

**CHANDOS**

TIPPETT

# A Child of Our Time

Pumeza Matshikiza soprano • Dame Sarah Connolly mezzo-soprano

Joshua Stewart tenor • Ashley Riches bass-baritone



BBC Symphony Chorus • BBC Symphony Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis



Photograph by Marius Flothuis / Lebrecht Music & Arts Photo Library / Bridgeman Images

Michael Tippett, late 1940s

## Sir Michael Tippett (1905 – 1998)

### A Child of Our Time (1939 – 41)

Oratorio for Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra  
with Text and Music by Michael Tippett

	<b>Part I</b>	<b>22:21</b>
1	1 Chorus: 'The world turns on its dark side'. Sostenuto	3:38
2	2 The Argument. Alto Solo: 'Man has measured the heavens with a telescope'. Allegretto –	2:03
3	Interludium. Meno mosso, tranquillo – Poco a poco animando –	0:55
4	3 Scena. Chorus and Alto Solo: 'Is evil then good?'. Allegro – Andante – Tempo dell'Interludium – Allegro	2:56
5	4 The Narrator. Bass Solo: 'Now in each nation there were some cast out...'. Tempo comodo, quasi parlante –	1:04
6	5 Chorus of the Oppressed: 'When shall the usurer's city cease?'. Allegro non troppo	2:27
7	6 Tenor Solo: Allegro agitato – 'I have no money for my bread'. Meno mosso, poco Andante – Allegro agitato – Meno mosso, poco Andante	3:33
8	7 Soprano Solo: 'How can I cherish my man in such days...?'. Allegretto –	3:15
9	8 A Spiritual. Chorus and Soprano and Tenor Soli: 'Steal away'. Andante con moto	2:26

	<b>Part II</b>	<b>20:55</b>
10	9 Chorus: 'A star rises in mid-winter'. Largo -	2:42
11	10 The Narrator. Bass Solo: 'And a time came...!'. Tempo comodo, quasi parlante -	0:19
12	11 Double Chorus of Persecutors and Persecuted: 'Away with them!'. Allegro molto -	1:02
13	12 The Narrator. Bass Solo: 'Where they could, they fled from the terror'. Tempo comodo, quasi parlante -	0:24
14	13 Chorus of the Self-righteous: 'We cannot have them in our Empire'. Allegro moderato -	0:48
15	14 The Narrator. Bass Solo: 'And the boy's mother wrote a letter...!'. Tempo comodo, quasi parlante -	0:15
16	15 Scena. The Mother, the Uncle and Aunt, and the Boy. Solo Quartet: 'O my son!'. Andante - Poco più mosso -	1:12
17	16 A Spiritual. Chorus and Soprano and Tenor Soli: 'Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord'. Allegro -	1:23
18	17 Scena. Duet. Bass and Alto: 'The boy becomes desperate in his agony'. Andante -	1:18

19	18	The Narrator. Bass Solo: 'They took a terrible vengeance'. Poco andante -	0:23
20	19	The Terror. Chorus: 'Burn down their houses!'. Allegro molto -	1:10
21	20	The Narrator. Bass Solo: 'Men were ashamed of what was done'. Poco andante -	0:34
22	21	A Spiritual of Anger. Chorus and Bass Solo: 'Go down, Moses'. Allegretto maestoso	2:30
23	22	The Boy sings in his Prison. Tenor Solo: Adagio - 'My dreams are all shattered in a ghastly reality'. Poco più mosso - Tempo I - Tempo II - Poco a poco più mosso -	3:03
24	23	The Mother. Soprano Solo: 'What have I done to you, my son?'. Allegro - Poco calando	1:39
25	24	Alto Solo: 'The dark forces rise like a flood'. Grave -	0:40
26	25	A Spiritual. Chorus and Soprano Solo: 'O! by and by'. Allegro moderato	1:28

	<b>Part III</b>	<b>20:20</b>
27	26 Chorus: 'The cold deepens'. Largo, poco lento	3:38
28	27 Alto Solo: 'The soul of man is impassioned...'. Allegro	2:25
29	28 Scena. Bass Solo and Chorus: 'The words of wisdom are these'. Andante – Andante poco più mosso – Tempo I – Andante poco più mosso – Tempo I – Andante poco più mosso – Tempo I – Poco ritenuto	4:59
30	Preludium. Andantino –	1:05
31	29 General Ensemble. Chorus and Soli: 'I would know my shadow and my light'. Sostenuto, ma con moto – Calando –	4:56
32	30 A Spiritual. Chorus and Soli: 'Deep river'. Pochissimo più moderato ma non lento – Con brio – In tempo – Meno mosso – Con brio – In tempo – Molto lento	3:14
		<b>TT 63:46</b>

**Pumeza Matshikiza** soprano  
**Dame Sarah Connolly** mezzo-soprano  
**Joshua Stewart** tenor  
**Ashley Riches** bass-baritone  
**BBC Symphony Chorus**  
**Wesley John** chorus master  
**BBC Symphony Orchestra**  
**Igor Yuzefovich** leader  
**Sir Andrew Davis**



Sir Andrew Davis

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## Sir Michael Tippett: A Child of Our Time

On 7 November 1938, a seventeen-year-old Polish Jew named Herschel Grynszpan walked into the German Embassy in Paris and shot a minor official, Ernst vom Rath, several times in the chest with a handgun which he had just purchased for this specific purpose. In spite of ministrations from Adolf Hitler's personal physicians, vom Rath died two days later. The assassination immediately unleashed the full fury of the Nazi Party. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels used the pretext to deliver an inflammatory anti-Semitic speech, thereby launching the infamous *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night) during which, overnight on 9/10 November and with Hitler's approval, police turned a blind eye as hundreds of Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues in Austria and Germany were ransacked. The appalling violence left at least ninety Jews dead, and many thousands more were quickly rounded up and incarcerated in concentration camps. This savage pogrom became the grim inspiration for the oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, composed by Michael Tippett (1905–1998) between 1939 and 1941, and first performed in 1944, as the Second World War was at long last beginning to draw, agonisingly slowly, to its close.

The ultimate fate of Grynszpan remains a mystery to this day, though he was officially declared dead (on the basis of no hard evidence) in 1960 so that his parents could achieve closure. His family's ordeal at the hands of both German and Polish governments had been the trigger behind his isolated act of violence. While Grynszpan was living in Paris with his uncle and aunt, having dropped out of school at the age of fourteen, his parents (who lived in Hanover) had been arrested by the Gestapo in October 1938 and sent back to Poland, which had already stripped them of their Polish citizenship on the grounds that they had been living for too many years abroad. An estimated 12,000 Polish Jews stranded in a similar stateless limbo suddenly found themselves abandoned on the border between Germany and Poland in appalling conditions of deprivation, and there is no doubt that Grynszpan killed vom Rath by way of symbolic revenge. Subsequently imprisoned in both Vichy France and then Germany, and initially to have been the subject of a high-profile trial designed by the Nazis as an international demonstration of the alleged threat to



civilisation posed by the Jews, Grynspan disappeared without trace in 1942 – possibly because his defence lawyers had threatened to allege that he had been in a homosexual relationship with vom Rath, and that the murder was in fact a crime of passion.

At the time of *Kristallnacht* (so named after the huge quantity of broken glass that littered the streets after this night of sickening destruction), Tippett had long wanted to write a major work on what he termed 'man's inhumanity to man'. His first idea was the possibility of an opera to be based on the Irish Easter Rebellion, of April 1916, during which nearly 500 people lost their lives, and in the aftermath of which sixteen rebel leaders were executed by the British. But Tippett became concerned that the genre of opera was too inherently dramatic to allow for the more contemplative treatment of the themes of brutality and the savage fate of political scapegoats, which he believed would speak more widely to a modern, compassionate community. He felt that the genre of oratorio, at the time somewhat neglected by composers, provided a more appropriate model for a suitably intimate treatment of such subject matter, though in the shape of its choruses there would still be the opportunity for moments of vivid drama alongside the straightforward

narrative scope offered by recitatives and the personal reflection which could be expressed in solo arias.

Tippett modelled the tripartite structure of *A Child of Our Time* on the format of Handel's *Messiah* (1741), which he had conducted and studied intensively in the early 1930s. In Handel's work, the first part is a prophecy, the second a narrative account of the main events (spanning from Christ's birth to the end of time), and the third a repository for meditative commentary. Tippett also drew inspiration from Bach's Passions, feeling that Grynspan was in essence the 'protagonist of a modern Passion story'. But the composer was concerned that adopting the chorales which are such a prominent feature of those Lutheran works might, for his purposes, be unsuitable – not only because he wanted to avoid locating his oratorio within a specific religion, whether that be Christianity or Judaism (for the same reason, he rejected an initial plan to use Jewish hymns), but also because he felt the need to find a kind of collective singing which might better reflect the shared experiences of contemporary audiences. The solution came in the shape of African American spirituals, five of which are located at strategic moments in the score, and which serve a similar general function to that of Bach's chorales.

