

The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace

Karl Jenkins (b. 1944)

(premiere performance April 25, 2000, Royal Albert Hall, London; for Britain's Millennium celebrations)

1. **The Armed Man** (*L'homme armé*, 15th-century French fight song)
English translation: The armed man must be feared;
Everywhere it has been decreed that every man should arm himself with a coat of iron mail.
2. **The Call to Prayers** (*Adhaan*, the Muslim call to prayer)
Allah is great. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah.
I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Come to prayer. Come to Success.
3. **Kyrie** Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.
4. **Save Me from Bloody Men** (from Psalms 56 and 59, which ask for God's protection from enemies)
5. **Sanctus**
Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
6. **Hymn Before Action** (Rudyard Kipling, 1896)
The earth is full of anger, the seas are dark with wrath; The nations in their harness, go up against our path.
Ere yet we loose the legions, ere yet we draw the blade, Jehova of the Thunders, Lord God of Battles, aid!
High lust and *froward bearing, proud heart, rebellious brow; deaf ear and soul uncaring, we seek thy mercy now!
The sinner that forswore Thee, The fool that passed Thee by,
Our times are known before Thee; Lord grant us strength to die! *froward = obstinate
7. **Charge!** (John Dryden and Jonathan Swift) *excerpts from text:*
The trumpet's loud clangor excites us to arms with shrill notes of anger and mortal alarms.
How blest is he who for his country dies. Charge! 'tis too late to retreat.
8. **Angry Flames** (Togi Sankichi, a Hiroshima survivor who died of radiation exposure in 1953)
Pushing up through smoke from a world half-darkened by over-hanging cloud,
The shroud that mushroomed out and struck the dome of the sky – black, red, blue – dance in the air,
Merge – scatter glittering sparks – already tower over the whole city.
Quivering like seaweed, the mass of flames spurts forward, popping up in the dense smoke,
Crawling out, wreathed in fire, countless human beings on all fours in a heap of embers
That erupt and subside, hair rent, rigid in death, there smoulders a curse.
9. **Torches** (Hindu 6th-century epic Sanskrit poem *Mahàbhàrata*)
The animals scattered in all directions, screaming terrible screams.
Many were burning, others were burnt. All were shattered and scattered mindlessly,
their eyes bulging. Some hugged their sons, others their fathers and mothers,
Unable to let them go, and so they died.
Others leapt up in their thousands, faces disfigured, and were consumed by the fire.
Everywhere were bodies squirming on the ground: wings, eyes and paws all burning;
They breathed their last as living torches.
10. **Agnus dei** Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace.
11. **Now the Guns Have Stopped** (Guy Wilson, Master of the Royal Armouries)
Silent, so silent now, now the guns have stopped. I have survived all; I, who knew I would not.
But now you are not here. I shall go home alone and try to live life as before and hide my grief.
For you, my dearest friend, who should be with me now, not cold too soon in your grave, alone.
12. **Benedictus** Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.
13. **Better Is Peace** (Sir Thomas Malory, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Revelation 24:1)
Excerpts from text: Better is peace than always war. And better is peace than evermore war.
Ring out the thousand wars of old, Ring in the thousand years of peace.
Ring in the valiant man and free the larger heart, the kindlier hand.
Ring out the darkness of the land. Ring in the Christ that is to be.
God shall wipe away all tears, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying,
Neither shall there be any more pain. Praise the Lord!

Karl Jenkins: *The Armed Man, a Mass for Peace* (premiered April 25, 2000; Royal Albert Hall)

The work you are about to hear this afternoon has become a global phenomenon. With *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace*, Welsh composer Karl Jenkins has become the most performed classical composer in the world. In the eleven years since its premiere, this work has gone viral, with more than 1,100 performances all over the globe. I calculate that's about two performances a week taking place somewhere in the world, and the momentum keeps growing. There have been 500 performances in the last three years. This piece is both a delight for singers and a powerful, moving experience for audiences. In under an hour, the emotional and spiritual impact of this work can change your life.

How is such a phenomenon possible? I think it's a rare synthesis of the universal themes of war and peace, powerful and arresting multi-cultural words, and most of all inordinately accessible music. Also, there's enough secular content that many performances take place outside the church, in community centers, schools and town halls. Cumulatively, the words and music take us on a roller coaster ride through the initial threat of conflict, fear, the graphic horrors of war, then gratitude, remembrance and hope. This is not music you need to grow to like, and Jenkins straddles the fence masterfully with enough meat on the plate to satisfy serious musicians while not venturing over the heads of the general public.

