

CHORAL WORKS

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The Three Kings (1995)

Max was the President of the National Federation of Music Societies, which is the conglomeration of amateur music societies, which includes choirs. Roderick Wylie, living in Edinburgh, was the Chairman of the Scottish Branch, and he saw to it that Peter Maxwell Davies (hereinafter called Max) played his full part at Chairman and a friendship was forged. Roderick was anxious that Max should write a large-scale choral work, and was able to fulfil his dream when the London Symphony Chorus commissioned *The Three Kings* to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, and it was to be performed by the Chorus together with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by its chorus director Richard Hickox at the Barbican Hall, the LSO's home, in October 1995.

All the initial contact was with Roderick until the time that Richard himself came on the scene, and it was he who chose the soloists. The text which Max chose were the Christmas poems which his friend, the Orcadian poet, George Mackay Brown wrote for his friends every Christmas. These poems were interspersed with related Latin fragments from fifteenth century carols. The choir was in the extremely capable hands of Stephen Westrop. Clive Gillinson was the Managing Director of the LSO, and we exchanged words on the subject of the commission on those occasions we met each other. There were no troubles of any kind in bringing this commission to the platform on 15 October 1995.

Job (1997)

This commission arose out of the associations that Max had formed in Vancouver which began in 1992. Max first conducted the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Commission) Vancouver Orchestra. He later also conducted the Vancouver Symphony, and then continued working with the CBC. The manager of that orchestra was Karen Wilson, and through her Max met [David Lemon](#), an Englishman who now lived in Vancouver, and who did a great amount to promote classical music in various different ways.

Max had been introduced to the orchestra by David Keeble, who at one time had studied with Max in the UK, but who held a position of being in charge of Canadian orchestras. He dropped a hint to Karen Wilson who invited Max, and things flowered from there. Then at one point David said that he wanted to commission a work from Max which would be based on the book of *Job*, but initially he did not have any firm idea what form the commission should take. I pointed out that it was dangerous to leave things unspecified as one got into terrible troubles in this way. As Max had

worked with the CBC Vancouver Orchestra and there was an excellent relationship there, it seemed appropriate that they should be involved. David was also on the board of the Vancouver Bach Choir and was also close to Bruce Pullan, an Englishman who had once been a member of internationally famous vocal group the Kings Singers, and who was now the conductor of the choir. There was some question as to how this choir, always used to singing works of the classical repertoire, might react to tackling new music. But Bruce did not see that as a particular problem. Then there was the question of soloists. Karen Wilson was, quite rightly, adamant that the soloists would all be Canadian, and the four who were chosen all had very considerable international as well as local careers.

One item for discussion between Max and David was the question of which version of *Job* Max would use. David was most anxious that the translation by the American poet [Stephen Mitchell](#) who had translated books from Chinese, German and Hebrew, should be used. It was Mitchell's translation from Hebrew of *Job* that had first ignited his great interest in a project on the subject. Max was happy to go along with David's wishes on the subject. David did not want the project to be in his own name, but under the name of the University of British Columbia. One way and another, what with Max going relatively frequently to Vancouver, and David himself making several trips to the UK to visit his family, they were able to discuss the project and for David to choose the selections.

The date was set for May 1997 and Max was to conduct the first performance himself, which was to be in the brand new Chan Centre for the Performing Arts on the campus of the University of British Columbia, which I loved as being one of the most beautiful spots in the whole world that I had ever had the luck of seeing. So brand new was it, that it was to be the very first public performance by a professional group in that hall. The rehearsals with the singers and the orchestra were all at the CBC studios. The choir had trained steadily and well. At first some of the members of the choir made some remarks about the difficulties, but Bruce was able to steer a clear course through all of these, and indeed it would be surprising if nobody had said anything as a response to something that was entirely new to them. The four singers – Valdine Anderson (soprano), Linda Maguire (Mezzo), Paul Moore (tenor) and Kevin McMillan (baritone) – also voiced some words along the lines of the suffering of Job was nothing compared to their own sufferings in learning the piece. Again, I found this to be, as they say, par for the course. People coming to Max's music for the first time have to stick with it, and they invariably come through at the other side with great enthusiasm.