Tippett had first encountered spirituals in a radio broadcast of 'Steal Away to Jesus', in which the stirring phrase 'The trumpet sounds within-a my soul' made him realise that 'in England or America everyone would be moved in this way'. He immediately ordered, from America, a copy of *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (edited by James Weldon Johnson, and published in New York in 1925), and found that the anthology 'contained words and tunes for every dramatic or religious situation that could be imagined'. He was also deeply moved by the film *Green Pastures* (1936), featuring an all-black cast and a haunting performance of the spiritual 'Go Down, Moses'. Tippett bought recordings of spirituals performed not only in a quasi-classical manner, but also in a 'hot' style, which featured (in his words) 'blues-provoked ambiguity of pitch'. Ultimately, he felt that the 'hot' performing style would be a step too far for the concert-orientated choirs of the time, who were likely to perform his piece. The flattened seventh of the blues scale was, however, an important germ in the design of the work, which often presents stark minor triads set against the flattened seventh above them.

In a note in the score, Tippett advised conductors that his arrangements of the spirituals

should not be thought of as congregational hymns, but as integral parts of the Oratorio; nor should they be sentimentalised, but sung with a strong underlying pulse and slightly 'swung'.

He seems to have regarded the genre as somewhat akin to jazz, though spirituals had a long pre-jazz history in the nineteenth century, which had made them a celebrated concert music, and one which uniquely fused European hymnody with African American performance characteristics long before jazz, in the 1920s, took the world by storm. The creative use which Tippett made of spirituals in *A Child of Our Time* was the aspect of the work that was most discussed in reviews of the early performances, the composer recalling that

criticism pointed at my using negro spirituals within such an apparently sophisticated score [arose from] the original incompatibility of emotionally complex composed music and popularly derived simple melody, [which] if set side by side without mediation, lead critics into a prejudice at a first hearing.

He likened the critics' initial perplexity to the comparable shock engendered by 'the mixture of sophisticated and popular' which was such a striking feature of the poetry of W.H. Auden in the 1930s.

The views of another leading poet of the era, T.S. Eliot, shaped not only *A Child of Our Time* but also (perhaps unwittingly) much of Tippett's later career as a composer. Tippett initially wanted Eliot to write the libretto for the work, and (at the poet's request) sent him a comprehensive *Sketch for a Modern Oratorio* which detailed the verbal requirements for every movement, even specifying their approximate duration. This text (which was printed in full in the book *Music of the Angels*, a collection of Tippett's writings, first published in 1980) was so coherent and well planned that Eliot eventually told the composer he was undoubtedly best placed to write the libretto himself – which he duly did. The long-term consequence of Eliot's declining the composer's request was that Tippett in the following decades would also write the libretti for all of his operas, an eventuality which delights Tippett aficionados, but which has also infuriated sceptics who are not always able to engage with the sometimes intractable, Jung-laden philosophising which they embody. (In the *Sketch for a Modern Oratorio*, Tippett had included liberal doses of quotations from Jung in the original German.)

Tippett later described Eliot as his 'spiritual father', with whom he talked frequently about poetry and drama, and the aesthetics of

theatre and opera. At the time when he was embarking on *A Child of Our Time*, Tippett was teaching the basics of music theory to Eliot's six-year-old son, while Eliot himself was 'helping in the kitchen and studiously picking blackcurrants in the garden' at the cottage in which Tippett then lived (in Oxted, in the English county of Surrey). 'We also played Monopoly,' Tippett recalled, 'at which Eliot was quite good.' Eliot was characteristically astute (though perhaps rather immodest) on the subject of libretto-writing, and cautioned Tippett that whatever he, as a distinguished poet, could produce for his oratorio would 'stand out a mile as so much better poetry'. Tippett later remembered that Eliot 'considered the poetically imaginative words of a real poet to be often unnecessary' in the genres of both opera and oratorio. Nevertheless, several echoes of Eliot's poetry remain in Tippett's libretto, including the motto for the work, 'the darkness declares the glory of light', which was borrowed from Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). There are also moments in the text which were clearly inspired by Wilfred Owen's anti-war poetry, written during the First World War, when Owen, like so many of his generation, naively volunteered to fight in the interests of a global conflict of which the utter futility, then (as now), nobody seemed to understand.

Tippett began writing *A Child of Our Time* in earnest immediately after the UK declared war on Germany, on 3 September 1939, a momentous event which came just two days after German forces invaded Poland. He borrowed the oratorio's title from Ödön von Horváth's novella *Ein Kind unserer Zeit* (1938), which treats a different story altogether; but Horváth (who died in the year his book was published, aged only thirty-seven) had written a comparable commemoration of a scapegoat, described by Tippett as an 'unnamed, deranged soldier / murderer, who sleeps on a park bench in the snow, at the end, frozen to death like a snowman'. Tippett, whose compositional prowess was not widely recognised at the time, was unsure whether *A Child of Our Time* would ever be performed. In December 1942, however, his close friends Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears expressed great enthusiasm for the piece when they saw the score. Britten sent a postcard to Tippett to declare: 'What a grand work the Oratorio is & A performance *must* be arranged soon.' However, as Tippett told another friend in response to this encouraging suggestion: 'Easier said than done!' Britten had been waiting in the wings even as Tippett was composing the work: Tippett wrote to his muse Francesca Allinson in 1940 that he had sketched the fugal entries in one of the choruses while listening to German

bombers droning overhead, 'I had the oddest of feelings as I deliberately completed the 24 bars & I then went to chat to Ben'.

Thanks to Britten's urgings, the conductor Walter Goehr (who had been responsible for directing the first performance of Britten's *Serenade* for tenor, horn, and strings, in 1943) oversaw the première of *A Child of Our Time*, on 19 March 1944, at London's Adelphi Theatre, with soloists including Pears and Joan Cross. As Tippett reminisced, 'somehow or other the money was scraped together to engage the London Philharmonic Orchestra', along with the combined singers of Morley College (where Tippett was then Director of Music) and the London Region Civil Defence Choir. Reviews of the première suggest that it was a scrappy and rather amateurish affair that failed to do full justice to the piece. On a more positive note, Tippett wrote to Allinson to say that the oratorio had 'got over not only to the ordinary [listeners] but even to the intellectuals'. One of the critics who, in a review of the première, had slated the work for its apparently incompetent orchestration later profusely apologised to Tippett, having realised that the composer was striving for a directness of expression that was most unusual in concert music of the time.

Later, and greater, recognition of the work was due in no small part to the publicity

it received when a BBC radio broadcast coincided with an illustrated feature in *Picture Post*, published in March 1945 under the title 'A Composer Listens to His Own Oratorio'. As in the case of Britten's much later *War Requiem* (1962) – described by Tippett as 'the one musical masterwork we possess with overt pacifist meanings' – the universal message at the heart of *A Child of Our Time* rapidly found many sympathetic audiences across the globe. Goehr conducted it in Hamburg soon after the end of the war, but restrictions imposed by the Allied occupiers in Germany meant that Tippett was not allowed to attend because he refused to wear a military uniform. (As a staunch pacifist, the composer had previously served time in a notorious London prison for being a recalcitrant conscientious objector.) The oratorio was then broadcast on Belgian Radio to great acclaim, and in 1947 Tippett conducted a performance in Budapest, the libretto hastily translated into Hungarian when it became apparent that the singers were not well versed in the English language. Several performances were mounted at Lugano, in Switzerland, in an Italian translation. The controversial and flamboyant doyen of world-famous conductors, Herbert von Karajan, conducted it in Turin during the winter of 1952/53, and annoyed Tippett intensely by

interposing an unscheduled interval at a point in the piece that suited his personal convenience.

Far more importantly: on at least two occasions, at memorable performances of *A Child of Our Time* in Haifa (1952) and Tel Aviv (1962), the audience included Herschel Grynszpan's father.

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One of today's rising vocal stars, the South African soprano **Pumeza Matshikiza** has performed at many of the leading opera houses across Europe and the United States and released two solo recordings, including *Voice of Hope*, her début, combining well-known arias with traditional and popular African songs; she also appears on *A Celebration of Paul Reade*, with the English Chamber Orchestra under Robin O'Neill. In recent seasons she has won critical acclaim as Mafienka (Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*) at Garsington Opera and as the Fox (Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*) and Moira (Poul Ruders's *The Handmaid's Tale*) at English National Opera. Further highlights of her recent career have included her débuts as both Bess and Serena (a new production of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*) at Theater an der Wien, as well as concerts in London, Germany, South

Africa, and, with Rolando Villazón, in Poland. Dvořák's *Rusalka* has quickly become one of her signature roles: after her acclaimed début at Stadttheater Klagenfurt, in 2018, she performed the part in new productions in Strasbourg and Antwerp. In another favourite role, Mimi (Puccini's *La bohème*), she made her first US appearance, with The Dallas Opera, and her débuts at both Semperoper Dresden and Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden. She made her début at Teatro alla Scala in the world première of Giorgio Battistelli's *CO2*, staged by Robert Carsen. Pumeza Matshikiza spent five years as an ensemble member of Staatsoper Stuttgart, where her numerous lead roles included Micaëla (*Carmen*), Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Ännchen (*Der Freischütz*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), and Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*).

