

Karl Jenkins (1944–)

If I had to describe [my music], I would say that it is satisfying. Much of classical music is still very

*isolated and narrow.*¹

Karl Jenkins was born and grew up in the South Wales along an estuary where the villagers rake in phenom Europe. His great luck was in having a father who, gave his son music lessons. Jenkins received classical music training at Wales' Cardiff University and at the London Royal Academy of Music as a composer, arranger, jazz performer, and bandleader, acquiring knowledge of music spanning many centuries and traditions.

svillage Gower of Penclawdd, situated in large quantities of cockles for export to the sea. He was a school teacher, organist, and choir master, and a bandleader. He went on to gain broad experience in many genres, cultures, and historical periods.

Jenkins first made his mark in jazz. On keyboard and piano, he was a founding member of the Nucleus, a pioneering prize-winning jazz-rock band. He later joined the psychedelic progressive rock and jazz fusion band Soft Machine, which was influential in the 1970s.

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In the 1980s, Jenkins turned to a composing career and awards for music he created for many well-known companies, such as Levi's, British Airways, Renault, De Beers, and Delta Airlines. In the mid-1990s, he entered mainstream music with the *Adiemus* project, which began as an experimentation with various vocal and instrumental sounds. The first three albums of the *Adiemus* series won phenomenal global recognition, topping both classical and popular music charts and winning 15 gold and platinum awards. World-class singers, such as Kiri Te Kanawa and Bryn Terfel, have recorded some of his vocal music. Jenkins has received many commissions from such prestigious sources as the Royal Ballet, the London Symphony, and HRH the Prince of Wales. His recording of the documentaries "The Celts" and "Testament" has won him British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) gongs, the British equivalent of Academy Awards statues.

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Classic FM, the U.K.'s foremost classical radio station with six million listeners, conducts an annual listeners survey to determine the most popular classical composers. Shortly after the 2000 premiere of *The Armed Man – A Mass for Peace*, the work claimed the eighth slot in the top-10 list,³ placing Jenkins as the only living composer among such greats as Mozart and Rachmaninov. "I don't think of myself as within a million miles of the composers I'm surrounded by. It's just that people have responded to the " *Benedictus*" from *The Armed Man*, and it has proved quite popular."⁴ The *Armed Man* CD was released on September 10, 2001, the day before world-changing events that led to another war.

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Jenkins continues to explore fresh sounds, blending genres, cultures, and historical periods, creating music that draws an ever-broader audience. Soon after its 2005 release, his *Requiem* topped the classical charts. That same year, The *Armed Man* CD went gold, selling more than 100,000 copies, and has had hundreds of performances in the U.K. and Europe. Jenkins would like this work to receive more U.S. exposure as well as more than 35 performances at Carnegie Hall. His many awards—from a room named in his honor at the Royal Academy of Music to Officer in the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Her Majesty the Queen—do not distract Jenkins from focused productivity. His *Stabat Mater* will premiere this year in Liverpool.

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The Armed Man – A Mass For Peace

The Armed Man was commissioned for the millennium by the U.K. Royal Armouries and had its premiere in London. Jenkins describes his inspiration this way: “As I started composing *The Armed Man*, the tragedy of Kosovo⁵ unfolded. I was reminded daily of the horror of such conflict, and so I dedicated the work to the victims of Kosovo.”⁶ According to Guy Wilson, then master of the Royal Armouries, Jenkins “responded to the commission by composing the most marvellous, varied, accessible, appropriate and singable music that embraces the whole world and the full range of emotions that the subjects of war and peace evoke.”⁷ The hope was that performances across time would encourage young people to think about “the vital issues of war and peace.”⁸

The human longing for peace is a visceral presence in this mass, as each movement adds to the larger story of war’s devastating impact. The various texts selected by Guy Wilson, as well as the music itself, embrace time periods from the first millennium B.C. to modern times. The work’s compelling beauty bridges Hindu, Islamic, and Christian cultures.

For more than 500 years, composers have created settings for the Burgundian song “*L’Homme Armé*” in their music. Jenkins opens the mass with this song, introducing the marching drumbeat of war, first barely audible, as though it might pass in the distance. Then the chorus joins in with “*L’homme armé doit on douter*” (the armed man must be feared), sung as a relentless round, and we become painfully aware that we are listening to a call to arms and a march to war.

