

Programme Note:

*L'homme, l'homme, l'homme armé,  
L'homme armé doit on doubter.*

*On a fait partout crier,  
Que chascun se viegne armer  
D'un haubregon de fer.*

*L'homme, l'homme, l'homme armé,  
L'homme armé doit on doubter.*

(You should be afraid of the armed man!  
Everywhere people are saying that you should  
protect yourself with a coat of armour.)

Anon (early 15th century)

When I decided to write a work based on this ancient tune I had to balance three competing and apparently incompatible intentions.

Firstly, given the text of the song and the time at which I was writing the music - prior to and during the hostilities in Iraq - I wanted it to express something of my feelings towards the institution of war.

Secondly, since the melody of 'L'homme armé' had been an inspiration to dozens of composers over more than five centuries since its composition, I intended to honour that tradition by alluding to some of the musical styles and employing some of the techniques of my predecessors.

Thirdly, some evidence points to the origin of this tune as a drinking song, so it was important that the music should have an element of enjoyment and exuberance.

As the music progressed I was surprised at the extent to which the first intention became dominated by the second and third. However, traces of the 'war theme' can still be detected in the finished work. Examples are the siren-like opening and closing motifs, the rhythms of Te Rauparaha's war chant 'Ka mate, Ka ora' (if I live, if I die), a 'pleading' motif derived from a 'waiata tangi' (mourning song), and a brief march and funeral procession.

The 'homage to musical tradition' is seen in the form of the whole piece - that most ancient of musical structures, variations on a theme. Within this overall form canons of all possible types and descriptions abound. I quickly came to the conclusion that 'L'homme armé' owed much of its popularity with composers to its great contrapuntal potential.

As for the ‘enjoyment theme’, elements of dance and popular song from several ages and places infiltrate much of the piece and power its momentum to a vigorous climax.

Gradually I came to see that my three intentions for this piece were not entirely incompatible. In my research for a programme note I discovered the following curious quotation with which Pierre de la Rue (1460-1518) concluded one of his two exquisite mass settings on ‘L’homme armé’:

*Extrema gaudii luctus occupant* (in the midst of joy, mourning is never very far away).

Perhaps solace from the pain of conflict may be found in the art and joy of music.

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