



VESPERS
for the
IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION



J. J. Wright
St. Patrick's Cathedral Choir
Fifth House Ensemble

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ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL CHOIR
FIFTH HOUSE ENSEMBLE

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Vespers for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception,
J.J. Wright (1985)
 2. **ii. Salve Regina** 5:42
Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674)
 3. **iii. Antiphon I/Psalm 113** 7:47
 4. **iv. Covered Me** 4:27
 5. **v. He** 7:42
 6. **vi. Intercessions** 2:05
 7. **vii. Our Father** 1:40
 8. **viii. Hail Mary** 8:14
 9. **ix. Magnificat** 8:21
Marc-Antoine Charpentier
(1643-1704)
 10. **x. Collect** 6:45
 11. **xi. Final Blessing** 0:55
- Total running time:* 54:54

J.J. Wright
Composer, Piano, Conductor

The St. Patrick's Cathedral Choir
Dr. Jennifer Pascual
Conductor, Music Director

Fifth House Ensemble:
Charlene Kluegel - Violin I
Anne-Sophie Paquet - Violin II
Michael Schneider - Viola
Herine Coetzee Koschak - Cello

Ike Sturm - Bass
Zach Harmon - Drums (tracks 3,
8, 10)
Nathan Ellman-Bell - Drums
(track 5)

Arwen Myers - Soprano
Laura Thoreson - Mezzo-Soprano
Brendan Tuohy - Tenor
David Farwig - Baritone



I first heard of JJ Wright in 2014, when I read an AllAboutJazz.com review of his jazz trio album *Inward Looking Outward*. “Pianist J.J. Wright has catholic tastes in more ways than one,” wrote Dan Bilawsky in that review, observing that Wright is “inspired and influenced by everything from the music of J.S. Bach to the work of Thelonious Monk to the songs of Sufjan Stevens.”

That caught my attention, as I fell in love with jazz nearly three decades ago and have ever since had a special affection for piano trios, especially those led by pianists— Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, Tord Gustavsen, and Brad Mehldau come to mind immediately—who draw upon both popular and classical music, melding it into a distinctive and immediately recognizable sound.

Certainly that was the case with *Inward Looking Outward*, which I found to be lyrical, subtle, and deceptively simple, by which I mean the music is so accessible and engaging you can easily overlook how exacting and well-crafted it really is. Virtuosity comes in various forms, and Wright’s gift is not so much displayed in notes per minute (although he has plenty of chops, as they say), but in the timeless, effortless quality of his playing and composing. This gift is certainly on display in *O Emmanuel* (2016) and *Vespers for the Feast of the Transfiguration* (2017), both of which reached and appealed to a wide audience (*O Emmanuel* topped the Billboard Classical Charts for eight weeks).

With *Vespers for the Immaculate Conception*, Wright displays a level of musical maturity and compositional command that is equal parts poignant, edifying, and contemplative. “*Vespers for the Immaculate Conception* differs in approach from my *Transfiguration Vespers*,” says Wright, “in that I composed *Transfiguration* with the specific intent of encouraging the congregation to sing the entire service. *Immaculate Conception* is meant to be actively engaged with in respect to listening to and meditating on the text, whereas *Transfiguration* encourages a different form of active participation.”

The inspiration for the composition came while Wright was pursuing doctoral studies in Rome and “exploring the contexts around sacred music from the 14th-19th centuries. ... In the same way that we read the Gospel or writings of Saints from the past in search of spiritual wisdom for our lives today, I hoped to uncover the wisdom that is embedded in the Catholic tradition of sacred music.” Gregorian chant and Baroque motets form a foundation for this new composition, which of course contains “the narrative that is present in the Vespers service itself of Mary’s

Immaculate Conception,” but moves musically, says Wright, via a “progression through time with Gregorian chant Invitatory informing the hearing of the Carissimi *Salve Regina*, which leads to my new music, and is crowned at the end with Charpentier’s *Magnificat* and the Gregorian chant Final Blessing.”

