

The background of the image is a handwritten musical score for 40 parts, arranged in two columns of 20 parts each. The notation is dense, with many notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The parts are numbered 1 through 40 on the left margin. The score is written in black ink on white paper. The text "Music from 4 to 40 parts" is written in a large, cursive, black font across the center of the image. Below this, the name "VAUGHAN MCALLEY" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

# Music from 4 to 40 parts

VAUGHAN MCALLEY





## Music from 4 to 40 parts

I have always been interested in counterpoint - the art of combining different, often contrasting, musical lines into a pleasing whole. While much music consists of a melody (“the tune”) and accompaniment, contrapuntal music can be more egalitarian, with the importance of each line ebbing and flowing throughout a piece. JS Bach, Mozart and Beethoven all recognised the expressive potential of counterpoint and made concerted efforts to improve their contrapuntal skills later in their composing careers.

The rules of renaissance counterpoint were

enthusiastically adopted in the middle of the 15th century, and were used in art music for more than 150 years. They are very clear about which intervals are consonant and dissonant (sweet and harsh-sounding), and how dissonance can be used. I decided to adopt these rules in my own compositions at the age of 30.

There are three things about this style that make it well-suited to my music. First, the majority of the surviving art music from this period is vocal and choral music. I have sung in choirs for 30 years and have composed a great deal of choral music. Voices are ideal for articulating counterpoint because a composer can use the text to emphasise a line within a texture. Second,

singers have more flexible tuning than most instruments, allowing chords to be tuned according to the rules of just intonation. Finally, the style is well-suited to composing music in a large number of parts. Musical developments after the year 1600 made composing music in more than about eight parts more difficult, and writing for a large number of distinct parts became a lost art. Thomas Tallis’ 40-part motet *Spem in alium* (c.1570) was almost

incomprehensible to the musicians of Victorian England.

Music from 4 to 40 parts contains music in this “neo-renaissance” style, mainly for voices, but also for piano and for string quartet. My approach to counterpoint differentiates my music from most other contemporary compositions, and I strive to create music that is both satisfying for all performers involved and pleasing to listen to as a whole. I hope you enjoy listening!

### **1 A Birthday**, for 5 voices

Poem by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

*Performers:* Kate McBride, Leonie Tonkin, Peter Campbell, Vaughan McAlley, Tom Reid

This piece was written for the wedding of Kate McBride and Tom Reid. I have always liked Rossetti’s poem, and it was read at my own wedding. The music is a rare contemporary example of a joyful piece in a minor key, and borrows one my favourite chord progressions from Josquin Desprez.

My heart is like a singing bird  
Whose nest is in a water’d shoot;  
My heart is like an apple-tree  
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;  
My heart is like a rainbow shell  
That paddles in a halcyon sea;  
My heart is gladder than all these  
Because my love is come to me.



Some members of the 40-voice choir after the performance of *Omnes angeli* (Track 14)

Raise me a dais of silk and down;  
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;  
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,  
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;  
Work it in gold and silver grapes,  
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;  
Because the birthday of my life  
Is come, my love is come to me.

## **2 Madrigal**, for 4 voices

Poem by Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

*Performers:* Kate McBride, Leonie Tonkin,  
Vaughan McAlley, Tim Daly

Like *A Birthday*, this piece was also written for the wedding of two friends. I took a liking to these lines from Pope's Pastorals after singing Handel's aria from *Semele* at my sister's wedding. The music makes use of the clarity and intimacy that four voices affords.

Where-e'er you walk, cool Gales shall fan the  
Glade,  
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a Shade,  
Where-e'er you tread, the blushing Flow'rs shall  
rise,  
And all things flourish where you turn your Eyes.

## **3 To Rosamonde, a balade**,

for 8 and 18 voices

Poem by Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343-1400)

*Performers:* Ensemble Gombert,  
directed by John O'Donnell

I had long wanted to write a third secular piece to complete the set begun with *A Birthday* and *Madrigal*. When Ensemble Gombert was preparing for its European tour of 2015 and I was unable to go, I wrote this luscious balade for them as a virtuosic encore piece. The balade is full of the rich chords that Ensemble Gombert sings so well. This performance includes an optional coda in 18 voices which fully utilises all singers in Ensemble Gombert for maximum encore-effectiveness.

