Minehead Choral Society
November 2026

Programme:

Armed Man:

1.	The Armed Man	Chorus
2.	Call to Prayers	Solo
3.	Kyrie	Soprano Solo + Chorus
4.	Save me From Bloody Men	Tenor/Bass
5.	Sanctus	Chorus
6.	Hymn Before Action	Chorus
7.	Charge	Chorus
8.	Angry Flames	SA Solos + Chorus
9.	Torches	Chorus
10.	Agnus Dei	Chorus
11.	Now the Guns Have stopped	Alto Solo
12.	Benedictus	Chorus
13.	Better is Peace	Chorus

INTERVAL

Vivaldi Gloria:

1.	Gloria	Chorus
2.	Et in terra pax hominibus	Chorus
3.	Laudamus te	Soprano / Alto Duet
4.	Gratias agimus tibi	Chorus
5.	Propter magnum gloriam	Chorus
6.	Domine Deus	Soprano Solo
7.	Domine Fili Unigenite	Chorus
8.	Domine Deus, Agnus Dei	Alto solo + Chorus
9.	Qui tollis peccata mundi	Chorus
10.	Qui Sedes ad dexteram	Alto solo
11.	Quoniam tu solus Sanctus	Chorus
12.	Cum Sancto Spiritu	Chorus

Programme Notes

We have two completely contrasting works for our November Concert. Having first performed in 2007 some excerpts from the newly-released Armed Man, a Mass for Peace, we performed the Minehead Premiere in April 2008. I have matched this powerful piece with the lighter, but no less meaningful Vivaldi Gloria. This shorter second half will give us the chance to reflect on the challenges of the first half and will finish the concert in optimistic fashion, looking forward to the future.

I am delighted to once more be joining forces with our professional soloists and orchestra, Stephanie Berner, Helena Payne and The Taunton Sinfonietta, led by Mary Eade.

Karl Jenkins The Armed Man – A Mass for Peace

To mark the millennium, Britain's Royal Armouries commissioned the composition of a mass which would reflect on war and peace in a multi-cultural, global society. The Master of the Royal Armouries collected and edited the text for the composition, using lyrics from classic poets, biblical verses, and traditional mass, as well as from Muslim, Hindu, and Japanese sources. It was written while the horror of Kosovo unfolded and Karl Jenkins dedicated it to the victims of that tragedy. Poignantly the recording was released in the week of 9/11.

The mass begins with a marching army and the beat of military drums, the orchestra gradually building to the choir's entrance, singing the 15th century "***The Armed Man"*** (L'Homme Armé), a song written between 1450 and 1463 at the court of Charles the bold of Burgundy. By the end of the 16th century, nearly 40 masses had been written using the song in some way. The song is a strong call to arms and establishes the darkness to follow.

After the scene is set, the style and pace changes and we are prepared for reflection by the traditional Muslim ***"Call To Prayer***s" (Adhaan).

The following ***"Kyrie"*** begins with a barely-audible orchestral introduction, the simple soprano solo, tonight sung by Stephanie Berner, is strengthened by the joining chorus, which stately requests divine blessings in the Christian tradition. The Christe Eleison section quotes Palestrina's setting of L'Homme Armé, before returning to the beautifully simple melody for the Kyrie.

This ecclesiastic contemplation is invaded by the dark sounds of ***"Save Me From The Bloody Men"***. This clever composition starts out sounding like a traditional Gregorian chant for male voices, perfectly in line with the religious songs preceding it. The nastiness, however, is in the final phrase where a sudden drumbeat and some ominous notes give a sense of doom to the titular phrase. The voices sound not so much afraid as they sound angry.

"Sanctus" is more upbeat, but retains the dignity of its context, managing to sound menacing and reflective; a sign of things to come. It is followed by the ominous ***"Hymn Before Action"*** which - using words by Rudyard Kipling - establishes the mindset needed for battle. The song both establishes a motivation for the fight and encourages the soldiers to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. The powerful imagery of the words combines well with the sweeping English melody, reminiscent of the style of musical theatre anthems or motion picture scores.

War is now inevitable. The beat picks up, literally, in ***"Charge!"*** which - using text from several sources - establishes the start of the battle with powerful vocals, trumpets, and drums. (All three of which are also mentioned in the song's lyrics.) The motivations and encouragements of the previous song are thematically repeated and near the end of the song we hear the abstract screams of the battle unfold. After the uncontrolled cacophony of destruction is the eerie silence of the battlefield after battle, followed by the burial of the dead. (Please note there will be a 30 second silence before the last post.)

At the centre of the work is an excerpt from a poem about the horrors of the atom bomb attack on Hiroshima. ***"Angry Flames"*** starts with the sound of a lone trumpet followed by the ringing of a bell, a slow melody, and then the quiet, sad solo vocals, sometimes supported by the chorus. The lyrics - translated from the Japanese and clearly reflecting the violence of the nuclear explosions of 1945 - powerfully describe the horrors left behind by battle as a city lies in flames.