As he has in his previous work, Wright sought to marry traditional sacred music with his roots in jazz and popular music. But the powerful emotions evident throughout the composition draw deeply upon the pain and sorrow experienced when his wife had a miscarriage after 12 weeks of pregnancy:

I had no idea how to cope with the grief and disappointment that we were going through, but this confusion led me to pray with the text of the Vespers in a different way than I had before. Through the liturgical prayer itself, I was given the gift of meeting Mary and Jesus directly in my work, and the music that resulted was a direct expression of a very real sense of knowing that Mary’s parents and Mary herself must have known well the struggles that we were going through as a family. The music became an expression of our grief and sorrow, all while receiving the gift of mercy from the newfound relationship with Mary and Jesus in the text of *Vespers for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception*. I felt that I had received an invitation from God to express my gifts alongside the text in order to invite myself and others into the prayer in a new way.

Wright points to the influence of composers including J.S. Bach, Arvo Pärt, Steve Reich, Duke Ellington, Benjamin Britten, Claudio Monteverdi, and James MacMillan. The latter stands out to me, as I can hear some of the same intense, captivating qualities in this composition as I hear in MacMillan’s riveting *Seven Last Words From the Cross* (1993) and because both men were in their early thirties when they composed their respective works. Most importantly, both are devout Catholics who really know and pray the texts, fully conversant with the tradition of sacred music and seeking to bring their unique gifts to that rich but often ignored tradition.

With *Vespers for the Immaculate Conception*, the young JJ Wright establishes himself as a composer of remarkable vision and talent, who composes—to borrow from Hans Urs von Balthasar—on his knees.

- Carl E. Olson, Memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church, October 1, 2019

TEXT & TRANSLATIONS

i. Invitatory

God, come to my assistance.

- Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

- as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever.

Amen. Alleluia.

ii. Salve Regina

Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674)

Salve, Regina, mater misericordiae:

Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.

Ad te clamamus, exsules, filii Hevae.

Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes

in hac lacrimarum valle.

Eia ergo, Advocata nostra,

illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos

converte.

Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris

tui,

nobis, post hoc exsilium ostende.

O clemens: O pia: O dulcis

Virgo Maria.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!

Our life, our sweetness, and our

hope!

To thee do we cry, poor banished

children of Eve,

to thee do we send up our sighs,

mourning and weeping in this valley

of tears.

Turn, then, most gracious advocate,

thine eyes of mercy toward us;

and after this our exile show unto us

the blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus;

O clement, O loving, O sweet

virgin Mary.

iii. Antiphon I/Psalm 113

Antiphon I:

I will make you enemies, you and the woman, your offspring and hers.

“Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?’”

“We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.”

Psalm 113: 1,4,7-9:

Praise, O servants of the LORD,

praise the name of the LORD!

High above all nations is the LORD,

above the heavens his glory.

From the dust he lifts up the lowly,

from the ash heap he raises the poor,

to set them in the company of princes,

Yes, the princes of his people.

To the childless wife he gives a home

as a joyful mother of children.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

iv. Covered me

Antiphon II: The Lord has clothed me with garments of salvation;

he has covered me with a robe of justice.

O praise the Lord, Jerusalem! Zion praise your God!

v. He

Psalm 147:

He has strengthened the bars of your gates;

he has blessed your children within you.

He established peace on your borders;

he gives you your fill of finest wheat.

He showers down snow like wool;

he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.

He sends out his word to the earth,

and swiftly runs his command.

He hurls down hailstones like crumbs;

before such cold, who can stand?

He sends forth his word and it melts them;

at the blowing of his breath the waters flow.

He reveals his word to Jacob;

he reveals his decrees and judgments to Israel.
He has not dealt thus with other nations;
he has not taught them his judgments.
Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

vi. Intercessions

Let us praise God our almighty Father, who wished that Mary, his Son's mother, be celebrated by each generation. Now in need, we ask:

Mary, full of grace, intercede for us.

