MEDIA RELEASE
18 November 2026

ACU's highest honour for acclaimed musician Sir James MacMillan

Australian Catholic University (ACU) will confer an honorary doctorate on world-renowned Scottish composer and conductor, Sir James MacMillan KT CBE.

One of the world's most celebrated composers, Sir MacMillan will receive a Doctor of the University (Honoris Causa) next week ahead of public performances with the chamber choir Polyphonic Voices and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

The honorary degree from ACU recognises Sir MacMillan's 35-year career as a composer for the Church and concert hall, who has used his world-renowned music to praise and proclaim the Gospel.

Sir MacMillan is a treasure in the classical music world but became an international household name when an estimated 4 billion people heard his music during Queen Elizabeth II's funeral, in a piece commissioned 11 years before her death.

"I've wanted to be a composer since I was a little boy but had no idea then what that would involve as life went on," Sir MacMillan said.

"Everything subsequently has been a big surprise and an even bigger delight."

A devoted Catholic who found his calling as a musician "when I was handed a little plastic recorder at primary school in Scotland", he composed music for Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the UK in 2010, and his *Stabat Mater* was performed in the Sistine Chapel's first-ever livestreamed concert in 2018.

"Music has always had an umbilical relationship with the sacred, or the search for the divine," Sir MacMillan said.

"I've always been inspired by the deep spiritual nature of music; that for many it can open doors to a sense of the numinous."

In honouring Sir MacMillan, ACU Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Zlatko Skrbis said the acclaimed musician exemplified the university's mission of pursuing excellence and knowledge.

"From playing music for a Pope, paying homage to a Queen's life, and even starting a festival to sustain the joy of music in his hometown, Sir James MacMillan is a musical treasure, and now honorary Doctor of ACU," Professor Skrbis said.

"His passion for music, his bold devotion to the Catholic faith, and his commitment to social justice exemplifies our university's pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good.

"Music has been said to be a universal language, one that transcends culture. We are proud to honour the music and life of Sir James with this honorary degree."

This is Sir MacMillan's second honorary doctorate this year, having received a Doctor of the University from the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in March.

Following his Honorary Doctorate conferral from ACU on 27 November, Sir MacMillan will give a public lecture, reflecting on the connection between his faith and his music at Cathedral Hall, Melbourne.

Sir MacMillan will premier his 2025 *Salve Regina*, commissioned by ACU, and conduct Polyphonic Voices in a selection from his *Strathclyde Motets*.

ACU Centre for Liturgy director Professor Clare Johnson will then host a conversation with Sir MacMillan alongside ACU scholars Professor Judith Wolfe and Rev Dr Christopher Willcock SJ.

Professor MacMillan said the world needed music and the arts "now more than ever".

"Artists have it in their gift to bring healing to a broken world and to broken hearts and souls," he said.

"Music should therefore be one of the basics of any humane education. Musicians and music educators then will have crucial roles to play in the healing of the nations and our stricken societies in the years to come."

Register for *Musical Catholicity in the 21st Century: A Composer Reflects* on 27 November at www.acu.edu.au/PublicLectureCf.

Photos of Sir James MacMillan KT CBE will be available on request following the Honorary Doctorate conferral on 27 November.

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