The rehearsals and performance were to be recorded by Collins Classics, which was the company with which he had a contract. The producer was always Veronica Slater, but it turned out that on this occasion Veronica was unable to get to Vancouver, and so Karen Wilson took on this responsibility, as well as being in charge of putting everything together. After the rehearsals days in the studio, the time came for everyone to move over to the new hall. But things did not go at all smoothly at this point. The balance of sound was completely wrong. Max was in great distress standing on the podium, and he made his discomfort felt, and I complained bitterly to the appropriate authorities. It was naturally a last minute panic. How to get everything ready on time for the opening? Acoustic matters did not, at that point, seem high on the list of priorities. A lot of men rushed in, and there were great

movements of removing and adding panels, and something that looked to me like cotton wool, or similar, being stuffed into various apertures in an attempt to make adjustments. After this precarious beginning, the Centre has gone on to have an excellent reputation for both its design and acoustics, so one can put these difficulties which Max was faced with down to teething problems. Otherwise all went well and all the different forces involved were extremely well prepared, and the premiere with its attendant recording was a joyous occasion, and most particularly for David Lemon, whose whole idea this had been, and who had put so much of his ever-generous self into it. The performance was broadcast on CBC shortly afterwards

It was [Richard Hickox](#) who led the way to the next performance. Richard was associated in one way or another with several orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra when he had conducted *The Three Kings*. But perhaps his first love among those orchestras was the one which he had founded – The City of London Sinfonia, and when I told him that Max was writing *Job* he requested that the UK premiere should go to him, and of course Max was delighted that this should be so. Richard again chose the soloists, inviting Kevin MacMillan to repeat his role as Job, and having Catherine Pirard (soprano), Catherin Wyn-Rogers (mezzo) and Mark Padmore (tenor) as the other three soloists. The BBC Singers were the chorus and that performance at the Barbican Hall in London on 22 November 1997. Several years later, Richard asked Max to write another work for the City of London Sinfonia, but this time with no chorus and just one soloist who was his wife, the mezzo-soprano Pamela Helen Stephen. This work was called *A Dance on the Hill*.

Over the years I had a strong personal and professional relationship with Idith Zvi in Israel. I had first met her when she worked at the Israel radio, Kol Yisroel, and she had started a festival called The Upper Galilee Music Days and she had asked me advice on artists on several occasions, and I was glad to be able to make recommendations.

Her job was now the manager of the Israel Chamber Orchestra, and I told her about *Job*, and she was immediately very interested, and set about programming it, in spite of many difficulties. The choir she used was one that was drawn from many Israeli kibbutzim, and three of the soloists were the same as for the Barbican performance, with Neil Archer singing the tenor part instead of Mark Padmore. I was happy to suggest the Canadian conductor Peter Bergamin who had conducted Max's opera *Resurrection* in Vienna, Antwerp, Amsterdam and Glasgow. The performance took place at the Tel Aviv Museum on 21 and 22 January 1999.

The last of the *Job* performances came about through my long-standing connection with Jos Leusink of KRO which is one of the many broadcasting companies which operate in the Netherlands. Jos invited Max to conduct one of the radio orchestras on a couple of occasions. When I told Jos Leusink about *Job* he was very excited and he arranged for a performance within the Musica Sacra Festival with the Limburg Symphony Orchestra and the Netherlands Concert Choir and soloists all chosen by Jos. The performance took place on 20 September 2001 at the Theater an het Vrijthof in the beautiful city of Maastricht, and was broadcast a few days later over the KRO station. It was conducted by the most excellent Jurgen Hempel, and I must say I was thrilled to pieces when the entire audience rose to its feet at the conclusion. I hoped that David Lemon would be happy with what he had caused to be created.