You made Mary our mother. Through her intercession grant strength to the weak, comfort to the sorrowing, pardon to sinners,
- salvation and peace to all.

O God, worker of miracles, you made the immaculate Virgin Mary share in your Son's glory in heaven,
- direct the hearts of your children to that same glory.

You made Mary the mother of mercy,
- may all who are faced with trials feel her motherly love.

You wished Mary to be the mother of the family in the home of Jesus and Joseph,
- may all mothers of families foster love and holiness through her intercession.

You crowned Mary queen of heaven,
- may all the dead rejoice in your kingdom with the saints for ever.

vii. Our Father

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

viii. Hail Mary

Antiphon III: Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with you.

Romans 8:29-30: Those whom God foreknew he predestined to share the image of his Son. Those he predestined he likewise called; those he called he also justified.

Magnificat Antiphon: All generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me.

ix. Magnificat - Luke 1:46-55

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.
Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo sal-
utari meo. Quia respexit humilitatem
ancillae suae.
Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me di-
cent
omnes generationes.
Quia fecit mihi magna,
qui potens est, et sanctum nomen
eius.
Et misericordia a progenie in prog-
enies,
timentibus eum.

Fecit potentiam in brachio suo,
dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.

My soul magnifies the Lord.
And my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior.
For He has regarded the lowliness of
His handmaiden.
Behold, from henceforth, I will be
called blessed by all generations.
For the Mighty One has done
great things for me, and holy is His
name.
His mercy is for those who fear Him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm,

He has scattered the proud in the
thoughts of their hearts

Deposuit potentes de sede
et exaltavit humiles.
Esurientes implevit bonis,
et divites dimisit inanes.

Suscepit Israel puerum suum
recordatus misericordie suae.
Sicut locutus est ad patres nostros,
Abraham et semini eius in saecula.

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto,
sicut erat in principio
et nunc et in saecula saeculorum,
Amen.

x. Collect

Text by Jeffrey Cooper

This day appears before us
The rose that bears no thorn;
By God's will to restore us,
Of her the Christ was born.
We sing her praise once more:
True daughter of the Father
Whom we with her adore.

Christ by his Passion winning
What God did then foresee,
She from her first beginning
From stain of sin was free.
We sing her praise once more:
Of God's own Son, the Mother;
Of saving Grace, the Door!

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped His servant Israel
in remembrance of His mercy.
According to the promise He made to
our ancestors,
to Abraham and to His descendants
forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the
beginning, is now, and for ever and
ever, Amen.

O Christ, who gave us Mary,

A Mother for our part,
Grant us to see the Father
Through purity of heart.
We sing her praise once more:
Pure spouse of God the Spirit
Whom we with her adore.

xi. Final Blessing

May the Lord bless us and protect
us from all evil and bring us to
everlasting life.

Amen.

The St. Patrick's Cathedral Choir

Soprano:

Mary Ellen Assue
Aine Hakamatuska
Joy Tamayo - Soloist on "Intercessions"
Jin Xiang Yu

Alto:

Elise Brancheau
Katherine Peck
Alexis Rodda
Abigail Wright

Music Director: Dr. Jennifer Pascual

Tenor:

Richard Liebowitz
John Des Marais
Salvatore Diana
George Kasarjian

Bass:

Salvatore Basile
Nicholas Hay
Aaron Theno
Daniel Brondel - Soloist on
"Intercessions"



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Engineered, mixed and mastered by Robert Friedrich for Five/Four Productions, Ltd. Produced by Thomas C. Moore for Five/Four Productions Ltd.

Assistant Producer - Daniel Stein
Executive Producer - J.J. Wright
Except noted above, all music composed, arranged, and orchestrated by J.J. Wright.

Artwork and layout by Daniel Mitsui and Carl E. Olson.

Vespers for the Immaculate Conception is dedicated to my wife Alexandra Wright.

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