The mournful mood is continued in the ninth song ***"Torches"*** which - using words from The Mahabharata - describes the sad fate of the victims of war. The melody, the instrumentation, and the singing in this song are all quite subdued as if fearful of disturbing the dead. Only the final word of this song, torches, is sung loud and angrily. This is a powerful composition in its imagery and execution, its relevance to modern life compelling considering it was written two and a half thousand years ago.
From the horrors of mass destruction the work turns to remember that each human life is sacred and unique. The ***"Agnus Dei"*** asks for divine peace, reminding us of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. This most beautiful of melodies combines with traditional Latin invocations of a mass, creating a stunning, powerful choral piece.
Using a lyric by the current Master of the Royal Armouries himself, ***"Now The Guns Have Stopped"*** is a haunting solo sung by Helena Payne; a carefully crafted song of mourning and loneliness sung by a weary battle survivor, struggling with the feelings of loss and guilt that so many survivors of the First World War felt when they came home but their friends did not.
The ***"Benedictus"*** heals those wounds in its slow and stately affirmation of faith. It starts out as a quiet instrumental; the choir follows, sounding as if singing from a great hall or church in the distance. Once the orchestra's brass section chimes in, the chorus becomes a powerful song of praise with a strong melody, leading us to the final, positive climax of the work.
The concluding track, ***"Better is Peace"***, beings where we started with Lancelot and Guinevere's declaration that peace is better than war. Jenkins uses the original Armed Man melody with Malory's desire for peace to show how the call for peace negates the call to arms by appropriating its melody. Using joyful instrumentation, cheerful choral vocals, and encouraging words by Tennyson, this song truly establishes a new beginning, with high hopes and good wishes. "Ring out the thousand wars of old, ring in the thousand years of peace." The mass ends with the affirmation from the Book of Revelations that change is possible; that sorrow, pain and death can be overcome.

After experiencing *The Armed Man* as a whole, the listener is left with a sense of awe. We have been taken through a broad range of emotions and Jenkins has not shunned the more horrific aspects of war and suffering - all the better to make the argument against it.
This song cycle is meant to be experienced as a whole: the composition and execution of these songs creates a wonderful overall experience, yet it is difficult to separate out a song and have it stand on its own. Each song is part of the larger story, each song makes sense as part of the overall composition, and by itself each song seems to be missing its context.
The powerful imagery of this song cycle cannot easily be separated from world events. Jenkins notes this as he dedicates the work to the victims of the Kosovo tragedy. This composition rings true for present events and the incorporation of both Christian and Muslim texts and melodies provide a powerful commentary on the disagreements between followers of these and other faiths.

Gloria in D RV589 - Antonio Vivaldi (1678 - 1741)

Our program continues in complete contrast with Vivaldi's famous Gloria in D. Composed in 1715, the Gloria lay undiscovered until the late 1920s, when it was found buried among a pile of forgotten Vivaldi manuscripts. Composed for the choir

of the Ospedale della Pietà, an orphanage for girls, it presents the traditional Gloria from the Latin Mass in twelve varied cantata-like sections. The Ospedale prided itself on the quality of its musical education and the excellence of its choir and orchestra. Vivaldi, a priest, music teacher and virtuoso violinist, composed many sacred works for the Ospedale, where he spent most of his career, as well as hundreds of instrumental concertos to be played by the girls' orchestra.

The wonderfully sunny nature of the ***Gloria***, with its distinctive melodies and rhythms, is characteristic of all of Vivaldi's music. The opening movement is a joyous chorus, with trumpet and oboe obligato. The extensive orchestral introduction establishes two simple motifs, one of octave leaps, the other a quicker, quaver - semiquaver figure, that function as the ritornello. The choir enters in chorale-like fashion, declaiming the text in regular rhythms, contrasting with the orchestral ritornello, which contains most of the melodic interest of the movement.
The B minor ***Et in terra pax*** is in nearly every way a contrast to the first. It is in triple rather than duple time, in a minor key, and rather slower. Its imitative and expressive chromatic texture evokes the motets of the Renaissance era. ***Laudamus te***, a passionate duet for soprano and mezzo-soprano, gives us some hint of the skill of Vivaldi's young singers, here beautifully sung by Stephanie and Helena.
Gratias agimus tibi is a very broad prelude to a fugal allegro on ***propter magnam gloriam***. The Largo ***Domine Deus, Rex coelestis*** is in the form of duet between the solo soprano and the solo violin, again beautifully sung by Stephanie. This is followed by the joyful F major ***Domine Fili unigenite***, dominated by the dotted rhythms characteristic of a French overture.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei features the resonant tones of our alto soloist, Helena, with the chorus providing an antiphonal response, ***qui tollis peccata mundi***, to each intercession. The bold harmonies of the following section, ***Qui tollis***, provide a refreshing change of tone colour, and complement the intercessional alto aria, ***Qui sedes ad dextera Patris***. The string accompaniment contains recollections of the opening movement, and prepares for the following movement, ***Quoniam tu solus sanctus***, which takes the shape of a brief reprise of the opening movement's broken octaves.
The powerful double fugue on ***Cum Sancto Spiritu*** that ends the work is an arrangement by Vivaldi of the ending of a Gloria for two choirs composed in 1708 by an older contemporary, the now forgotten Veronese composer Giovanni Maria Ruggieri, whom Vivaldi seems to have held in high esteem, as he used a second adaptation of this piece in another, lesser-known D Major Gloria setting, RV 588.
Today Vivaldi is one of the most popular of all composers, who during his lifetime enjoyed considerable success and fortune, which he squandered through extravagance, and when he died in Vienna he was buried in a pauper's grave.

Marcus Capel
November 2026