Canticum Canticorum 2001

English - Song of Songs/ English Hebrew Shir Hashirim

It was in late 1997, just before I went to Moscow for the first, and, I am sure, the last time, and before the trip to the Antarctic, that I was approached by the Internationale Orgel Woche– Musica Sacra in the German town of Nuremberg. This organisation is, in its English translation, the International Organ Week – Musica Sacra, and it was to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 2001, and they wanted Max to write a major work for them.

It was the custom in Germany that virtually in any kind of a position of some authority had an assistant. Thus, from my point of view, my contact was not through Professor [Werner Jacob](#), who was the boss of the organisation, nor through the administrator, who was Hans Helmut Mahner, but through Eckerhard Fellner, who was Mahner's assistant. Communication continued and then, getting on for a year later, Eckerhard Fellner asked if I would go to Nuremberg for further discussion concerning the commission contract, which had not yet been signed. I asked whether the discussions would be artistic or financial, and I was told that they would be financial. In that case, it would be my husband Michael who would need to go to Nuremberg since he dealt with all the financial matters. And thus it was that in November 1998, one whole year after the first approach, Michael went to Nuremberg to finalise the contract.

Everything went well at that meeting and all the difficulties were sorted out. Michael met Prof. Jacob of the Organ Week, and Dr. Wulf Konold, the Intendant of Stadtsische Bühnen Opernhaus Nürnberg, which was the opera company of the town of Nuremberg. . The agreement was that it was the International Organ Week – Musica Sacra - which was making the commission, and it would be the opera company which would actually perform the work which Max would write. The opera company had all the necessary forces, name, the choir, the orchestra and the soloists. The time was November 1998, and the first performance of the proposed new work would be some time during the year of 2001, but it had not been decided at that meeting when during 2001 this would be.

One of the items which were set up was the fact that the work would be sung in Latin, and that there would be commentaries upon the text, and these commentaries would be in German. Jochen Arnold was the Dramaturg – artistic advisor – of the Organ Week, and he would be collaborating with Max as to what these commentaries would be. Max had agreed to this way of creating this work. I would need to channel Herr Arnold's suggestions through to Max. It was going to be tricky to bring Max together with the principal players in this complex set up. However, I was able to bring Max to meet Jochen Arnold in April 1999, so that they were fully in agreement. In all these comings and goings and correspondence, I was dealing with Prof. Jacob's assistant, Tanya Sieber, and, as I said previously, with Eckerhard Fellner, who was the assistant to the administrator for the Organ Week, Herr Mahner.

As far as I was concerned, this whole project was the Organ Week's baby and they were looking after everything. At a much later stage, the opera house would come

into the picture, but all that would be done in collaboration with those people in charge at the Organ Week.

Max had a meeting with Jochen Arnold. I continued to receive communications from Herr Fellner, but nobody had told me that in the meantime Herr Mahner had died, and a new person had taken his place.

Jochen Arnold communicated by fax with Max. Max had always refused to have a fax machine in his own house on Sanday in Orkney, but he had agreed that faxes could be sent to the local shop where he would pick them up and send replies. This method had been a vast improvement on what had been before, where it had been impossible to get any kind of written communication to Max quickly, and only regular mail would actually work. But, as neither Max nor Jochen Arnold copied what they wrote to each other to me, and, as it turned out, Max was under the impression that many of the faxes which Jochen Arnold sent to Max were being sent by me – also being J. Arnold and Max not looking too closely – things became out of hand, and I had got lost in the mire of what was going on.

Further strange things started to occur. I was getting messages from Frau Anna Barandum, who was Dr. Konold's assistant at the opera house. I was being told about possible choirs from Eastern Europe, such as from Slovakia, and from Latvia. I was assured that these choirs were of an excellent quality. I was never sure why these choirs had been brought into the picture, as my understanding was that the choir which would be used would be the opera house choir. But there seemed to be no objections from the Organ Week team, and so I assumed that everyone was happy to proceed in this way. But no choir was settled upon. I had thought that perhaps one of these choirs would be of a more specialist nature than the opera house choir, and the new work was, after all, to be a choral work.