It's interesting that Jenkins was not the first choice of the committee charged with commissioning the work in 1999. They wanted John Rutter, a favorite of English speaking choristers, but Rutter did not share Jenkins' enthusiasm for a project of global outreach that was to incorporate such diverse texts and musical styles. Jenkins, however, was known for his eclecticism, and was riding the wave of the success of his new age Adiemus albums from the mid 1990s. They had become a cross-over sensation, selling over three million copies while topping the charts of both pop and classical music. Electronic instruments, exotic ethnic percussion, a made up vocal language and overdubbing techniques contributed to the cross-over appeal.

Once Jenkins was on board for *The Armed Man* commission, he was given texts that included four movements from the Christian mass. These Latin texts were interspersed with biblical and poetic writings. There are references to other world religions, most notably in words from the Koran, so today you'll hear texts sung in medieval French, Greek, Latin, Arabic and English. In the tradition of some of the world's great composers, Jenkins stole from himself. He borrowed melodies for the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* from his Adiemus compositions. One of the unique characteristics of this mass is the way it combines church music with military elements. Much of the score is based on marches, with field drums and trumpet calls. He skillfully incorporates the instruments and rhythms of Africa, jazz chord progressions, the repetitions of pop music, along with instrumentation and voice leading of classical music.

However, cross-over works generate criticism from all factions. Jenkins just brushes them aside, saying that unless critics have a musical education and experience as broad as his own, their expertise is not well-rounded enough, and their opinion doesn't interest him. Jenkins is well versed in jazz, rock, opera, pop, commercial music, film scores, as well as classical forms.

It is helpful to look at the back story of how this work came to be commissioned. Jenkins was approached by the Royal Armouries Museum as a candidate to write a choir and orchestra composition centered on the theme of world peace to be premiered during Great Britain's Millennium celebrations, dedicated to the victims of the then ongoing war in Kosovo. As we left the most war-torn and destructive century in man's history, the piece would look ahead with hope for mankind to commit itself to a more peaceful millennium.

The Royal Armouries Museum is home to the United Kingdom's national collection of arms, armor, and artillery, but it is also involved in community work on knife and gun crime prevention. They have also launched campaigns to raise awareness about resolving or avoiding conflict. Guy Wilson, then Master of the Royal Armouries, selected

the texts for this work. Although the commission required that it reflect Britain's Christian tradition, the eclectic texts make the work appeal to the world music audience. Its call for peace through exposure to the horrors of war is a theme that transcends cultural differences.

Jenkins, whose father was a church organist, trained in classical music in both Wales and England, but went on to be successful writing jingles for Delta Airlines, DeBeers Diamonds, Levi-Strauss Jeans, Pepsi, Volvo and the like. All the while he worked as a jazz saxophonist, so cross-over possibilities were already bubbling to the surface. He had even been a member of the 1970s progressive rock band, *Soft Machine*. It is only in recent years that he began writing music for the concert hall, nearly all of it written after 1999. His *Requiem* dates from 2005, a *Stabat Mater* from 2008 and a *Gloria* and *Te Deum* from just last year. In 2008 he wrote four concertos for various instruments and orchestra.

It's interesting to look at the way the various texts unfold. *The Armed Man* begins with a marching army with fife and drums, which build up to the choir's entrance. They sing the 15th-century French fight song, *l'Homme Armé doit on doubter*, or "The Armed Man Should Be Feared." Military trumpet calls separate the choral statements of the tune, which has been used as the melody in hundreds of musical works. Its heyday was in the Renaissance, when the tune was incorporated into settings of the Catholic mass. At least forty of those survive. The first appearance of the song was at the time of the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, an event that cast a huge psychological trauma over Europeans, who felt an urgent need to organize a military response to the victorious Ottomans. They planned another crusade, but it never materialized. The most significant twentieth century example of an Armed Man mass was composed in 1968 by British composer Peter Maxwell Davies. Thus Karl Jenkins continues a 600 year long tradition of writing Armed Man masses.

After the scene for armed conflict has been laid out in the first movement, the style and pace change abruptly with the Muslim Call to Prayer. Traditionally proclaimed by a muezzin (moo-EH-zin) from a mosque's minaret – five times a day while facing Mecca – this call to prayer is so central to Islamic faith that both the Iraqi and Iranian flags bear this text. The muezzin raises his hands to his ears and calls out in a loud voice. No one who has visited a Muslim country will forget the call to prayer at dawn, especially these days, when electronic speakers broadcast the muezzin's calls at piercing volume. There is no written music for these words, so each muezzin improvises his own fluctuations. It is no accident that this text occurs early in *The Armed Man*, because it sows the seeds of tension. While the three great Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all share a divine covenant with the God of Abraham, they hold an uneasy truce with each other. These distinct religions all arose from the teachings of the prophets of one universal creator God, called Allah by Muslims and Elohim by Jews. Many people think Allah is a God, when Allah is only a word that *means* God. Thus, Arabic translations of the Christian bible use the word Allah whenever the word for God appears. The impact of this work would be diminished if instead there had been an English language call to prayer in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