The Koran, the holy book of Islam, stresses prayer as the link between Muslims and Allah, creator and benefactor. The call to prayer, “*Adhaan*,” came into being so Muslims would know when to pray and when to go to the mosque for congregational prayer. Traditionally, one of the men takes the role of *muezzin* and sings the call from the mosque roof top or minaret five times each day.⁹ The five times, attuned to nature, vary across the globe but are roughly at dawn, as the sun declines from its zenith, just before sunset, just after sunset, and at night. Although the pronunciation and accompanying actions for the call to prayer differ from one country or region to another, the words remain the same.

Jenkins follows the Islamic call to prayer with a prayer from the Christian Ordinary of the mass. This juxtaposition transcends the walls of mosque, temple, and church, where voices hear each other to call and respond in open space. “*Kyrie*” begins in a stately, somber style and, with the phrase “*Christe eleison*,” flows into the style of Renaissance composer Palestrina, whose serene work captured Counter-Reformation conservatism in a “polyphony of absolute perfection.”¹⁰ The tenor line imitates Palestrina’s use of “*L’Homme Armé*” in his mass by the same name.

“Save Me From Bloody Men” sets Biblical text to Gregorian chant, suggestive of monastic life. But after prayers of “Be merciful unto me,” “Defend me,” and “Deliver me,” the voices become impassioned with fear and anger with the words “Save me,” as an ominous sense of doom overtakes them. The infectious uplift of yet subtly menacing “*Sanctus*” follows, with its militaristic rhythm that harks back to “*L’Homme Armé*.”

The poem “Hymn Before Action” is by author and poet Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). This youngest of all Nobel Prize winners rejected knighthood, and his fiction is known for addressing issues of national allegiance and identity. Jenkins scores the battle-ready mindset of the poem in

agrandchoralmovement,reflectingthegrimdeterm inationofabrotherhoodpreparedtodie together.

“Charge!”expressestheseductivewar.Thepoetrysegmentsarebypoetand playwrightJohnDryden(1631-1700),whosodominat dRestorationEnglandthattheperiod wascalledtheAgeofDryden.Insteadofrelyingo ncourtpatronage,hewroteinapreciseand reasonedstylethatthegeneralpublicunderstood. Theline“Howblestishewhoforhiscountry dies”wasquotedbyIrishmanJonathanSwift(1667-1 745)inalettertotheEarlofOxfordurging peaceableactioninthefaceofhostilities. ¹¹Themusicforthesetextstakesonanaccelerated beat,asthechorusandorchestrabecomebattle-dri ven.Swift’swordsinterjectacrythatseems tobebothfromtheheartsofthosesendingtheir inintobattleandthosewhomustfight.The movementendswithacacophonyofhorrifiedvoices asthebattleisengaged, followedbyavery longsilence,andfinallyatrumpetsoloplayingth e“lastpost.”

Thecentralmovementof *The ArmedMan* describestheatomicbomb’smassiveandworld- changingimpact—twocitiesofJapaneseciviliansde ad.¹²Asolitarybellandtrumpetopen “AngryFlames,”andthenaslowmelodybegins.Ver ybriefpoignantchoralphrasesemphasize the delicatelyeffectivewordsofpoetTogeSankich i,whowas24yearsoldwhenthebombfell onHiroshima.Duringthehandfulofyearsremainin gtohimafterhecontractedradiation-caused leukemia,hewastheleadingHiroshimapoetinJapa ndapassionateactivistforpeace.

Thetextof“Torches”remindsusthatmassdestruct ionisasoldaswaritself.Thelinesarefrom theancientsacredHindubook *Mahabharata*.This epic,acollectionofstoriesdatingfromthe firstmillenniumB.C.,becameaunifiedtextof100 ,000stanzasinabout350A.D.Theawesome visionsofthecosmos,divinity,andhumanitycompa reinphilosophicaldepth,complexity,and scopetotheGreekmythsandtheBible.Atthecor eofthe *Mahabharata*,battlesragebetween twofamiliesdescendedfromgodsanddemons. With agentlyrockingrhythm,theorchestra accompaniedthechorus,whichpaintsafieryscene thatdestroysbelovedanimalsandhumans alikewiththeimmediacyofaneyewitnessaccount.

