

Program Notes

Gloria, Vivaldi



Venice, in the early eighteenth century, was a remarkably enlightened city-state and its governors saw fit to provide well for its poor, its sick, and its abandoned. The *Ospedale della Pietá* was one of four charitable institutions, this one for orphaned or abandoned babies. As the babies grew up, the boys were trained as craftsmen, the girls in lace-making and laundering, unless they showed special musical talent. If they were musically gifted, they received the finest instrumental and vocal training imaginable. Vivaldi, *Il Pretto Rosso* (The Red Priest, so called because of his flaming red hair) was contracted by the *Ospedale* as a part time instructor. His title was *Maestro di Violino*. He was never was able to convince the board of the *Ospedale* to offer him the more prestigious full-time position of *Maestro di Coro*. Only when the installed *Maestro di Coro* took ill was Vivaldi asked to stand in as substitute for him and it was during these years, from 1713-1719, and again in 1739, that he wrote sacred choral music for the *Ospedale*.

Such was the accomplishment of the girls and women singers and instrumentalists that, according to Charles de Brosses, writing in 1739, "The girls sing like angels, and play the violin, the flute, the organ, the oboe, the cello, the bassoon, in short there is no instrument large enough to frighten them."

French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, wrote:

"Every Sunday in the churches of the four scuole, during Vespers, there are motets for a large chorus and orchestra. These are composed and conducted by the leading Italian maestri and performed from behind screened-off galleries by girls, the oldest of whom is

not twenty years of age. I can think of nothing so delectable and touching as this music: the wealth of artistry, the exquisite taste of the songs, the beauty of the choices, and the precision of performance . . . what pained me were these cursed screens which let only sounds escape and kept hidden from me the angelic beauties of which the sounds were so worthy."

The *Gloria* that we perform is one of two that Vivaldi wrote and they are very similar to each other. We are not sure of the exact occasion for which Vivaldi wrote either *Gloria* or when precisely they were written, or when first performed. We do know that both fell into two hundred years of obscurity. Unveiled at a concert in 1939 the *Gloria* we perform today subsequently has become one of the most popular of all choral-orchestral works.

The twelve-movement Mass is filled with rich contrasts of tonality, tempo, meter and rhythmic figures, homophonic and polyphonic textures, choral and solo contrasts, a range of musical means- learned to ingenuous- and expression-lyrical to virtuoso, and a panoply of mood opposites- exuberant/reflective, joyful/somber, playful/grandiose, tender and personal/declamatory and universal.

The music has a theatrical quality that would have pleased the contemporary audience. Well-to-do tourists visiting Venice during Lent when theaters were closed, would have been delighted, in the absence of theater or opera performances, to attend a church service or a concert of sacred music, to entertain themselves, perhaps even to find a wife from among the young women performers. Accounts vary as to whether the singers and instrumentalists were indeed all so ravishingly and angelically beautiful as Rousseau describes. Some contemporary accounts are more prosaic in describing the disfigurements of some the performers. Were the screens behind which the women and girls performed to hide their beauty or their plainness?

The first movement of the Mass, *Gloria*, opens with energetic D major fanfares from the orchestra, punctuated by trumpet and oboe, to which the choir responds with jubilant shouts.

By contrast, the second movement, *Et in Terra Pax*, in the relative minor mode, is the most somber movement: almost thirty fugal entries beseeching peace on earth seem to suggest how profoundly difficult it is for the world to be in peace. This, the longest movement, also contains the most modulations, symbolic of the searching for peaceful solutions and resolutions. Nothing could be more apropos today. There are two subjects that appear at one time or another in all the voices woven together: "et in terra pax..."



"bonae voluntatis..." and a third thread consists of long-held notes, building the inner organic tension.

The third movement, *Laudamus te*, a joyful duet, has chains of deliciously spicy suspensions in the florid intertwining vocal lines of the two soprano soloists.

A short but grand homophonic introduction *Gratias agimus* leads to a buoyant fugue *Propter magnam gloriam*, effervescent, confident, even playful as the voices steal the subject from each other.

