

MacMillan

A Deep but Dazzling Darkness^a.

Í (A Meditation on Iona). Veni, veni, Emmanuel^b

^aGordan Nikolitch *vn* ^bColin Currie *perc*

Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra

/ James MacMillan

Challenge Classics © CC72540 (70' • DDD)



New and old MacMillan concertos from Amsterdam

It was probably both a blessing and a curse that James MacMillan should have enjoyed such phenomenal success with his percussion concerto *Veni, veni, Emmanuel*, composed 20 years ago for Evelyn Glennie. Living up to the reputation that the piece earned for him has not always been easy but the two other, more recent works on this CD tap a seam of inspiration hardly less fertile than the one that he so dramatically mined back in 1992. This is the first disc in a projected series with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic, of which MacMillan was appointed permanent guest conductor in 2010.

A Deep but Dazzling Darkness, completed in 2002, is scored for solo violin, ensemble and tape, the tape contributing sounds of human anguish from an uncredited chorus of lost souls. At almost 24 minutes the music is

overstretched; but Gordan Nikolitch is the potent violinist in his expressions of Shostakovich-like apprehension and the orchestra paints an unnerving backdrop of darkness and flickers of light.

Í, MacMillan's meditation on the island of Iona from 1996, is altogether more focused, more concentrated, more direct in its evocation of mood, containing the elements of rhapsody within a more disciplined framework. And then there is *Veni, veni, Emmanuel* itself, with the inestimable Colin Currie firing the percussive battery. *Veni, veni*, now in the pantheon of contemporary classics, sounds as wonderfully fresh, imaginative, rhythmically impulsive and vibrantly colourful as it did all those years ago at its Proms premiere. **Geoffrey Norris**

Gramophone awards 2012