Theprayer“ *AgnusDei* ,”whichevolvedfromancientJewishritesintothe Ordinaryofthemass, honorsJesusforthesacrificeofhislifetoatone forhumanity’ssins.Thebeautifulsolomelody, begunbythesopranosandthenmagnifiedbytheres tofthechorus,servesasaprayerforthose whoselivesaresacrificed.

Thesilencingofwar’sbrutalmachinerygivesway toanintervalofhavingtoacceptone’sown survivaleventhoughfriendshavedied.Appropriat ely,GuyWilson’sownpoem“NowtheGuns HaveStopped”isinthestyleofanelegy;andJenk ins’musictonessgentlytotheheartssuffering fromloss.

“*Benedictus*”seemstodrawonthesparsbeautyoftheprevious movement,beginningwiththe melodyinsoloinstruments, followed,onebyone,b yeachchoralvoicepart.Thefamiliarityof thewordsfomtheOrdinaryofthemasscomfortsan dinspires;despitehaunting sadness,it swellstoaresounding“ *Hosanna*.”¹³

“BetterisPeace”openswiththedance-likedialogu eofLancelotandGuiniverefrom *LeMorte d’Arthur*¹⁴byThomasMalory(1405-1471).Theupbeatreprisal of“ *L’HommeArmé*”then signalsreclamationofthehumanoptimismandresil iencyneededtotriumphoverdisastersof ourownmaking.ThemiddletextisbyPoetLaureate Alfred, LordTennyson(1809-1892)from

his masterpiece, “In Memoriam A.H.H.,” commemorating his dearest friend. In a spirit of rejoicing, his phrases “thousand wars” and “thousand years” invite us to freshen our minds, look back on the 20th century, and commit to a less war-ravaged 21st century. The ending lines from Revelation 21:4 imagine a thousand-year-long age of renewal, following the burial of him who “should deceive the nations no more” (Revelation 20:3). The final choral setting, reminiscent of the Welsh choral tradition, expresses both hope and sorrow and the healing, uniting effects of giving praise.

-Carol Talbeck

¹“Fanfare for the common man,” *The Independent* (London) by Sam Ingleby, quoting Jenkins, May 17, 2004.

²In 2006, the University of Wales awarded Jenkins a Doctor of Music degree.

³*The Armed Man* remained in the Classic FM top 10 in 2005 and 2006 and currently is number 12 on their top 300 list. Classic FM has awarded the “Redf” award to him for “outstanding service to classical music.”

⁴See the first footnote.

⁵In 1999, N.A.T.O. launched military action to restrain the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and Serbians after several massacres between the two. An estimated 300,000 Albanians were displaced by the conflict. At least 30,000 of the displaced found themselves in the woods without food or shelter.

⁶<http://www.karljenkins.com/armedman.php>, undated.

⁷Liner notes from the CD *The Armed Man—A Mass For Peace*, Virgin Records Ltd. 2001.

⁸Audiophile Audition: web magazine article on Karl Jenkins by John Sunier, November 3, 2005.

⁹Today, the call to prayer may be restricted to inside the mosque, due to noise regulations.

¹⁰*A History of Western Music* by Donald Jay Grout, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York 1960.

¹¹While part of the Tory government’s sinner circle, Jonathan Swift mediated fierce disagreements between his friend Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, lord treasurer and prime minister, and Henry St. John, secretary of state for foreign affairs. Swift translated the line from Roman poet Horace’s Odes (23 B.C.) in a letter to Robert, who was imprisoned at the time for political reasons. World War I poet Wilfred Owen described the line as “the old lie.”

¹²The bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, dropped three days apart in August 1945, resulted in 140,000 and 80,000 dead respectively, as well as many thousands afterward due to radiation poisoning.

¹³The melody first became widely popular in Europe and the U.K. on Jenkins’ *Adiemus: the Eternal Knot*. It is also featured on the gold album *Pure* (2004) by young singing sensation Hayley Westenra.

¹⁴Malory’s title in contemporary French would be *La Mort d’Arthur*.