Born in County Durham, the mezzo-soprano **Dame Sarah Connolly** studied piano and singing at the Royal College of Music, of which she is now a Fellow. Among many other roles she has sung Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*) at Teatro alla Scala, Milan and The Royal Opera, Covent Garden; the Composer (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Clairon (*Capriccio*), and Gertrude (Brett Dean's *Hamlet*) at The Metropolitan Opera, New York; Orfeo (*Orfeo ed Euridice*) and the title role in *The Rape of Lucretia* at Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich; the title role in *Giulio Cesare* and

Phèdre (*Hippolyte et Aricie*) at Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Brangäne (*Tristan und Isolde*) at The Royal Opera, Glyndebourne Festival, Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, and Festspielhaus Baden-Baden; the title role in *Ariadante* and Sesto (*La clemenza di Tito*) at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; Phèdre at Opéra national de Paris; the title role in *Ariadante* for De Nationale Opera and Wiener Staatsoper; Fricka (*Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*) at The Royal Opera and Bayreuther Festspiele; and Ježibaba (*Rusalka*) at The Royal Opera. She has also made frequent appearances at Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, and, particularly, English National Opera.

Regularly partnered by Eugene Asti, Julius Drake, Malcolm Martineau, and Joseph Middleton, Sarah Connolly has appeared in recital in London, New York, Boston, Paris, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, San Francisco, Atlanta, and Stuttgart; at the BBC Proms, Incontri in Terra di Siena at La Foce, and Schubertiada de Vilabertran; and at the Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, and Oxford Lieder festivals. In concert she has performed at the Aldeburgh, Edinburgh, Lucerne, Salzburg, and Tanglewood festivals, and she is a frequent guest at the BBC Proms where, in 2009, she was a memorable guest soloist at the Last Night. She has appeared regularly with many of the world's great orchestras under conductors

such as Ivor Bolton, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Mark Elder, Daniel Harding, Philippe Herreweghe, Vladimir Jurowski, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Riccardo Chailly, and Sir Simon Rattle. She has recorded prolifically and twice been nominated for a Grammy Award. She was made a DBE in the 2017 Birthday Honours, having been made a CBE in the 2010 New Year Honours, and in 2012 received the Singer Award of the Royal Philharmonic Society in recognition of her outstanding services to music. Sarah Connolly was awarded the 2023 King's Medal for Music, an award given annually to an outstanding individual or group of musicians who has had a major influence on the musical life of the nation.

Enjoying a most interesting career, the tenor **Joshua Stewart** has made a particular impact in recent concert appearances as the tenor solo in Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla on tour in the UK and to Paris and Germany. He later joined the BBC Symphony Orchestra, with whom he is a frequent soloist, to perform and record the piece, also singing George Walker's Mass; he will return in 2024 to sing José Garcia's *Missa de Santa Cecilia* (1826). In recent concert engagements in the US he has sung Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* with

the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra under Paolo Bortolameolli and the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel, made his début as Rodolfo (*La bohème*) with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, and was the tenor soloist in Paul Moravec's *Sanctuary Road* with the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra. In performances staged by Peter Sellars under Esa-Pekka Salonen, he sang the Shepherd (*Oedipus Rex*) at the Baltic Sea Festival, Stockholm, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, and Royal Festival Hall, London. On the operatic stage he has appeared as Charlie Parker (Daniel Schnyder's *Charlie Parker's Yardbird*) at Seattle Opera, Madison Opera, The Atlanta Opera, and Arizona Opera; as Valcour (Joseph Bologne's rarely heard *L'Amant anonyme*) and Jonah (Kris Defoort's *The Time of Our Singing*) at Theater St. Gallen, Switzerland; made his celebrated début in the title role of *Albert Herring* at the Princeton Festival, New Jersey; and sung his first Son (Jeanine Tesori's *Blue*) at Seattle Opera. Joshua Stewart will return to Seattle in the near future as Street and Elijah (Anthony Davis's *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*).

The bass-baritone **Ashley Riches** studied at King's College, Cambridge and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and was later

a Jette Parker Young Artist, at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden and a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist. On the operatic stage he has sung roles including Figaro and Count Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), the title role in *Don Giovanni*, Escamillo (*Carmen*), Schaunard (*La bohème*), and the Pirate King (*The Pirates of Penzance*) at venues such as The Royal Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper, English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Garsington Opera, the Grange Festival, and Opera Holland Park. Highlights on the concert platform include performances in Berlioz's *Lélio* with Sir John Eliot Gardiner in Carnegie Hall, New York and Bernstein's *Wonderful Town* with the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle, a European tour of *Giulio Cesare* and *Agrippina* with Les Talens Lyriques under Christophe Rousset, and *Créon* (*Oedipus rex*) with the Berliner Philharmoniker. His discography includes *Wonderful Town* with the LSO and Simon Rattle, Poulenc's *Chansons gaillardes* with Graham Johnson, the St John Passion and St Matthew Passion with the Academy of Ancient Music, Purcell's *King Arthur* with the Gabrieli Consort (Recording of the Year at the 2020 *BBC Music Magazine Awards*), and Handel's *La resurrezione* with The English Concert under Harry Bicket. An accomplished recitalist, he released his début solo recital

album, *A Musical Zoo*, in 2021, on Chandos, for which he has also recorded songs by Sir Arthur Sullivan with David Owen Norris. When not singing, Ashley Riches enjoys the *Times Crossword*.

Founded in 1928, the **BBC Symphony Chorus** is one of the UK's leading choirs. It performs, records, and broadcasts a distinctive range of large-scale choral music with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and internationally acclaimed conductors and soloists. In its early years it gave performances of works such as Mahler's Symphony No. 8, Stravinsky's *Persephone*, and Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, and under its Director, Neil Ferris, a commitment to contemporary music remains at the heart of its performances. The Chorus makes regular appearances at the BBC Proms, usually including the First and Last Nights, and performs with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican, in London, in addition to participating in other performances and in learning projects. Most of the performances of the BBC Symphony Chorus are broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and it has also made a number of commercial recordings, including a Grammy-nominated CD of Holst's *First Choral Symphony* and a *Gramophone* Award-winning album of Elgar's *The Dream*



*of Gerontius*, both conducted by Sir Andrew Davis and released on Chandos Records.

At the heart of British musical life since its foundation, in 1930, the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** plays a central role at the BBC Proms, at the Royal Albert Hall, during which it performs at the First and Last Nights and appears regularly with leading conductors and soloists. It undertakes an annual season of concerts at the Barbican, where it is Associate Orchestra. Its commitment to contemporary music is demonstrated by a range of premières each season, as well as Total Immersion days, devoted to specific composers or themes. Its richly varied programming includes well-loved works at the heart of classical music, newly commissioned pieces, collaborations with highly regarded musicians from the world of pop, and, in recent years, evenings of words and music featuring readings by well-known authors. The Orchestra maintains close relationships with its roster of conductors and guest artists: Sakari Oramo, Chief Conductor; Dalia Stasevska, Principal Guest Conductor; Semyon Bychkov, Günter Wand Conducting Chair; Sir Andrew Davis, Conductor Laureate; and Jules Buckley, Creative Artist in Association. It also makes regular appearances with the BBC Symphony

Chorus. The vast majority of performances are broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Attendance is free to a number of studio recordings each season; these often feature up-and-coming new talent, including members of BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists scheme. All broadcasts are available for thirty days on BBC Sounds and the Orchestra can also be seen on BBC TV and BBC iPlayer and heard on the BBC's online archive, Experience Classical. The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, alongside the BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Singers, and BBC Proms, also offer enjoyable and innovative education and community activities and take a leading role in the BBC Ten Pieces and BBC Young Composer programmes. [bbc.co.uk / symphonyorchestra](http://bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra)

One of today's most recognised and acclaimed conductors, **Sir Andrew Davis** has enjoyed a career that spans more than fifty years, during which he has been the musical and artistic director at several of the world's most distinguished opera and symphonic institutions. These include Lyric Opera of Chicago (Music Director and Principal Conductor 2000 – 21, now Music Director Emeritus), BBC Symphony Orchestra (Chief Conductor 1989 – 2000, now Conductor Laureate), Glyndebourne Festival Opera (Music Director 1988 – 2000), Melbourne

Symphony Orchestra (Chief Conductor 2013 – 19, now Conductor Laureate), and Toronto Symphony Orchestra (Principal Conductor 1975 – 88, now Conductor Laureate). He also holds the honorary title Conductor Emeritus from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Maestro Davis has performed at many of the world's important opera houses, among them The Metropolitan Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Bayreuther Festspiele, and Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and appeared with virtually every internationally prominent orchestra, including the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, and all the major British orchestras.

