

SALT LAKE CHORAL ARTISTS IN POWERFUL PLEA FOR PEACE

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SALT LAKE CHORAL ARTISTS, “A Pledge for Peace,” Libby Gardner Concert Hall, Oct. 15

Karl Jenkins’ music isn’t widely known in the United States. He’s a prolific composer but in this country he’s best known as the nameless author of a couple of popular television ads for an airline company and a jewelry store.

But Jenkins is more than a commercial composer. His music has mass appeal in its melodicism and its trend towards a certain amount of theatricality, yet more importantly it’s honest and sincere and can have deeper meaning than what’s immediately apparent.

That’s true for his *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace*. Premiered in England in 2000, it is a gripping anti-war work in the spirit of Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*. And as in the Britten, Jenkins also incorporates texts by a number of authors, including Alfred, Lord Tennyson, into the Catholic Mass. In addition, Jenkins also makes use of the medieval song *L’homme armé* (*The Armed Man*), cleverly twisting it to serve peace rather than war. In the words and the music, *The Armed Man* makes a powerful statement on the idiocy and futility of war. And at the end, there is a glimmering of hope and a faint vision of a better future, one that renounces war and replaces it with understanding and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the world.

Brady Allred and his Salt Lake Choral Artists introduced Utah audiences to Jenkins’ Mass in two performances Saturday in Libby Gardner Concert Hall. The work was done masterfully. Allred and his singers delved into the emotions of the music and gave a reading that incorporated subtlety and nuance where it sometimes was difficult to find. It was a vibrant interpretation that brought Jenkins’ message across in clear cut terms.

Allred and his vocal forces are something to be reckoned with in Utah’s dynamic choral music scene, and in concerts such as this they stand head above shoulders of all the rest. There is a professional quality to the singing that one seldom finds among the many choral ensembles, both large and small, in the state. There is depth, feeling, expression and power in their singing.

Joining the group was mezzo-soprano Holly Sorenson, who sang her solos with beautifully crafted expressiveness and lyricism. Sorenson has a rich vibrant voice and it was wonderfully suited to the music.

Accompanying the voices was a sizable orchestra assembled for these concerts. It performed magnificently; it was, in fact, one of the best performances played by a pick up orchestra. Of special note was principal cellist Julie Bevan’s playing in the “Benedictus.” She played her lengthy solo with radiant beauty.

There was also a visual element to the Mass. There was a slideshow that was synchronized to run with the music showing images of war and the brutality that man has inflicted on his fellow man. It was moving and well designed.

Prior to the Mass the Choral Artists, along with the Young Choral Artists sang Jenkins' captivating "Adiemus" from the *Songs of Sanctuary*.