The time was now moving on. The date of the first performance was fixed for 6 July 2001. Max had written the work, being always brilliant with fulfilling his obligations in good time. Chester Music had brought out the vocal score in due readiness for the choir and for the soloists. The General Music Director of the opera house, Philippe Auguin, was to conduct the performance, which was to be broadcast on Bavarian Radio.

By this time, which was in June 2001, less than one month from the first performance, I was getting extremely worried. I was not hearing anything from the Organ Week people, and all attempts to obtain any kind of information out of the Opera House people were met with a total negative. I bombarded Frau Barandum, Dr. Konold's assistant, and she had to put up with me, but was as friendly as could be, but was unable to help. Then, on 18 June 2001, I received a phone call from the big man - Dr. Konold, himself. He told me that he had searched all over Germany for a tenor who was willing to take on the roll, but had met with refusals all round. I was astonished at this because I had thought that the tenor would be one of his own singers within the company. He asked me if I would find a tenor for him. I said I would do my best to come up with someone, as of course I would do anything to ensure a good performance of Max's work.

I phoned Neil Mackie, who was the long-standing tenor who had worked on Max's pieces, starting off with the operas *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus* and *The Lighthouse*. Neil was at this time head of vocal studies at the Royal College of Music. Neil said that he regretted that he was unable to take on this role himself, but that he had exactly the right tenor who would be able to do this. I was to bring the vocal score to him, Neil, at the Royal College and he would show it to the man he hoped would take it on. I had copies of the vocal score on hand, having had experience with these kinds of problems previously, and I knew I always had to have a supply. I rushed over to the college, which was only a 20 minute walk, or, should I say run on this occasion, away from our flat, and handed over the score to Neil. Neil phoned me back shortly afterwards to say that the tenor would be Andrew Kennedy and that he would be prepared to do it, and that he, Neil, would go through the part with him. With great relieve I got back to Frau Barandum at the Opera house and I put her in touch with Andrew Kennedy and they proceeded from there. Whew! That was a near one.

Almost immediately afterwards I flew north to Orkney for the St. Magnus Festival, hoping that things had settled down. But they had not. While I was in Orkney, I was contacted once again by Dr. Konold, who informed me that it was now urgent that a baritone should be found. This was now getting ridiculous. With all the resources that the Opera House had within their own company, let alone connections everywhere in Germany, they were not able to find a tenor or a baritone. Once again I contacted dear Neil Mackie from Orkney, and he gave me Geoffrey Davidson. I phoned him, and, as luck would have it, he lived in Norfolk, and was able to drive over to the Chester Music warehouse in Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, to view and to collect the vocal score personally. Once again I put Geoffrey Davidson together with Frau Barandum at the Opera House. She was always entirely on my side and in great distress about the way things were going. Geoffrey Davidson was fixed up on 21 June. The first performance was to be 6 July.

It was at this point that I thought that things had got so out of hand I had to bring in the publishers, who were Chester Music. I phoned James Rushton, and gave him the whole story, and thought that it would be best if he would be in contact with Dr. Konold at the Opera House to find out exactly what it was that was, or was not happening, as clearly a good or even passable performance of Max's work was going to be seriously compromised. However, James's attempts at finding out what was going on met with the same lack of success as my own ones.

I remained at the Festival in Orkney until Friday 29 June, and on my return to London, I was contacted by someone at the Opera House who informed me that he had read in a newspaper that the premiere of *Canticum Canticorum* for the following Friday was to be cancelled. I immediately phoned Prof. Jacob at the Organ Week, and told him this information. Prof. Jacob said, firmly, that the performance would NOT be cancelled. I was to leave things to him. Which I did. I was due to leave for Nuremberg, on Tuesday 3 July for whatever was, or was not, going to happen on Friday 6 July. Max, in great agitation, was holding off going to Nuremberg, as he certainly was not going to travel all the way from Orkney for the event not to happen.