A vast and award-winning discography documents the artistry of Sir Andrew, his CDs including recordings of the works of Berg, Berlioz, Bliss, Delius, Elgar (winner of the 2018 Diapason d'Or de l'Année in the category Musique Symphonique), Finzi, Grainger, Handel (nominated for a 2018 GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance), Holst, Ives, and York Bowen (nominated for a 2012 GRAMMY® for

Best Orchestral Performance). His lauded recordings with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus celebrating British composers were recently released as a sixteen-CD retrospective collection. He currently records for Chandos Records, with whom he has been an exclusive artist since 2009.

Born in 1944, in Hertfordshire, England, Maestro Davis studied at King's College, Cambridge, where he was Organ Scholar before taking up conducting. His diverse repertoire ranges from baroque to contemporary works, and spans the symphonic, operatic, and choral worlds. He is a great proponent of twentieth-century music, including works by Janáček, Messiaen, Boulez, Elgar, Tippett, Britten, and Vaughan Williams, in addition to the core symphonic and operatic works.

Holding the honorary position of President of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, Sir Andrew Davis was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1992, and in 1999 was designated a Knight Bachelor in the New Year Honours List.



Alexander James

Recording 'A Child of Our Time' at Fairfield Halls

## Sir Michael Tippett: Ein Kind unserer Zeit

Am 7. November 1938 betrat ein siebzehnjähriger polnischer Jude namens Herschel Grynszpan die deutsche Botschaft in Paris und schoss den Botschaftssekretär Ernst vom Rath mit einer kurz zuvor für diesen Zweck erworbenen Handfeuerwaffe mehrmals in die Brust. Trotz des Einsatzes von Hitlers Leibärzten starb vom Rath zwei Tage später. Das Attentat entfesselte unmittelbar die volle Wut der Nationalsozialisten. Der Propagandaminister Joseph Goebbels nutzte das Ereignis als Vorwand für eine antisemitische Brandrede, mit der er die berüchtigte Kristallnacht vom 9. November auslöste, in der – mit Hitlers Zustimmung und von der Polizei geduldet – Hunderte von jüdischen Wohnstätten, Geschäften und Synagogen in Österreich und Deutschland geplündert wurden. Mindestens neunzig Juden starben infolge der entsetzlichen Gewaltausbrüche und Tausende wurden innerhalb kurzer Zeit verhaftet und in Konzentrationslager gesperrt. Dieses grausame Pogrom diente dem Komponisten Michael Tippett (1905 – 1998) als düstere Inspiration für sein zwischen 1939 und 1941 geschaffenes Oratorium *A Child of Our Time*,

das 1944 uraufgeführt wurde, während der Zweite Weltkrieg sich, wenn auch mit quälender Langsamkeit, seinem Ende zu nähern begann.

Das weitere Schicksal Grynszpans konnte bis heute nicht völlig aufgeklärt werden, auch wenn er im Jahr 1960 (ohne eindeutige Beweislage) offiziell für tot erklärt wurde, damit seine Eltern einen Abschluss finden konnten. Auslöser für diesen isolierten Gewaltakt waren die Qualen, die seine Familie durch die deutsche wie auch die polnische Regierung erlitten hatten. Während Grynszpan sich bei seinem Onkel und seiner Tante in Paris aufhielt (er hatte bereits mit vierzehn die Schule verlassen), waren seine in Hannover lebenden Eltern im Oktober 1938 von der Gestapo verhaftet und nach Polen zurückgeschickt worden; dort aber hatte man ihnen inzwischen die polnische Staatsbürgerschaft aberkannt mit der Begründung, sie hätten bereits zu viele Jahre im Ausland gelebt. Auf diese Weise strandeten etwa 12.000 polnische Juden mit ähnlich staatenlosem Status unter entsetzlichen entbehrungsvollen Bedingungen im Niemandsland zwischen

Deutschland und Polen, und es besteht kein Zweifel, dass Grynszpan vom Rath in einem Akt symbolischer Rache tötete. Danach wurde er in Vichy-Frankreich und anschließend in Deutschland inhaftiert. Die Nazis wollten zunächst einen Schauprozess anstrengen, um auf internationaler Ebene die angebliche Bedrohung der Zivilisation durch die Juden zu demonstrieren; im Jahr 1942 jedoch verschwand Grynszpan spurlos – möglicherweise weil seine Verteidiger damit gedroht hatten, zu behaupten, er habe mit vom Rath eine homosexuelle Beziehung gehabt und bei dem Mord handele es sich mithin um ein Verbrechen aus Leidenschaft.

Zum Zeitpunkt der Kristallnacht (benannt nach der enormen Menge an Glas, das in dieser Nacht entsetzlicher Zerstörungswut zu Bruch ging und die Straßen übersäte) hatte Tippett schon lange ein größeres Werk über – wie er es bezeichnete – "die Unmenschlichkeit des Menschen gegenüber anderen Menschen" komponieren wollen. Zunächst erwog er, eine Oper zu schreiben, die auf der irischen Rebellion vom April 1916 basierte, in deren Verlauf fast 500 Menschen ihr Leben verloren und in deren Folge sechzehn Anführer der Rebellen von den Briten exekutiert wurden. Doch Tippett befürchtete, dass die Gattung der Oper grundsätzlich zu dramatisch

sein könnte für eine eher kontemplative Auseinandersetzung mit der Thematik von Brutalität und dem grausamen Schicksal politischer Sündenböcke – was eine moderne, mitfühlende Gesellschaft seiner Meinung nach besonders ansprechen würde. Er spürte, dass die Gattung des Oratoriums, die von zeitgenössischen Komponisten etwas vernachlässigt worden war, ein passenderes Modell für eine angemessene Annäherung an diesen Themenkomplex wäre, wobei die Gestaltung der Chöre immer noch Gelegenheit für Momente lebhafter Dramatik böte neben dem geradlinig narrativen Zugang, den die Rezitative erlaubten, und der persönlichen Reflektion, die in den Soloarien zum Ausdruck käme.

Mit der dreiteiligen Struktur von *A Child of Our Time* folgte Tippett dem Format von Händels *Messiah* (1741), den er in den frühen 1930er Jahren intensiv studiert und dirigiert hatte. In Händels Werk handelt es sich beim ersten Teil um eine Prophezeiung, beim zweiten um eine Nacherzählung der wesentlichen Ereignisse (die sich von Christi Geburt bis zum Ende der Zeit erstreckt) und beim dritten um eine Sammlung meditativer Kommentare. Tippett ließ sich zudem von Bachs Passionen inspirieren, da Grynszpan seinem Empfinden nach im Grunde der "Protagonist einer modernen

Passionsgeschichte" war. Allerdings war der Komponist besorgt, dass die Übernahme der Choräle, die ein solch wichtiges Element dieser lutherischen Werke sind, sich als für seine Zwecke unpassend erweisen könnte – nicht nur weil er vermeiden wollte, sein Oratorium in einer bestimmten Religion zu verankern, sei es nun das Christentum oder das Judentum (aus diesem Grund verwarf er auch den zunächst gefassten Plan, jüdische Hymnen zu verwenden), sondern auch weil er es für notwendig hielt, eine Art des kollektiven Singens zu finden, das die gemeinsamen Erfahrungen des zeitgenössischen Publikums besser reflektieren würde. Die Lösung kam in der Form afro-amerikanischer Spirituals, von denen er insgesamt fünf an strategischen Stellen des Werks platzierte und denen generell eine vergleichbare Funktion zufällt wie Bachs Chorälen.