*Madame, ye ben of al beaute shryne  
As fer as cercled is the mapamounde,  
For as the crystal glorious ye shyne,  
And lyke ruby ben your chekes rounde.  
Therwith ye ben so mery and so jocounde  
That at a revel whan that I see you daunce,  
It is an oynement unto my wounde,  
Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce.*

Madam, you are the shrine of all beauty  
as far as the world-map encompasses,  
for you shine like a glorious crystal,  
and your round cheeks are like rubies.  
Thereupon you are so merry and jocund  
that when I see you dancing at a revel,  
it is an ointment for my wound,  
even though you are not encouraging to me.

## **Four Chorale Preludes for Piano**

in Mass form

Michael Kieran Harvey, piano

**4** *Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit*

**5** *Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr'*

**6** *Heilig, heilig, heilig*

**7** *O Lamm Gottes unschuldig*

Michael Kieran Harvey asked me many times to write a piece for the piano, and these preludes exist largely because of his persistence. Choosing the chorale prelude form, I began with the chorale *Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit*. The *Kyrie* is the first movement of the traditional Mass, so I decided to write three more preludes corresponding with the *Gloria*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*, to create a complete Mass cycle. While researching suitable chorales I discovered that this was the basic premise for Bach's *Klavierübung III*! At least I knew that my idea was good, if not entirely original.

*Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit* has the pianist's hands leaping around the piano to create a complex contrapuntal texture. *Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr'* is in only two voices, one voice being the chorale melody and the other using repeated rhythmic patterns. *Heilig, heilig, heilig* is the most pianistic of the preludes, accompanying

the chorale with a shimmering five-part texture. Finally there is a prelude and fugue based on *O Lamm Gottes unschuldig*. The prelude contains the first two verses of the chorale in canon. The last verse appears in the chorale fugue with periodic statements of the chorale's lines in various voices.

## 8 Lamentations for 5 voices

*Words:* Lamentations 2:13-15

*Performers:* Kate McBride, Niki Ebacioni, Leonie Tonkin, Vaughan McAlley, Tom Reid

Tenebrae services traditionally occur on Thursday, Friday and Saturday in Holy Week, and include responsories alternating with readings from the Lamentations of Jeremiah. This is a setting of the second reading for Good Friday. Of the nine possible readings, this one resonates most with me and seems particularly appropriate in this time of false prophets and wasted opportunity. The section *Magna est enim velut mare* (For your ruin is vast as the sea) is a musical depiction of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, with its slow but relentless rising of destructive floods. Since composing *Lamentations* in 2012 I have been blessed with two beautiful daughters, which makes the depiction of Jerusalem as a daughter all the more poignant for me.

*De lamentatione Jeremiae prophetae.*

*Mem. Cui comparabo te vel cui assimilabo te, filia Ierusalem? Cui exaequabo te et consolabor te, virgo filia Sion? Magna est enim velut mare contritio tua; quis medebitur tui?*

*Nun. Prophetae tui viderunt tibi falsa et stulta nec aperiebant iniquitatem tuam, ut converterent sortem tuam; viderunt autem tibi oracula mendacii et seductionis.*

*Samech. Plausuerunt super te manibus omnes transeuntes per viam; sibilaverunt et moverunt caput suum super filiam Ierusalem: "Haecce est urbs, quam vocabant perfectum decorem, gaudium universae terrae?"*

*Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum.*

From the Lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah:

Mem. What shall I testify to you? what shall I liken to you, daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare to you, that I may comfort you, virgin daughter of Zion? For your breach is great like the sea: who can heal you?

Nun. Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions; They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captivity, but have seen for you false revelations and causes of banishment.

Samech. All that pass by clap their hands at you. They hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men called The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?

Jerusalem, return to the Lord your God.

## 9 III. Lento from String Quartet (2015)

*Performers:* The Four Seasons Quartet  
Sunkyoung Kim, Helen Bower - violin  
Phoebe Green - viola  
Nora Brownrigg - cello

My *String Quartet* (this name will suffice as I have no plans for writing another one<sup>1</sup>) was composed between 2013 and 2015. Lento, the quartet's slow third movement, is less 'busy' than most of my music and the opening theme contains long silences. Later variations fill this silence with thicker textures, before the music drops back to a ghostly pizzicato where the theme is almost inaudible. The recapitulation of the theme and climax has all the instruments playing together in their highest registers. Fans of music theory will be interested to know that the movement is in two modes—F dorian and D sharp phrygian.