The sixth movement, *Domine Deus*, is graceful, elegant barcarole, a duet between soprano and oboe as if a duet between lovers on a gondola.

The seventh movement, *Domine, fili unigenite* uses the French saccade rhythms (two notes: long and very short, in jerky style), to create a canvas of courtliness. Again the voices choose partners, as if in a dance. Occasional chains of *hemiolas* (deliberate misplacing of accents) create some fun!

The eighth movement, another *Domine Deus*, is a stately, plaintive mezzo soprano solo. Like a finely distilled liqueur, her interjections come in small sips, underpinned by a quiet, majestic basso continuo. Choral punctuations affirm the soloist's pleas.

The choir returns in the ninth movement, *Qui tollis peccata mundi*, in full intensity, with a heart-rending recognition of man's sins and a plea for salvation from these. The *suscipe* section, in triple rhythm, adds urgency to the supplication.

The tenth movement, *Qui sedes*, is another dance, buoyant and friendly, between the mezzo soprano soloist and the orchestral strings...Did Vivaldi lose himself in the sheer joy of the music? The text refers to sins and pity; the music sounds like a canter to a dance festival. The blazing music of the opening returns in the eleventh movement, *Quoniam tu solus sanctus*, a jewel of musical recycling: a measure taken from here or there in the first movement stitched together in a different order produces a familiar but new joyful experience.

To close the work Vivaldi produces a triumphal fugue of unstoppable verve, "Cum Sancto Spiritu," a splendid showpiece of contrapuntal writing with not one, but two subjects that share the same "Cum sancto spiritu..." text. The first is majestic and, with delightful reversal of roles, the voices imitate the trombone, instead of the more usual vice versa proceeding. The second subject is effervescent and champagne-like. *Amens*, like spun sugar, decorate both subjects. The truth is, this movement is not Vivaldi's but is borrowed, note for note, from a contemporary, Giovanni Maria Ruggieri, who, I feel sure, is indebted to Vivaldi for making his fugue known!

Program Notes by Shulamit Hoffmann

An Armed Man: A Mass for Peace, Karl Jenkins



The Armed Man: A Mass For Peace was written by contemporary Welsh composer, Karl Jenkins, on commission from the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds, England, for the Millennium celebrations. Dedicated to victims of the Kosovo crisis, it was premièred at The Royal Albert Hall, London, on April 25, 2000 in a performance by the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and the National Musicians Symphony Orchestra conducted by Grant Llewellyn and featuring Julian Lloyd Webber (the brother of Andrew) as cello soloist.

Karl Jenkins was classically trained at Cardiff University, Wales, and at the Royal Academy of Music, London, and then successfully wrote music for commercials and worked as a jazz musician. His *Adiemus – Songs of Sanctuary* albums and projects have won 15 gold and platinum awards since their premier in 1995. In 2005 he was awarded an OBE by Her Majesty The Queen “for services to music.”

The Royal Armouries in Leeds, England, is home to the United Kingdom’s national collection of arms, armor, and artillery. It is one of the largest collections of guns and knives in the world and offers special insight into how and why people use weapons. The Armouries is involved in community work on knife and gun crime prevention and has launched various campaigns, including *No to Knives*, to raise awareness about resolving or avoiding conflict.

Guy Wilson, Master of the Royal Armouries, who selected the texts used in Jenkins’ Mass, says, “The theme that ‘the armed man must be feared’ which is the message of the song seemed to me painfully relevant to the 20th century and so the idea was born to commission a modern *Armed Man Mass*. What better way both to look back and reflect as we leave behind the most war-torn and destructive century in human history, and to look ahead with hope and commit ourselves to a new and more peaceful millennium.”

A concert performance of Jenkins’ *Mass for Peace* in which the composer conducted the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and the London Philharmonic Orchestra also featured a video montage of scenes of war. This performance can be seen on a commercially available DVD and movements from it can be found on You-Tube. The visual images heighten the music’s indirect commentary on war and the impact of the music and visuals is deeply affective.