The distress all around was immense. There was James Rushton doing his best to find out what was happening, but being greeted with the same blank wall as had been there

all along. There was Max in a state of horror in Orkney. There was me in London. And of course there was also Prof. Jacob in Nuremberg.

The next thing we heard was that a choir had been brought in. The choir which was in situ at that moment was a small local choir from Nuremberg called the Palestrina Choir. This was not a choir to instil confidence in performing difficult new music. What Prof Jacob did was to tell Dr. Konold that he had to employ the Bavarian Radio Choir from nearby Munich. This was a highly professional choir used to sight-reading all music, including 'difficult' new music. They would easily be able to tackle the matter in hand. They would of course add a great deal to the tiny Palestrina Choir. In a word, they would be able to do the job. The reason for the proposed cancellation was due to the fact that the conductor, Philippe Auguin, who was the GMD at the Opera House, had been agitating for a long while to hear what the choir was supposed to be doing, but had been kept away from it until the last minute. When he came to stand in front of the Palestrina choir, he found them totally unprepared for a performance the following week and had said that the performance would have to be cancelled. Prof. Jacob had phoned Dr. Konold and told him that he would have to engage the choir from Munich, who would be able to read well and fast and be prepared by Philippe Auguin himself.

It finally emerged that the Organ Week had given a large amount of money for the Opera House for the production of the performance of *Canticum Canticorum*. However, this money had not been spent on this work. It had been spent on another work which the Opera House was presenting that season. They had wanted to bring in a cheap choir from Eastern Europe whilst leaving their own choir to rehearse other works in their repertoire. They had only started to think of the soloists once month prior to the performance, and found that the soloists from their own house were not prepared to undertake a new and what they would consider a difficult work at such a late stage, and when they started to enquire elsewhere in Europe, the money they were offering was so small that nobody was prepared to take it on. Altogether, for all those years, the Opera House had behaved in this underhand way. However, when Prof. Jacob forced the issue with Dr. Konold, he was forced to spend a great deal of money to get in a choir that was able to handle all of this at the last minute.

The people at the Opera House such as the Dramaturg, Dr. Klaus Angermann and Michael Kersten who made all the arrangements for me and who were arranging the performance itself, were all as helpful and as nice as could be. They all knew that I had been through a terrible time on Max's behalf. When I arrived at Nuremberg airport on the evening of Wednesday 4 July, I was greeted like royalty. There was a reception committee, and I was given a huge bunch of flowers. I was driven straight to the rehearsal room where I could hear distinct sounds of what sounded like a confident choir. I met Philippe Auguin who was doing an heroic job. It seemed to me that I could take the chance to phone Max, waiting at the Bevan's house in Stromness in Orkney that he should proceed on to Nuremberg, and that there would in fact be a performance which would not discredit Max.

The concert hall, which was called Die Meistersinger Hall and the hotel close by, at which we stayed were both situated in the Nazi Party Rally Grounds, where Hitler held his massive parades during the 1930s which were memorialized in Leni Riefenstahl's film "Triumph of Will". Everything we had ever seen about Hitler had

always featured this film where one could see the huge oval-shaped building, modelled on the Coliseum in Rome, designed to seat 50,000 people. The foundation stone was laid in 1935 but the building was never finished. At the end of the war, the city of Nuremberg kept the ruins as a reminder of the dangers of fascism. These days the grounds are home to a documentation centre that chronicles Nazi crimes. From the balcony of my hotel room, I could easily see this unfinished building. All this, and the happenings throughout the weeks and months leading up to the first performance were a far cry from my other idea of Nuremberg, namely, of course, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* by Wagner, which is an opera I love very much, with odour of the linden baum which is a lime tree in English wafting through on a summer's evening. Here was another summer's evening, but I was unable to detect any smell of the linden baum.