We likely need a refresher lesson in biblical genealogy. Abraham was a descendant of Noah's son Shem, and among Abraham's descendants are both Jesus and Muhammad. Moses and Jesus descended from Abraham through his son Isaac. Muhammad was a descendant of Abraham through Ishmael, Abraham's first born son. Jews and Christians are not exactly encouraged to read the Koran, so most don't know that the Koran has an entire chapter called Noah. The Koran mentions Jesus 25 times; it refers to Jesus as son of Mary (not the son of God), but affirms that Jesus was born to Mary as the result of virginal conception. They consider Jesus a Muslim – Muslim means "one who submits to God," and they consider Jesus the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament. Muslims believe that Jesus will return to earth near the day of judgment to restore justice and defeat "the false messiah," the Antichrist. However, they do not believe that Jesus was crucified and subsequently raised from the dead, but was instead raised up to God through bodily ascension. Judaism recognizes that Jesus was a Jewish Rabbi, but does not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, so Christians are more closely aligned with Muslims than Jews. That's where things get a bit prickly. It's those differences that make us start digging trenches. Frequently these differences lead to war. History has been stained by acts of violence among these three faiths, which seem to

play up their intolerance of each other, instead of recognizing their common bond through Abraham.

The *Armed Man* then moves on to the *Kyrie*, a Greek text that forms part of the traditional Catholic mass. In this instance, the *Kyrie* pays homage to the past by quoting (in *Christe Eleison*) from Palestrina's own *Armed Man* mass. Jenkins follows the centuries old practice of setting the *Kyrie* in triple meter and the *Christe Eleison* section in duple meter. And if that doesn't mean anything to you, that's just fine.

In *Save Me from Bloody Men* the tenors and basses alone perform a chant setting of English translations of two Hebrew Psalms – Psalms 56 and 59, which ask for God's help against our enemies. The translations used are from the King James Bible, which this year celebrates its 400th birthday. I need to warn you to adjust your pacemakers, because there is an arresting and loud whack of the drums near the end of this otherwise quiet movement.

The *Sanctus* that follows is an ominous, slow march and has a primeval, tribal character that adds to its power. The menace grows in the next movement in an almost cinematic musical setting of Kipling's poem "*Hymn Before Action*," whose heroic "God and country" text builds to its final, devastating line, "Lord, grant us strength to die."

Drawing upon writings of second cousin poets John Dryden and Jonathan Swift, "*Charge*" is a hymn to martial glory, followed by the tragic consequence of war in all its uncontrolled cacophony and destruction, resulting in screams of anguish from dying soldiers. Then the eerie silence of death takes over after fighting has ceased and, finally, a single trumpet plays "Last Post," a British bugle call akin to our "Taps."

At the very center of the work is "*Angry Flames*," an excerpt from a poem about the horrors of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The poet was a Japanese man who was 24 at the time and survived the attack, only to die in 1953 of leukemia brought on by radiation exposure. Next we are reminded that this sort of horror is nothing new, as we listen to an eerily similar passage from the sixth-century Sanskrit epic poem from India, the *Mahābhārata* (mah-hah-BAH-rah-tah). This movement, titled "Torches," graphically describes helpless forest animals burning alive in the fires caused by war. Not easy to sing or hear.

From the aftermath of destruction and death, the work turns its focus to one of remembrance, emphasizing that even a single death from war is one too many. First comes the *Agnus Dei*, with its lyrical realization of the Latin mass text, punctuated by fanfares from distant sounding trumpets. A vocal solo movement follows, "*Now the Guns Have Stopped*." It is an original text by Guy Wilson, then Master of the Royal Armouries Museum. He wrote about the feelings of loss and guilt that so many survivors of the World Wars felt when they came home, while many of their friends did not.

The beautiful and serene *Benedictus* begins with a ravishing cello solo. This movement helps heal the wounds of war through its slow and stately affirmation that precedes transcendent cries of Hosanna!

The work's climax begins with an English text superimposed over the French folk tune that started the work, changing the key from minor to major, reflecting the hope that peace might conquer war. Not wanting the new Millennium to be like the last, we rejoice in the words of Tennyson, who tells us to "Ring out the thousand wars of old, Ring in the thousand years of peace." After all this clamor the work ends with the affirmation that change is possible, that sorrow, pain and death can be overcome. This lush a capella choral treatment of Revelation 24:1 is a poignant end to a wrenching, powerful work that continues to touch thousands of new listeners and performers alike.

This afternoon we welcome guest singers from Charlottesville's Oratorio Society of Virginia, who are joining our church choir and orchestra under the direction of Lance Vining, the conductor of both groups. Also, today's performance will be enhanced by visual images, and we're fortunate to enjoy the talent of graphic artist Kim Jackson. I thank you for your attention and remind you that our performance starts promptly at 4 o'clock.