

WAR AND PEACE WITH THE DONCASTER CHORAL SOCIETY

The main dish in Doncaster Choral Society's first concert of its 2011-2012 season, at Priory Methodist Church on 26 November was Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man, A Mass for Peace*, which is still not much more than a decade old, but is already one of the most popular pieces of modern music, a fact evidenced here by the audience, highly satisfactory in numbers and enthusiasm. Indeed they had plenty to enthuse about, as the Society under the inspiring and knowledgeable direction of its Conductor, Simon Lindley, produced singing of power, vigour and memorability.

A "mass for peace" Jenkins' work may be, but inevitably it concerns itself with war, its excitements, its terrors, its anguish. It is richly eclectic, both in its musical inspiration, bringing in the *L'Homme Armé* tune used in many medieval and Renaissance masses, both at the start and near the end, and, powerfully, the Last Post, and in its lyrics. AS a mass it includes four liturgical movements, Kyrie, Sanctus, Agnus Dei and Benedictus (by coincidence or not, these are the sections most frequently to be heard on Classic FM), interspersing these with appropriate from the bible and from Kipling, Dryden, Malory, Tennyson and others, selected by Guy Wilson, whose own poem "Now the Guns Have Stopped" was movingly sung by contralto Lucy Appleyard, one of six vocal soloists, all of whom made their distinctive contributions, the others being Cameron Stanley (treble), Claire Strafford (soprano), Philip Steel (tenor) and Paul Tidd (bass) while Noah Nazir took the role of the Muezzin as he had done when the DCS performed the Mass previously, in 2005.

But it was the chorus that had the most to do and it clearly relished the task, both warlike passages and the consoling climax which rings out a millennium of war (more, surely?) and "wipes away all tears". This was, in a word, inspirational; the singers were finely supported by organist David Houlder and members of the National Festival Orchestra, here relatively few in numbers but still producing remarkable colour from string quartet, bass, two trumpets, flute (doubling piccolo) and two percussionists, each player having their own solo opportunities, eagerly accepted.

The Mass occupies just under an hour – such is its variety it seems longer – so the evening was filled out with items more or less appropriate to the theme of Remembrance: Quilter's rousing *Non Nobis Domine*; the "Albinoni" *Adagio*, shapely if essentially bogus; Vivaldi's often canonic *Two Trumpet Concerto*, brilliantly realised by soloists Jamie O'Brien and Gordon Truman; Vaughan Williams' 1929 version of Psalm 100, which he drew on for his "mess up" (to use his own words) of the *Old Hundredth* for the Coronation of 1953; and Elgar. The busy Mr. Houlder played organ transcriptions of Elgar's *Imperial March* and *Nimrod* and, one of the evening's highlights, *With Proud Thanksgiving*, adapted movingly and in more concise form from the composer's *For the Fallen* (part of his *The Spirit of England*), here given a devoted performance by the choir and its impressive orchestra, albeit a tiny one by Elgar's usual standards. I hope we may hear this again in the future. Indeed the whole evening was a moving commemoration of our annual Armistice celebration, even if it was a fortnight or so late. Many, many thanks to all.