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1 Famous last words

### **10 In principio erat verbum** for 5 voices

Words: John 1:1,2,14

*Performers:* Kate McBride, Kathryn Pisani, Leonie Tonkin, Vaughan McAlley, Tim Daly

*In principio* was written in 2005 and was performed by Ensemble Gombert in Australia and on their US tour of 2009. It sets part of the well-known introduction to the Gospel of John. “The Beginning” is represented by a canon between the two sopranos at the wide interval of twelve bars. One of the main challenges was to make the representation of a static eternity interesting! Then, with a distinctive chord progression, the Word is made flesh, and everything changes. The resonant final chords on the word *veritatis* are a testament to the value of truth in circumstances where it really counts.

*In principio erat Verbum: et Verbum erat apud Deum: et Deus erat Verbum. Hoc erat in principio apud Deum.*

*Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, et vidimus gloriam eius gloriam quasi unigeniti a Patre, plenum gratiae et veritatis.*

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God: and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.

### **11 I will lift up my eyes unto the hills** for soprano and string quartet

Words: Psalm 121:1-4

*Performers:*

Kate McBride - soprano

Rachel Hunt, Rachel Gamer - violin

Shani Williams - viola

Alison Both - cello

This piece was written as a twenty-first birthday present for its singer, Kate McBride. Her virtuoso agility is highlighted in the first section of the da capo aria, and her impressive breath control in the second.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help,  
My help cometh e'en from the Lord who hath made heav'n and earth.  
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved, and he that keepeth thee will not sleep,  
Behold: he that keepeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

### **12 Lord, you have been our dwelling place** for 5 voices

Words: Psalm 90:1-2,12-14,16

*Performers:* Kate McBride, Katharina Hochheiser, Leonie Tonkin, Vaughan McAlley, Tom Reid

This piece, for soprano soloist with four-part choir, was premiered at the baptism of my daughter Eleanor on 24 May 2015. The text was chosen to emphasize our place in generations that stretch

back from “before the mountains were born” and forward into the future. The choir begins by singing of these generations through time, followed by a quicker plea for mercy, before the soloist enters with a prayer for wisdom. The piece ends with a fugue on the words “Let your work appear to your servants; your glory to their children”, chosen because I would like to have a positive influence in my children’s lives.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place for all generations.

Before the mountains were born,  
before you had formed the earth and the world,  
even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Relent, relent, Yahweh!  
How long, how long?  
Have compassion on your servants!  
Satisfy us in the morning with your loving kindness,  
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Teach us to count our days,  
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place for all generations.

Before the mountains were born,  
before you had formed the earth and the world,  
even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Let your work appear to your servants,  
your glory to their children.





Angeli Vocal Ensemble (Kate McBride, soprano, Tom Reid, bass, Vaughan McAlley, tenor, Leonie Tonkin, alto)

### **13 The Lord Bless You and Keep You** for recorder and 4 voices

*Words:* Numbers 6:24-26

*Performers:* Leonie Tonkin - recorder with Kate McBride, Niki Ebacioni, Vaughan McAlley, Tom Reid

This piece was premiered at the baptism of my second daughter, Genevieve, on 26 March 2017, and is a companion piece of sorts to *Lord, you have been our dwelling place*. The text is the *Aaronic Blessing*, commonly used at baptisms,

and is set for the unusual combination of recorder and choir. The recorder plays a highly decorated version of the Gregorian hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* above the choir's petitions, and the choir's amen is taken from that of the Gregorian hymn.

The Lord bless you and keep you,  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be  
gracious unto you,  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and  
give you peace.  
Amen.

### **14 Omnes angeli for 40 voices**

*Words:* Revelation 7:11-12

*Performers:* Ensemble Gombert  
directed by John O'Donnell

In 2009 I had the idea of singing Tallis' forty-part *Spem in alium* for my 40th birthday. When I told friends about my formidable birthday plans, some of them suggested I write a forty-part piece of my own. It seemed quite a challenge: no one to my knowledge has written a fully polyphonic forty-part piece since Tallis in 1570, but Tallis had at least shown it was possible. We sang the first section of *Omnes angeli* at my birthday party in July 2010, and it took me another two years to complete the motet.