Tippett war Spirituals erstmals in einer Rundfunkausstrahlung von "Steal Away to Jesus" (Schleich dich davon zu Jesus) begegnet, wo die bewegende Formulierung "The trumpet sounds within-a my soul" (Die Trompete erklingt in meinem Herzen) ihn begreifen ließ, dass "in England oder Amerika jeder auf diese Weise berührt würde". Daraufhin bestellte er sich sofort ein Exemplar von *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925 in einer Edition von James

Weldon Johnson in New York erschienen) und stellte fest, dass die Anthologie "Worte und Melodien für jede dramatische oder religiöse Situation enthielt, die man sich vorstellen könnte". Tief bewegt war er auch von dem Film *Green Pastures* (1936) mit seiner ausschließlich schwarzen Besetzung und einer zu Herzen gehenden Darbietung des Spirituals "Go Down, Moses". Tippett kaufte nicht nur Aufnahmen von in quasi klassischer Manier aufgeführten Spirituals, sondern auch solche in dem als "hot" bezeichneten Stil mit (wie er es ausdrückte) "vom Blues herrührenden ambivalenten Tonhöhen". Letztlich fand er aber, dass der "heiße" Aufführungsstil für die zu seiner Zeit vor allem Konzert-orientierten Chöre, die sein Stück wohl aufführen würden, einen Schritt zu weit ginge. Die kleine Septime der Blues-Skala wurde allerdings zu einer wichtigen Keimzelle im Entwurf des Werks, das immer wieder krasse Molldreiklänge präsentiert, die sich gegen die darüber liegende kleine Septime abheben.

In einer Notiz auf der Partitur gibt Tippett Dirigenten den Rat, seine Bearbeitungen der Spirituals

nicht als Hymnen für die Gemeinde, sondern als integralen Teil des Oratoriums zu verstehen; noch sollten diese sentimentalisiert, sondern vielmehr mit

einem kräftigen Grundrhythmus und leichtem "Swing" gesungen werden.

Er scheint die Gattung als dem Jazz verwandt gesehen zu haben, obwohl Spirituals bereits im neunzehnten Jahrhundert eine lange vor dem Aufkommen des Jazz zurückreichende Geschichte hatten, dank derer sie zum gefeierten Konzertrepertoire avanciert waren, in dem europäischer Hymnengesang auf einzigartige Weise mit afro-amerikanischen Aufführungstraditionen fusionierte – lange bevor der Jazz in den 1920er Jahren die Welt im Sturm eroberte. Tippetts kreativer Einsatz von Spirituals in *A Child of Our Time* war der in Kritiken früher Aufführungen am meisten diskutierte Aspekt des Werks; wie der Komponist sich erinnerte:

Die auf meine Verwendung von Negro-Spirituals in einer solch offensichtlich anspruchsvollen Musik gerichtete Kritik [ergab sich aus] der zunächst für unvereinbar gehaltenen Kombination von emotional komplex komponierter Musik mit von volkstümlichen Traditionen abgeleiteten einfachen Melodien, [die,] wenn sie unvermittelt nebeneinander gesetzt wurden, Kritiker beim ersten Hören zu Voreingenommenheit verleiten.

Die anfängliche Konsternierung der Kritiker verglich er mit dem ähnlich gearbeteten Schock, den die "Mischung aus Kultiviertheit

und Volkstümlichkeit" auslöste, die in den 1930er Jahren ein so besonderer Aspekt der Dichtung von W.H. Auden war.

Die Ansichten eines anderen führenden Dichters dieser Ära, T.S. Eliot, hatten prägenden Einfluss nicht nur auf *A Child of Our Time*, sondern auch (vielleicht unabsichtlich) auf einen wesentlichen Teil von Tippetts späterer Laufbahn als Komponist. Tippetts hatte zunächst gewünscht, dass Eliot das Libretto für das Werk schreibe, und dem Dichter auf dessen Bitte hin einen umfassenden "Entwurf für ein modernes Oratorium" zukommen lassen, das die Textanforderungen für jeden Satz im Detail beschrieb und sogar deren ungefähre Länge spezifizierte. Dieser Text (der in dem Buch *Music of the Angels*, einer 1980 erstmals veröffentlichten Sammlung von Tippetts Schriften, vollständig abgedruckt ist) war derart schlüssig und hervorragend geplant, dass Eliot dem Komponisten schließlich mitteilte, dieser sei zweifellos selbst am besten in der Lage, das Libretto zu schreiben – was Tippetts dann auch tat. Die langfristige Konsequenz aus Eliots Absage war, dass Tippetts in den folgenden Jahrzehnten auch die Libretti für alle seine Opern selber verfasste – ein Umstand, der Tippetts Anhänger erfreut, zugleich aber die Skeptiker erzürnt, die sich nicht immer mit

der gelegentlich störrischen Philosophiererei eines C.G. Jung anfreunden können, zu der diese tendieren. (Tippetts "Entwurf für ein modernes Oratorium" enthält eine großzügige Dosis an deutschen Originalzitatzen aus Jungs Schriften.)

Tippett hat Eliot später als seinen "geistigen Vater" bezeichnet, mit dem er sich häufig über Dichtung und Dramatik sowie die Ästhetik von Theater und Oper austauschte. Zu der Zeit, als er die Arbeit an *A Child of Our Time* aufnahm, brachte Tippett Eliots sechsjährigem Sohn die Grundlagen der Musiktheorie bei, während Eliot selbst in dem Cottage, in dem Tippett damals lebte (in Oxted in der englischen Grafschaft Surrey) "in der Küche half und im Garten eifrig schwarze Johannisbeeren pflückte". "Wir spielten auch Monopoly," erinnerte sich Tippett, "darin war Eliot ziemlich gut." Eliots Äußerungen zum Thema Libretto-Schreiben waren typischerweise scharfsinnig (wenn auch vielleicht recht unbescheiden), und er warnte Tippett, dass, was immer er als bedeutender Dichter für sein Oratorium produzieren könnte, "als so viel bessere Poesie meilenweit herausragen" würde. Tippett erinnerte sich später, dass Eliot bei den Gattungen Oper und Oratorium "die poetisch phantasievollen Worte eines echten Dichters häufig für unangebracht hielt". Trotzdem enthält

Tippetts Libretto noch einige Anklänge an Eliots Dichtung, darunter das Motto für das Werk, "Die Dunkelheit kündigt von der Herrlichkeit des Lichts", das Eliots Schauspiel *Murder in the Cathedral* (Mord in Dom, 1935) entliehen war. Zudem enthält der Text Passagen, die eindeutig von Wilfred Owens Antikriegs-Dichtung inspiriert sind, welche dieser im Ersten Weltkrieg schrieb, als er sich wie so viele junge Männer seiner Generation naiverweise freiwillig meldete, um in einem globalen Konflikt zu kämpfen, dessen absolute Sinnlosigkeit damals (und heute) niemand zu begreifen schien.

Tippett machte sich ernsthaft an die Komposition von *A Child of Our Time* unmittelbar nach dem 3. September 1939 – dem Tag, an dem Großbritannien Deutschland den Krieg erklärte; dieser folgenreiche Schritt ereignete sich nur zwei Tage nach der deutschen Invasion Polens. Den Titel des Oratoriums entlieh er Ödön von Horváths Novelle *Ein Kind unserer Zeit* (1938). Die Novelle behandelt eine ganz andere Geschichte, allerdings hatte Horváth (der in dem Jahr, in dem sein Buch erschien, mit nur siebenunddreißig Jahren verstarb) eine vergleichbare Art von Erinnerung an einen Sündenbock geschrieben, die Tippett mit den Worten zusammenfasste: "ungenannter, verwirrter Soldat / Mörder, der



auf einer Parkbank im Schnee schläft, am Ende erfroren wie ein Schneemann". Tippett, dessen kompositorische Fähigkeiten zu der Zeit noch keine größere Beachtung gefunden hatten, war nicht sicher, ob *A Child of Our Time* jemals aufgeführt würde. Doch im Dezember 1942 sahen seine engen Freunde Benjamin Britten und Peter Pears sich die Partitur an und bezeugten große Begeisterung für das Werk. Britten sandte Tippett eine Postkarte, auf der er erklärte: "Was für ein großartiges Werk das Oratorium doch ist & eine Aufführung *muss* bald arrangiert werden." Einem anderen Freund gegenüber kommentierte Tippett diese Ermutigung allerdings mit den Worten: "Leichter gesagt als getan!" Noch während er an der Komposition arbeitete, hatte Britten bereits in den Startlöchern gestanden: 1940 teilte Tippett seiner Muse Francesca Allinson mit, er habe die Fugeneinsätze in einem der Chöre geschrieben, während er den über ihm dröhnenden deutschen Bombern lauschte: "Ich hatte die seltsamsten Empfindungen während ich bedachtsam die vierundzwanzig Takte vollendete & dann ging ich zu Ben, um zu plaudern."

