**THE ARMED MAN: KARL JENKINS**

**LANGCLIFFE SINGERS (& FRIENDS): CHRIST CHURCH, SKIPTON (28/2/15)**

Karl Jenkin's work "The Armed Man (A Mass for Peace) was composed specifically to mark the transition from one millennium to another and to reflect on the passing of a particularly war-torn and destructive period of history and look forward in hope towards a more peaceful future. It is dedicated to the victims of the Kosovo conflict and is on many levels a challenging and thought provoking piece. It is therefore all the more commendable that this performance was assembled with only one full rehearsal and was a "come and sing" event featuring singers from a wide range of backgrounds who had joined the Langcliffe Singers simply for the event and for the afternoon rehearsal.  They were accompanied by organist Alastair Mackenzie and by the musicians from Skipton Music Centre Senior Percussion Group and Senior Brass Group. These young and very talented performers showed considerable skill and enthusiasm in their vital role and were truly a credit to the work of the music centre demonstrating how fortunate the area is to have a means of fostering young talent in this way. The percussion plays a central role in the work and the group rose to this challenge wonderfully, as did both the cello soloist and the young trumpeter. Congratulations to them all. In creating the work Karl Jenkins drew on a range of texts and there are times when it must be said that it is not an easy piece to listen to; it is disturbing in places with distressing imagery and painfully loud with percussion drowning out the lyrics which at points descend into wordless screams and moans. Yet it also contains movements of great poignancy (Now the Guns Have Stopped) and simple beauty (Benedictus) which make compelling listening. It is dramatic in form covering a range of musical styles and taking the listener on a whirlwind journey through the build up to war, an apocalyptic encounter which leads to devastation and on to a final upbeat ending "Better is Peace" and the haunting promise that "God Shall Wipe Away All Tears". It could be argued that it is at times overly self-consciously attempting to manipulate the listeners' emotions and yet it has an inner drive which compels in forward for both performer and listener, so that there is little time to reflect on how the effect is created. That said, it has to be acknowledged that this was an absolutely riveting performance which kept you focussed throughout. The soloists rose well to the challenges and the choir as a whole performed admirably, showing tremendous concentration. Clearly under the skilful baton of Nigel Waugh they continue to be inspired and go from strength to strength.

Gill O'Donnell