National Youth Choir of Great Britain, Orchestra of Opera North, Manchester Camerata, SCO and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

From 2012 to 2017, he was Artistic Director of the National Portrait Gallery's Choir in Residence programme, the first ever in-house music programme of any gallery or museum in the world. He has curated and devised performances for the Southbank Centre, Wilderness Festival and Latitude and collaborated with leading cultural figures across a variety of different art forms. Gregory is the co-founder and conductor of Festival Voices, a versatile ensemble dedicated to cross-art collaboration.

Gregory sits on the board of Manchester Camerata as a non-executive director. His outstanding work as a choral director was recognised with the 2015 Arts Foundation's first-ever Fellowship in Choral Conducting.

Gregory's Chair is kindly supported by Anne McFarlane

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SCO CHORUS



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The Scottish Chamber Orchestra Chorus, under the direction of Gregory Batsleer since 2009, has built a reputation as one of Scotland's most vibrant and versatile choirs. Widely regarded as one of the finest orchestral choruses in the UK, it celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2021.

Members enjoy the unique opportunity of performing with one of the world's leading chamber orchestras, working with international conductors including Maxim Emelyanychev, Andrew Manze, Harry Christophers, Richard Egarr, Václav Luks and Sir James MacMillan.

The Chorus appears regularly with the Orchestra in Scotland's major cities. Recent concerts have covered a wide range of music including Bach Mass in B minor and *Christmas Oratorio*, Brahms *Requiem*, Haydn *Creation*, Stravinsky Mass, a rare performance of Vaughan Williams *Flos Campi* and premiere performances of works by Anna Clyne (SCO Associate Composer 2019-2022) and Sir James MacMillan.

The SCO Chorus also performs a capella, both digital and live, in music ranging from Thomas Tallis to new work by Anna Clyne and Jay Capperauld. Its annual Christmas concerts have established themselves as a Season highlight; the Chorus also enjoys appearing on the SCO's Summer Tour.

Other notable out-of-Season appearances have included critically-acclaimed performances with the SCO at the BBC Proms in Handel's *Jephtha* in 2019 and in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in 2023, and at the 2023 and 2024 Edinburgh International Festival in semi-staged performances of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and *Così fan Tutte*.

Our Young Singers' Programme was established in 2015 to nurture and develop aspiring young singers. It is designed for young people with a high level of choral experience and ambitions to further their singing with a world-class ensemble.

Further information at sco.org.uk

The SCO Chorus Young Singers' Programme is kindly supported by the Baird Educational Trust and the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust.

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SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA



The Scottish Chamber Orchestra (SCO) is one of Scotland's five National Performing Companies and has been a galvanizing force in Scotland's music scene since its inception in 1974. The SCO believes that access to world-class music is not a luxury but something that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in, helping individuals and communities everywhere to thrive. Funded by the Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council and a community of philanthropic supporters, the SCO has an international reputation for exceptional, idiomatic performances: from mainstream classical music to newly commissioned works, each year its wide-ranging programme of work is presented across the length and breadth of Scotland, overseas and increasingly online.

Equally at home on and off the concert stage, each one of the SCO's highly talented and creative musicians and staff is passionate about transforming and enhancing lives through the power of music. The SCO's Creative Learning programme engages people of all ages and backgrounds with a diverse range of projects, concerts, participatory workshops and resources. The SCO's current five-year Residency in Edinburgh's Craigmillar builds on the area's extraordinary history of Community Arts, connecting the local community with a national cultural resource.

An exciting new chapter for the SCO began in September 2019 with the arrival of dynamic young conductor Maxim Emelyanychev as the Orchestra's Principal Conductor. His tenure has recently been extended until 2028. The SCO and Emelyanychev released their first album together (Linn Records) in November 2019 to widespread critical acclaim. Their second recording together, of Mendelssohn symphonies, was released in November 2023. Their latest recording, of Schubert Symphonies Nos 5 and 8, was released on 1 November.

The SCO also has long-standing associations with many eminent guest conductors and directors including Principal Guest Conductor Andrew Manze, Pekka Kuusisto, François Leleux, Nicola Benedetti, Isabelle van Keulen, Anthony Marwood, Richard Egarr, Mark Wigglesworth, Lorenza Bordini and Conductor Emeritus Joseph Swensen.

The Orchestra's current Associate Composer is Jay Capperauld. The SCO enjoys close relationships with numerous leading composers and has commissioned around 200 new works, including pieces by Sir James MacMillan, Anna Clyne, Sally Beamish, Martin Suckling, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Karin Rehnqvist, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Nico Muhly and the late Peter Maxwell Davies.

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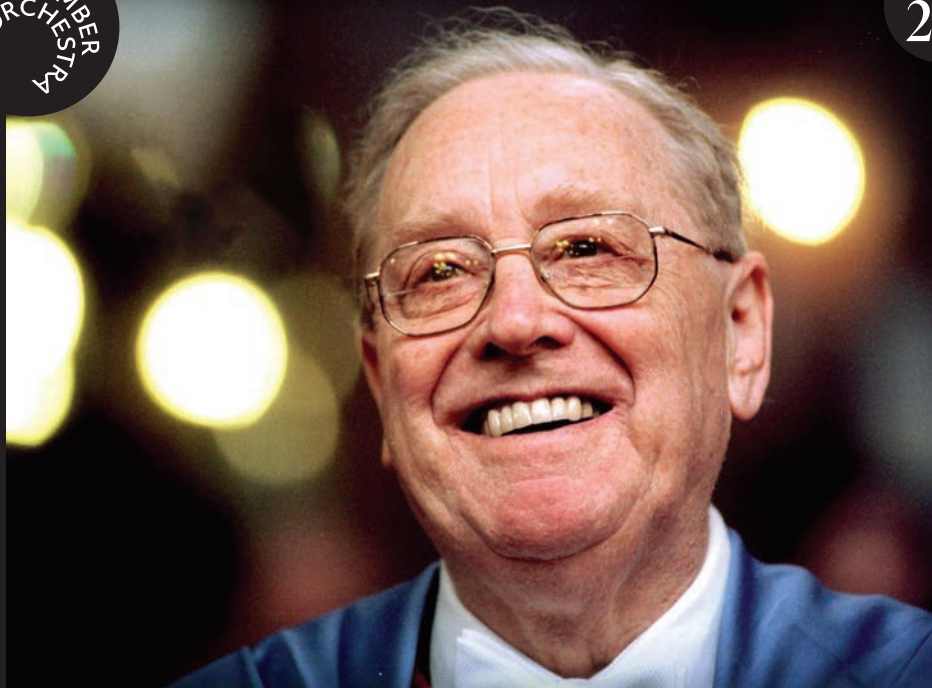
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Sir Charles Mackerras
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