Dank Brittens Vermittlung betreute der Dirigent Walter Goehr (der auch für die Leitung der Uraufführung von Brittens *Serenade* für Tenor, Horn und Streicher im Jahr 1943 verantwortlich gewesen war), die Premiere

von *A Child of Our Time* am 19. März 1944 im Londoner Adelphi Theatre, in der Pears und Joan Cross zu den Solisten gehörten. Wie Tippett sich erinnerte: "Irgendwie kratzten wir das Geld zusammen, um das London Philharmonic Orchestra zu engagieren", außerdem sämtliche Sänger des Morley College (wo Tippett damals Musikdirektor war) und des London Region Civil Defence Choir. Den Kritiken der Premiere ist zu entnehmen, dass diese eine zusammengestückelte und recht amateurhafte Angelegenheit war, die dem Werk nicht wirklich gerecht wurde. In eher positivem Ton schrieb Tippett an Allinson, das Oratorium habe "nicht nur die gewöhnlichen [Zuhörer], sondern auch die Intellektuellen erreicht". Einer der Kritiker, der in einer Besprechung der Uraufführung das Stück wegen seiner anscheinend inkompetenten Orchestrierung verrissen hatte, entschuldigte sich später wortreich, da er inzwischen begriffen hatte, dass der Komponist eine expressive Direktheit anstrebte, die seinerzeit in der Konzertmusik äußerst ungewöhnlich war.

Die spätere – und größere – Anerkennung des Werks war in nicht geringem Maße der öffentlichen Aufmerksamkeit gezollt, die ihm zukam, als eine Ausstrahlung der BBC zeitlich mit einem im März 1945 publizierten Feature in der *Picture Post*

unter dem Titel "Ein Komponist lauscht seinem eigenen Oratorium" zusammenfiel. Wie auch im Fall von Britten's viel späterem *War Requiem* (1962) – das Tippett als "das einzige musikalische Meisterwerk mit offen pazifistischer Bedeutung" beschrieb –, fand die im Kern von *A Child of Our Time* liegende universale Botschaft in der ganzen Welt rasch eine breite empathische Zuhörerschaft. Goehr dirigierte das Werk kurz nach Kriegsende in Hamburg, die Restriktionen der alliierten Besatzungsmächte in Deutschland verhinderten allerdings Tippett's Anwesenheit, da dieser sich weigerte, eine Militäruniform zu tragen. (Als überzeugter Pazifist war der hartnäckige Kriegsdienstverweigerer zu Kriegszeiten in einem berüchtigten Londoner Gefängnis inhaftiert gewesen.) Sodann wurde das Oratorium mit großem Erfolg vom belgischen Rundfunk gesendet, und 1947 dirigierte

Tippett eine Aufführung in Budapest, für die das Libretto hastig ins Ungarische übersetzt wurde, als sich herausstellte, dass die Sänger kaum mit der englischen Sprache vertraut waren. Es folgten mehrere Aufführungen in italienischer Sprache im schweizerischen Lugano. Herbert von Karajan, der kontroverse und flamboyante Nestor unter den Dirigenten von Weltruhm, führte das Werk im Winter 1952/53 in Turin auf und verärgerte Tippett zutiefst, weil er an einer Stelle in dem Stück eine ungeplante Pause einlegte, da ihm dies persönlich so passte.

Wesentlich wichtiger aber ist, dass bei mindestens zwei denkwürdigen Aufführungen von *A Child of Our Time* in Haifa (1952) und Tel Aviv (1962) Herschel Grynszpan's Vater im Publikum saß.

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## Sir Michael Tippett: A Child of Our Time

Le 7 novembre 1938, un juif polonais de dix-sept ans, Herschel Grynszpan, entra dans l'ambassade d'Allemagne à Paris et tira plusieurs fois dans la poitrine d'un fonctionnaire subalterne, Ernst vom Rath, avec un pistolet qu'il venait de se procurer dans ce but précis. Malgré les soins prodigués par les médecins personnels d'Adolf Hitler, vom Rath succomba à ses blessures deux jours plus tard. Cet assassinat déclencha immédiatement la fureur du parti nazi. Le ministre de la Propagande, Joseph Goebbels, profita de ce prétexte pour prononcer un discours antisémite incendiaire qui eut pour effet de déclencher la tristement célèbre *Kristallnacht* (Nuit de Cristal) au cours de laquelle, dans la nuit du 9 au 10 novembre et avec l'approbation d'Hitler, la police ferma les yeux sur le saccage de centaines de maisons, d'entreprises juives et de synagogues en Autriche et en Allemagne. Cette terrifiante violence fit au moins quatre-vingt-dix morts parmi les Juifs, tandis que plusieurs milliers d'autres furent rapidement rassemblés et incarcérés dans des camps de concentration. La brutalité de ce pogrom devint la sombre

source d'inspiration de l'oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, composé par Michael Tippett (1905 – 1998) entre 1939 et 1941, et joué pour la première fois en 1944, alors que la Seconde Guerre mondiale commençait enfin à toucher à sa fin, avec une lenteur angoissante.

Le sort tragique de Herschel Grynszpan reste un mystère à ce jour, bien qu'il ait été officiellement déclaré mort (sans aucune preuve tangible) en 1960 afin que ses parents puissent tourner la page. Les épreuves subies par sa famille aux mains des gouvernements allemands et polonais avaient été le facteur conduisant à son acte de violence isolée. Pendant que Grynszpan, ayant abandonné l'école à l'âge de quatorze ans, vivait à Paris avec son oncle et sa tante, ses parents (qui vivaient à Hanovre) avaient été arrêtés par la Gestapo en octobre 1938 et renvoyés en Pologne, pays qui les avait déjà déchus de leur nationalité polonaise sous le prétexte qu'ils vivaient depuis trop longtemps à l'étranger. On estime à 12000 le nombre de Juifs polonais qui se retrouvèrent apatrides et abandonnés à la frontière entre l'Allemagne et la Pologne dans des conditions de dénuement effroyables, et il

ne fait aucun doute que Grynspan tua vom Rath par vengeance symbolique. Emprisonné par la suite dans la France de Vichy puis en Allemagne, et devant faire l'objet d'un procès retentissant monté par les nazis comme une démonstration internationale de la prétendue menace que les Juifs faisaient peser sur la civilisation, Grynspan disparut sans laisser de traces en 1942 – peut-être parce que ses avocats avaient menacé d'alléguer qu'il avait eu une relation homosexuelle avec vom Rath, et que le meurtre était en fait un crime passionnel.

À l'époque de la *Kristallnacht* (ainsi nommée en raison de l'énorme quantité de verre brisé qui jonchait les rues après cette nuit de destruction écœurante), Tippett voulait depuis longtemps écrire une œuvre majeure sur ce qu'il appelait "l'inhumanité de l'homme à l'égard de l'homme". Sa première idée fut celle d'un opéra basé sur l'Irish Easter Rebellion (Rébellion irlandaise de Pâques) en avril 1916, au cours de laquelle près de cinquante personnes trouvèrent la mort, et à la suite de laquelle seize chefs rebelles furent exécutés par les Britanniques. Mais Tippett s'inquiéta du fait que le genre de l'opéra était trop intrinsèquement dramatique pour permettre un traitement plus contemplatif des thèmes de la brutalité et du sort violent des boucs émissaires politiques, qui pourrait

parler plus largement à une communauté moderne et compatissante. Il estimait que le genre de l'oratorio, à l'époque relativement négligé par les compositeurs, offrirait un modèle plus approprié pour un traitement intime de ce type de sujet, même si, sous la forme de ses chœurs, il y aurait encore la possibilité de moments de drame vif aux côtés de la portée narrative directe apportée par les récitatifs et la réflexion personnelle qui pourrait être exprimée dans les arias des solistes.

Tippett modela la structure tripartite de *A Child of Our Time* sur celle du *Messiah* de Haendel (1741), qu'il avait dirigé et étudié intensivement au début des années 1930. Dans l'œuvre de Haendel, la première partie est une prophétie, la deuxième un récit des principaux événements (allant de la naissance du Christ à la fin des temps), et la troisième un recueil de commentaires méditatifs. Tippett s'inspira également des Passions de Bach, estimant que Grynspan était par essence "le protagoniste d'une histoire moderne de la Passion". Mais il craignait que l'adoption des chorals, qui sont une caractéristique si importante de ces œuvres luthériennes, ne convienne pas à ce qu'il recherchait – non seulement parce qu'il voulait éviter de situer son oratorio dans une religion spécifique, christianisme ou judaïsme

(pour la même raison, il rejeta l'idée d'utiliser des cantiques juifs), mais aussi parce qu'il ressentait le besoin de trouver un type de chant collectif qui pourrait mieux refléter les expériences partagées par les publics contemporains. La solution est venue sous la forme de spirituals afro-américains, dont cinq apparaissent à des moments importants de la partition, et qui remplissent une fonction générale semblable à celle des chorals de Bach.