Max duly arrived on the Thursday, full of worry and trepidation, but nevertheless encouraged by my report to him. He was also given a heroes welcome on his arrival at the airport and, I am glad to say, a great deal of fuss was made of him, and the fact that he had actually come there. He was also driven straight to the rehearsal, and was happy with what he had heard. There had been a great step forward in that one day. Max had many interviews and appearances on television, and much fuss, especially having regard to the fact that the report had been that the performance was going to be cancelled.

The performance happened on the Friday evening as had been planned. It was good enough for Bavarian Radio to make their broadcast later, and I was promised by several people who worked at the opera house that they would send me a copy of the broadcast.

Professor Jacob had arranged that we would all be invited to his house following the performance. It was at that point that all the details of what had been going on during all these months and years emerged, and how the money which had been designated by the Organ Week had been diverted to other projects by the Opera House. The soprano and mezzo soloists were both house soloists, one of whom was American and she said she had been asked to take on the role two weeks previously, and she was not a person who would shy away from a challenge. To say that the Opera House had reneged on this responsibility is putting it mildly. It all came right in the end by Philippe Augin putting his foot down and refusing to go ahead with a completely unrehearsed choir, this bringing to light that they had only been working on the piece for a minimum amount of time. Prof. Jacob was not going to allow his great scheme to be sabotaged in this way and he had forced Dr. Konold, under the terms of the agreement that he had with him, to engage a very expensive professional choir which would be able to bring off a performance in an incredibly short space of time. I was able to help with providing the two male singers through the good offices of Neil Mackie. The two females had been exceptionally good sports. But, my goodness, it was a near thing. I wouldn't like to have to go through something like that again. In all other instances, the people who commission take good care that they will get the very best out of the situation, but the opera house had not allowed this to happen, but it came right in the end.

Mass 2002

When [Tim Ambler](#), professor of business administration at the London Business School, on behalf of Westminster Cathedral, contacted me to ask whether Max would consider composing a Mass to be celebrated in Westminster Cathedral, I was almost certain that he would refuse. It was quite a complex question for Max. On the one hand, he had never shown any inclination to write music which would be used for religious purposes. On the other hand, Max had been very much drawn to the music of the Renaissance – Victoria and Palestrina, and to the English Tudor composers, Tallis and Byrd. When he had been a student at Manchester University, he had become very familiar with the sixteenth century repertoire because he both sang in the University Choir and attended performances of sixteenth century music at Manchester Cathedral. When, later, as a student of Goffredo Petrassi in Rome. Max heard the Latin Mass sung at the Benedictine College and Church of Sant' Anselmo, always keeping with him the *Liber Usualis*, which is the indispensable Catholic manual of plainsong melody. Max used this book constantly as a source for numerous of his compositions which were based on plainsong.

In the end, Max noted that other composers who were not Catholics had set the Mass, and he decided to accept the offer. In an interview with Roderic Dunnett, Max said “I wanted to give people an intense musical and spiritual experience; and if they get that from the setting I'm very happy. But of course, because I'm not a Catholic, I come to it from, as it were, the outside”.

Chief among the people at Westminster Cathedral with whom I came into contact was [Martin Baker](#), Master of Music. I would go along to a rehearsal, and saw a lot of scruffy-looking boys rush in to take their places. The Martin would give the down-beat and instantly there was magic, and these boys produced the most utterly glorious sound.

The *Mass* was celebrated at a Pentecost Service on 19 May 1992 by [Archbishop Cormac Murphy O'Connor](#). There was a packed congregation in the Cathedral. Afterward there was a party held in one of the large rooms in the Cathedral, which was attended by what seemed to me to be almost the whole of the congregation. Tim Ambler provided the funds for the commission.

The whole work is founded on two Whitsun plainsong chants, *Veni Creator Spiritus* and *Dum complerentur dies Pentecostes* and so Max wrote two more short works which compliment the main *Mass*. All these three were recorded for Hyperion Records very shortly afterwards. I attempted to interest Notre Dame in Paris, and the Vatican in Rome, but had no success.