Jenkins’ Mass draws on a diverse array of cultural and historical sources both for text and for music, and, in so doing, gives it cross-cultural global relevance and appeal. The poignancy of Jenkins’ *Mass for Peace* is heightened by the release of the CD, on September 10, 2001, the day before the World Trade Center tragedy.

What we perform today is a Suite of seven movements derived from the larger work. The texts are based on the Roman Catholic Mass as well as texts from other sources. The suite takes its moniker from the fifteenth century anonymous song *L’homme armé*. *The Armed Man - A Mass For Peace* is part of a six-century-old tradition of *Armed Man* masses that take *L’homme armé* as their starting point.

This haunting *L’homme armé* tune and text is featured in the first and last movements and, in its mystery and compelling intensity, forms the emotional heart of the piece. *L’homme armé* is a marching song, sung in medieval French. Although its origins are unknown, it seems like a call to arms and evokes armies rallying for battle.

Based on traditional Latin sacred Mass texts, the Mass juxtaposes sources as diverse as the Medieval *L’homme armé* tune and contemporary Brazilian drum rhythms. The Kyrie opens with a beautiful tune and then segues to a pastiche of Palestrina counterpoint, the sixteenth century epitome of sacred music.

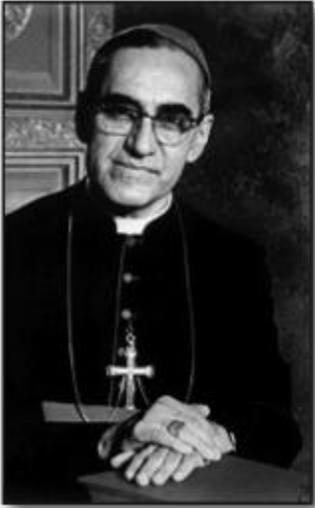
The Sanctus quotes the text of the service of Holy Communion and it is set, with some irony, to the most martial music. The movement entitled “Hymn Before Action,” based on a text by the English poet and author, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), is the most dramatic. The Agnus Dei and Benedictus movements are lyrical and reflective. The *L’homme armé* reprise is a stark reminder of the omnipresence of war.



The music of *The Armed Man Mass* is accessible to the listener yet it consistently makes a profound impact. It uses the traditional musical and textual means to explore a subject that remains, sadly, all too contemporary. Jenkins wrote, “As I started composing *The Armed Man* the tragedy of Kosovo unfolded. I was reminded daily of the horror of such conflict.” The music is by turns visceral and ethereal. We trust that the visuals we have chosen for our performance enhance the music’s compelling account of the descent into the hell of war and its terrible consequences of suffering so intense that it can only be described without words—in music and in image.

Program Notes by Shulamit Hoffmann

***Misa del Pueblo*, René Carlos Ochoa**



Misa del Pueblo was originally written for a small church choir of untutored musicians in San José, California. When first heard, *Misa* included but a single melodic line with its text and a guitar accompaniment. Years later - at the suggestion of Shulamit Hoffmann - I expanded the initial scoring to include four-part choir and the characteristic instruments of the Mariachi - strings and trumpets. A piano part and simple rhythmic suggestions for a percussionist have also been added.

The music is “folksy” and “popular” in its style. It was inspired by the life - and death - of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, who was tragically assassinated in 1980 due to his support and efforts on behalf of the poor of his country. He remains for me an enduring symbol of the greatness of the human spirit and the sacrifice that is often required to bring peace and justice into our world.

As with any musical composition of the Mass, the preexistent text is what must be “brought to life” by the music that is newly created. Here, I was faced with an interesting challenge: how to make a piece that is accessible to the average singer of a church choir and those in the assembly - i.e. not too difficult to perform - and, at the same time, a piece that might hopefully remain interesting and fresh. It was this “balance” that I strived to attain as *Misa del Pueblo* found its expression through me.

Thanks to my friend and colleague Shulamit Hoffmann for suggesting and encouraging me to create this new concert version of *Misa del Pueblo*. Thanks also to Fr. Kevin Joyce, who was a constant inspiration as this music was first conceived. It is my hope that members of *Viva la Musica!* and all who

perform and listen to it will find it enjoyable.

Program Notes by René Carlos Ochoa