Tippett avait découvert les spirituals lors de la diffusion à la radio de "Steal Away to Jesus", où la phrase émouvante "The trumpet sounds within-a my soul" lui avait fait comprendre qu'"en Angleterre ou en Amérique, tout le monde serait ému de cette manière". Il commanda immédiatement aux États-Unis un exemplaire de *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (édité par James Weldon Johnson et publié à New York en 1925) et découvrit que cette anthologie "contenait des paroles et des mélodies pour toutes les situations dramatiques ou religieuses imaginables". Il fut également profondément ému par le film *Green Pastures* (1936), avec une distribution entièrement noire et une interprétation obsédante du spiritual "Go Down, Moses". Tippett se procura des enregistrements de spirituals interprétés non seulement de manière quasi classique,

mais aussi dans un style "hot", qui présentait (selon lui) "une ambiguïté tonale produite par le blues". Finalement, il jugea que le style "hot" serait un pas de trop pour les chœurs de concert de l'époque qui étaient susceptibles d'interpréter son oratorio. La septième diminuée de la gamme du blues a toutefois joué un rôle important dans la conception de l'œuvre, qui présente souvent de sombres accords mineurs de trois sons opposés à la septième diminuée qui les surmonte.

Dans une note de la partition, Tippett avertit les chefs d'orchestre que ses arrangements de spirituals

ne doivent pas être considérés comme des hymnes de congrégation, mais comme une partie intégrante de l'Oratorio; ils ne doivent pas non plus être sentimentalisés, mais chantés avec une forte pulsation sous-jacente et légèrement "balancée".

Tippett semble avoir considéré le genre comme assez comparable à celui du jazz, bien que les spirituals aient eu une longue histoire pré-jazz au dix-neuvième siècle qui en firent une musique de concert célèbre, et qui fusionna de manière unique l'hymnodie européenne avec les caractéristiques de l'interprétation afro-américaine bien avant que le jazz, dans les années 1920, ne prenne le monde d'assaut. Le traitement créatif des spirituals dans *A Child of Our Time* est

l'aspect de l'œuvre qui a été le plus discuté par les critiques des premières exécutions, le compositeur rappelant que

la critique de mon utilisation de negro spirituels dans une partition aussi apparemment sophistiquée [résultant de] l'incompatibilité originelle entre une musique composée émotionnellement complexe et une mélodie simple d'origine populaire, [qui] si elles sont mises côte à côte sans médiation, conduisent les critiques à un préjugé lors d'une première écoute.

Il compara la perplexité initiale des critiques au choc comparable produit par le "mélange de sophistication et de populaire" qui était une caractéristique si frappante de la poésie de W.H. Auden dans les années 1930.

Les opinions d'un autre grand poète de l'époque, T.S. Eliot, façonnèrent non seulement *A Child of Our Time*, mais également (peut-être sans le vouloir) une grande partie de la carrière ultérieure de Tippett en tant que compositeur. Il souhaitait au départ qu'Eliot écrive le livret et (à la demande du poète) lui envoya un *Sketch for a Modern Oratorio* (Esquisse pour un oratorio moderne) très complet qui détaille les exigences verbales de chaque mouvement, et précise même leur durée approximative. Ce texte (intégralement reproduit dans le livre

*Music of the Angels*, un recueil d'écrits de Tippett publié pour la première fois en 1980) est si cohérent et bien organisé qu'Eliot finit par dire au compositeur qu'il était sans aucun doute le mieux placé pour écrire lui-même le livret – ce qu'il fit dûment. La conséquence à long terme du refus d'Eliot fut que Tippett deviendra l'auteur des livrets de tous ses opéras au cours des décennies suivantes, un fait qui enchante les amateurs du compositeur, mais qui rend également furieux les sceptiques qui ne sont pas toujours capables de s'engager dans la philosophie parfois abstruse et fortement influencée par Jung, que ces opéras incarnent. (Dans le *Sketch for a Modern Oratorio*, Tippett avait inclus de nombreuses citations de Jung dans l'original allemand.)

Plus tard, Tippett décrira Eliot comme étant son "père spirituel", avec lequel il s'entretenait fréquemment de poésie et de théâtre, ainsi que de l'esthétique du théâtre et de l'opéra. À l'époque où il se lança dans *A Child of Our Time*, Tippett enseignait les rudiments de la théorie musicale au fils d'Eliot, âgé de six ans, tandis que poète lui-même "aidait à la cuisine et cueillait soigneusement des cassis dans le jardin" du cottage où vivait alors Tippett (à Oxted, dans le comté anglais du Surrey). "On jouait également au Monopoly, se souvint Tippett,



et Eliot était très bon." Eliot faisait preuve d'une perspicacité caractéristique (bien que peut-être assez prétentieuse) sur le sujet de l'écriture de livrets, et avertit Tippett que tout ce qu'il pourrait produire pour son oratorio, en sa qualité de poète distingué, "passerait pour de la bien meilleure poésie". Tippett se souviendra plus tard qu'Eliot "considérerait que les mots poétiquement imaginatifs d'un véritable poète étaient souvent inutiles" dans les genres de l'opéra et de l'oratorio. Néanmoins, plusieurs échos de la poésie d'Eliot subsistent dans le livret de Tippett, notamment la devise de l'œuvre, "l'obscurité proclame la gloire de la lumière", empruntée à la pièce d'Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). Certains passages du texte ont également été clairement inspirés par la poésie pacifiste de Wilfred Owen écrite pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, quand Owen, comme tant d'autres de sa génération, se porta naïvement volontaire pour combattre dans l'intérêt d'un conflit mondial dont personne, à l'époque (comme aujourd'hui), ne semblait comprendre l'absolue futilité.

Tippett commença sérieusement la composition de *A Child of Our Time* immédiatement après la déclaration de guerre du Royaume-Uni à l'Allemagne le 3 septembre 1939, une date historique qui eut lieu deux jours seulement après

l'invasion de la Pologne par l'armée allemande. Il emprunta le titre de l'oratorio au roman de Ödön von Horváth *Ein Kind unserer Zeit* (1938), mais qui traite d'une toute autre histoire. Horváth (qui mourut prématurément à l'âge de trente-sept ans l'année même de la publication de son livre) avait écrit une commémoration comparable d'un bouc émissaire, décrit par Tippett comme un "soldat anonyme mentalement dérangé / meurtrier, qui dort sur un banc public dans la neige, à la fin gelé à mort comme un bonhomme de neige". Tippett, dont les talents de compositeur n'étaient pas largement reconnus à l'époque, n'était pas sûr que *A Child of Our Time* serait un jour joué. Ses amis proches Benjamin Britten et Peter Pears se montrèrent très enthousiastes à l'égard de l'œuvre quand ils prirent connaissance de la partition en décembre 1942. Britten envoya une carte postale à Tippett dans laquelle il déclarait: "Quelle œuvre grandiose que cet Oratorio & Une exécution *doit* être organisée rapidement." Cependant, comme Tippett le déclara à un autre ami en réponse de cette suggestion encourageante: "C'est plus facile à dire qu'à faire!" Britten attendait dans les coulisses alors même que Tippett composait l'œuvre: Tippett écrivit à sa muse Francesca Allinson en 1940 qu'il avait esquissé les entrées

fuguées de l'un des chœurs tout en écoutant le bourdonnement des bombardiers allemands au-dessus de sa tête, "J'ai éprouvé les sentiments les plus bizarres alors que je complétais délibérément les 24 mesures et ensuite je suis allé bavarder avec Ben".

Grâce à l'insistance de Britten, le chef d'orchestre Walter Goehr (qui avait assuré la création de la *Sérénade* pour ténor, cor et cordes de Britten en 1943) dirigea la première de *A Child of Our Time* le 19 mars 1944 à l'Adelphi Theatre de Londres, avec des solistes tels que Peter Pears et Joan Cross. Comme le rappela Tippett, "d'une manière ou d'une autre, on racla les fonds de tiroir pour réunir l'argent afin d'engager le London Philharmonic Orchestra", ainsi que les chanteurs du Morley College (où Tippett était alors le directeur musical) et le London Region Civil Defence Choir. Des critiques de la première suggèrent qu'il s'agissait d'une affaire décousue et plutôt amateur qui n'avait pas réussi à rendre pleinement justice à l'ouvrage. Sur une note plus positive, Tippett écrivit à Allinson pour lui dire que l'oratorio avait "séduit non seulement les [auditeurs] ordinaires, mais également les intellectuels". L'un des critiques, qui dans un compte rendu de la création avait éreinté l'œuvre pour son orchestration apparemment incompétente, s'excusa ensuite abondamment auprès de

Tippett, ayant compris que le compositeur cherchait à atteindre un degré d'expression directe qui était très inhabituel dans la musique de concert de l'époque.