From a technical point of view, writing music in forty parts is like writing a novel with forty main characters—one needs a very good way of keeping track of everything. It is also an enormous canvas, requiring a suitably grand subject. To this end, I chose the heavenly scene of angels, elders and animals worshipping the Lamb from the Book of Revelation.

A forty-part choir allows gigantic and spectacular tuttis, but also many different combinations of smaller groups. *Omnes angeli* is written for ten four-part choirs, most with different voicings, which are arranged in a semicircle.

The first section uses combinations of eight and twelve parts to set the heavenly scene, with all forty parts joining to sing the first amen. In the next section, each of the forty singers comes in separately with the breathless phrase "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and

honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever". The sound progresses around the semicircle, and the texture changes as the different voicings combine. The final singers' acclamations are drowned out by a huge tutti amen that is the climax of the work. At this point the two highest sopranos call and answer "one to another" from each end of the semicircle, like the Seraphim from the book of Isaiah (6:2-3). The recapitulation is rearranged for different combinations of choirs, and has extra pairs of voices singing the acclamations from the middle section. The final amen is slightly longer than I originally planned. The original plan of the whole piece was intricately worked out with numerical proportions, and included 38 bars of tutti (all

40 voices singing together). With some slight adjustments to the form I was able to change that to 40 bars with all 40 voices. From the viewpoint of a composer obsessed with numbers, 40 bars of tutti is more numerically pleasing than 38 bars of tutti!



Composer Vaughan McAlley and score for *Omnes angeli for 40 voices*

*Omnes angeli stabant in circuitu throni,  
et seniorum, et quattuor animalium,  
et ceciderunt in conspectu throni in facies suas,  
et adoraverunt Deum, dicentes,  
Amen:  
Benedictio et claritas  
et sapientia et gratiarum actio  
et honor et virtus  
et fortitudo Deo nostro in saecula saeculorum.  
Amen!*

And all the angels stood round about the throne,  
and about the elders and the four beasts,  
and fell before the throne on their faces,  
and worshipped God saying,  
Amen:  
Blessing, and glory,  
and wisdom, and thanksgiving,  
and honour, and power,  
and might, be unto our God for ever and ever.  
Amen!



## **Ensemble Gombert**

*Omnes angeli* and  
*To Rosamunde*

Claerwen Jones  
Kate McBride  
Carol Veldhoven  
Yi Wen Chin  
Niki Ebacioni  
Belinda Wong-Barker  
Peter Campbell  
Michael Stephens  
Stuart Tennant  
Mike Ormerod  
Tom Reid

*Omnes angeli* only

Hildy Essex  
Sarah Harris  
Megan Nelson  
Katherine Norman  
Maria Pisani  
Rebecca Collins  
Jenny Mathers  
Kathryn Pisani  
Katrina Renard  
Leonie Tonkin  
Tim van Nooten  
Andrew Raiskums  
Ben Owen  
Sam Qualtrough  
Matt Thomson  
Richard Bolitho  
Catherine Cowie  
Will Cuningham  
Robin Czuchnowski  
Brian Johnson  
Loclan MacKenzie-Spencer  
John Weretka  
Kim Worley  
Ross Abraham  
David Brown  
Josh McLeod  
Andrew Murray  
Julien Robinson  
Jonathan Wallis

*To Rosamunde* only

Victoria Brown  
Katharina Hochheiser  
Deborah Summerbell  
Juliana Kay  
Vaughan McAlley  
Michael Strasser  
Nicholas Tolhurst

All tracks recorded and  
edited by Vaughan  
McAlley at the  
Move Records studio in  
Eaglemont, except:

Track 3: recorded at the  
Trinity College Chapel

Track 14: recorded by  
Martin Wright at The  
Dome, 333 Collins  
Street, Melbourne

Thank you to all the performers, who generously donated your precious time, and especially to Tom Reid and Kate McBride who feature on so many tracks. Thanks to Martin and Sue Wright, Victoria Brown, my parents Peter (1944-2018) and Helen, my delightful daughters Eleanor and Genevieve, and most of all to my wife Leonie, without whom I am sure there would have been no CD.

Vaughan McAlley, July 2019