



Karl JENKINS

Palladio concerto grosso for strings

Karl Jenkins (b. 17 February 1944) is a Welsh composer whose music blends classical tradition with contemporary appeal, known for its accessibility, rhythmic drive, and rich harmonic language. Trained as both a classical musician and a jazz performer, Jenkins studied at Cardiff University and the Royal Academy of Music in London. He first gained prominence as a multi-instrumentalist in the progressive jazz-rock band Soft Machine, before transitioning to composition full-time. Jenkins's wide-ranging output includes orchestral works, choral music, concertos, film scores, and crossover pieces that have reached vast international audiences.

His most famous works such as *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace*, *Adiemus*, and *Stabat Mater* have earned him a reputation as one of the most performed living composers, particularly in the choral and educational spheres. Jenkins's music often embraces a global sensibility, drawing from diverse traditions while remaining rooted in tonal harmony, memorable melody, and evocative atmospheres. His ability to connect with listeners through direct emotional communication has made him a favorite among both professional ensembles and community choirs around the world.

One of his most recognizable and enduring instrumental compositions is ***Palladio*** (1995), a three-movement work for string orchestra. Inspired by the Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio, whose designs emphasized symmetry, proportion, and classical form, Jenkins composed the piece as a musical expression of architectural principles. The structure of the work, especially the first movement, reflects Palladio's ideals: it is clear, balanced, and mathematically precise yet it pulses with contemporary energy.

The first movement (*Allegretto*) is by far the most famous, frequently performed as a stand-alone piece. Characterized by a steady, driving rhythm and bold, repeating string motifs, it combines Baroque-inspired counterpoint with modern minimalism and cinematic flair. The music unfolds in tightly constructed phrases, layering and building toward a climactic resolution. It gained widespread recognition when it was featured in a television advertisement for De Beers diamonds, leading many to associate its crisp, elegant sound with luxury and precision.

The second movement offers a contrasting mood lyrical, slower, and more introspective. Here, Jenkins showcases his ability to write expressive melodic lines that flow with grace and emotional nuance. The lush string writing and shifting harmonies create a meditative atmosphere, offering a moment of stillness between the driving outer movements.

The final movement returns to rhythmic vitality, employing syncopated figures and bold gestures to bring the work to a dynamic conclusion. Jenkins again blends classical elements with modern idioms, producing a sound that is at once stately and contemporary. The sense of motion and symmetry ties back to the architectural inspiration, creating a sense of resolution and completeness.

Though originally composed for string orchestra, *Palladio* has been arranged for various ensembles and settings, and its opening movement has taken on a life of its own in popular culture, film, and advertising. Its blend of Baroque structure, minimalist repetition, and modern harmonic color exemplifies Jenkins's stylistic signature: music that is engaging, evocative, and deeply communicative.

Today, *Palladio* stands as a modern classic in the string repertoire a piece that bridges eras, disciplines, and audiences. Whether appreciated for its rhythmic vitality, its architectural elegance, or its broad popular appeal, it remains one of Karl Jenkins's most iconic and widely performed works.