Le reconnaissance ultérieure et plus importante de l'œuvre fut due largement à la publicité dont elle devint l'objet quand une émission de radio de la BBC coïncida avec un article illustré dans *Picture Post* publié en mars 1945 sous le titre "A Composer Listens to His Own Oratorio" (Un compositeur écoute son propre oratorio). Comme dans le cas du *War Requiem* beaucoup plus tardif (1962) de Britten – décrit par Tippett comme "le seul chef-d'œuvre musical que nous possédions ayant des significations pacifistes évidentes" – le message universel de *A Child of Our Time* trouva rapidement de nombreux publics attentifs à travers le monde entier. Walter Goehr le dirigea à Hambourg peu après la fin de la guerre, mais les restrictions imposées par les Alliés en Allemagne eurent pour effet que Tippett ne fut pas autorisé à y assister parce qu'il refusait de porter un uniforme militaire. (En tant que pacifiste convaincu, le compositeur avait auparavant purgé une peine dans une célèbre prison londonienne pour avoir été un objecteur de conscience insoumis.) *A Child of Our Time* fut ensuite diffusé à la radio belge avec grand succès, et en 1947 Tippett le dirigea à Budapest, le

livret ayant été traduit à la hâte en hongrois quand il devint évident que les chanteurs ne maîtrisaient pas la langue anglaise. Plusieurs exécutions furent organisées à Lugano en Suisse, utilisant une traduction italienne. Le doyen controversé et flamboyant des chefs d'orchestre de renommée mondiale, Herbert von Karajan, dirigea l'ouvrage à Turin au cours de l'hiver 1952/1953, et irrita fortement Tippett en intercalant un entracte non prévu

à un moment de l'œuvre pour sa convenance personnelle.

De manière beaucoup plus importante: à deux reprises au moins, lors des concerts mémorables consacrés à *A Child of Our Time* à Haïfa (1952) et Tel Aviv (1962), le père de Herschel Grynszpan se trouvait dans le public.

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Traduction: Francis Marchal



Recording 'A Child of Our Time' at Fairfield Halls



Alexander James

Recording 'A Child of Our Time' at Fairfield Halls

## A Child of Our Time

### Part I

#### 1 No. 1. Chorus

The world turns on its dark side.  
It is winter.

#### 2 No. 2. The Argument

##### Alto Solo

Man has measured the heavens with a  
telescope, driven the Gods from their  
thrones.

But the soul, watching the chaotic mirror,  
knows that the Gods return.

Truly, the living God consumes within and  
turns the flesh to cancer!

#### 3 Interludium

#### 4 No. 3. Scena

##### Chorus and Alto Solo

Is evil then good?  
Is reason untrue?

Reason is true to itself;  
But pity breaks open the heart.

We are lost.  
We are as seed before the wind.  
We are carried to a great slaughter.

#### 5 No. 4. The Narrator

##### Bass Solo

Now in each nation there were some cast out  
by authority and tormented, made to suffer  
for the gen'ral wrong.

Pogroms in the east, lynching in the west;  
Europe brooding on a war of starvation.  
And a great cry went up from the people.

#### 6 No. 5. Chorus of the Oppressed

When shall the usurer's city cease?  
And famine depart from the fruitful land?

#### 7 No. 6. Tenor Solo

I have no money for my bread; I have no gift  
for my love.

I am caught between my desires and their  
frustration as between the hammer and  
the anvil.

How can I grow to a man's stature?

#### 8 No. 7. Soprano Solo

How can I cherish my man in such days, or  
become a mother in a world of  
destruction?

How shall I feed my children on so small a  
wage?

How can I comfort them when I am dead?

#### 9 No. 8. A Spiritual

##### Chorus and Soprano and Tenor Soli

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus;  
Steal away, steal away home –  
I han't got long to stay here.

My Lord, He calls me, He calls me by the  
thunder,  
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,  
I han't got long to stay here.

Steal away, steal away...

Green trees a-bending, poor sinner stands  
a-trembling,  
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,  
I han't got long to stay here.

Steal away, steal away...

**Part II**

**10 No. 9. Chorus**

A star rises in mid-winter.  
Behold the man! The scape-goat!  
The child of our time.

**11 No. 10. The Narrator**

**Bass Solo**  
And a time came when in the continual  
persecution one race stood for all.

**12 No. 11. Double Chorus of Persecutors and  
Persecuted**

Away with them!  
Where, where?  
Curse them! Kill them!  
Why, why?  
They infect the state.

How?  
We have no refuge.

**13 No. 12. The Narrator**

**Bass Solo**  
Where they could, they fled from the terror.  
And among them a boy escaped secretly,  
and was kept in hiding in a great city.

**14 No. 13. Chorus of the Self-righteous**

We cannot have them in our Empire.  
They shall not work, nor draw a dole.  
Let them starve in No-Man's-Land!

**15 No. 14. The Narrator**

**Bass Solo**  
And the boy's mother wrote a letter saying:

**16 No. 15. Scena  
The Mother, the Uncle and Aunt, and the Boy  
Solo Quartet**

(The Mother)  
O my son! In the dread terror, they have  
brought me near to death.

(The Boy)  
Mother! Ah Mother! Though men hunt me like  
an animal, I will defy the world to reach  
you.

(The Aunt)  
Have patience.  
Throw not your life away in futile sacrifice.

(The Uncle)  
You are as one against all.  
Accept the impotence of your humanity.

(The Boy)  
No! I must save her.

**17** **No. 16. A Spiritual**  
**Chorus and Soprano and Tenor Soli**  
Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord,  
Nobody knows like Jesus.

O brothers, pray for me,  
O brothers, pray for me,  
And help me to drive  
Old Satan away.

Nobody knows the trouble...

O mothers, pray for me,  
O mothers, pray for me,  
And help me to drive  
Old Satan away.

Nobody knows the trouble...

**18** **No. 17. Scena**  
**Duet**  
**Bass and Alto**  
The boy becomes desperate in his agony.

A curse is born.  
The dark forces threaten him.

He goes to authority.  
He is met with hostility.

His other self rises in him, demonic and  
destructive.

He shoots the official –

But he shoots only his dark brother –  
And see... he is dead.

**19** **No. 18. The Narrator**  
**Bass Solo**  
They took a terrible vengeance.

**20** **No. 19. The Terror**  
**Chorus**  
Burn down their houses! Beat in their heads!  
Break them in pieces on the wheel!

**21** **No. 20. The Narrator**  
**Bass Solo**  
Men were ashamed of what was done.  
There was bitterness and horror.

**22** **No. 21. A Spiritual of Anger**  
**Chorus and Bass Solo**  
Go down, Moses,  
Way down in Egypt land;  
Tell old Pharaoh,  
To let my people go.

When Israel was in Egypt land,  
Let my people go,  
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,  
Let my people go,  
'Thus spake the Lord', bold Moses said,  
Let my people go,  
'If not, I'll smite your first-born dead',  
Let my people go.

Go down, Moses,  
Way down in Egypt land;  
Tell old Pharaoh,  
To let my people go.

**23 No. 22. The Boy sings in his Prison**

**Tenor Solo**

My dreams are all shattered in a ghastly  
reality.  
The wild beating of my heart is stilled: day  
by day.  
Earth and sky are not for those in prison.

Mother! Mother!

**24 No. 23. The Mother**

**Soprano Solo**

What have I done to you, my son?  
What will become of us now?  
The springs of hope are dried up.  
My heart aches in unending pain.

**25 No. 24. Alto Solo**

The dark forces rise like a flood.  
Men's hearts are heavy: they cry for peace.

**26 No. 25. A Spiritual  
Chorus and Soprano Solo**

O! by and by, by and by,  
I'm going to lay down my heavy load.

I know my robe's going to fit me well,  
I've tried it on at the gates of Hell.

O, Hell is deep and a dark despair,  
O, stop, poor sinner, and don't go there!

O! by and by, by and by,  
I'm going to lay down my heavy load.

**Part III**

**27 No. 26. Chorus**

The cold deepens.  
The world descends into the icy waters,  
Where lies the jewel of great price.

**28 No. 27. Alto Solo**

The soul of man is impassioned like a woman.  
She is old as the earth, beyond good and evil,  
the sensual garments.  
Her face will be illumined like the sun.  
Then is the time of his deliverance.

**29 No. 28. Scena**

**Bass Solo and Chorus**

The words of wisdom are these:  
Winter cold means inner warmth, the secret  
nursery of the seed.



How shall we have patience for the  
consummation of the mystery?  
Who will comfort us in the going through?

Patience is born in the tension of loneliness.  
The garden lies beyond the desert.

Is the man of destiny master of us all?  
Shall those cast out be unavenged?

The man of destiny is cut off from fellowship.  
Healing springs from the womb of time.  
The simple-hearted shall exult in the end.

What of the boy, then? What of him?

He, too, is outcast, his manhood broken in  
the clash of powers.  
God overpowered him – the child of our time.

**30** **Preludium**

**31** **No. 29. General Ensemble**  
**Chorus and Soli**

I would know my shadow and my light,  
So shall I at last be whole.

Then courage, brother, dare the grave  
passage.

Here is no final grieving, but an abiding hope.

The moving waters renew the earth.  
It is spring.

*(Chorus repeats the words of the soloists.)*

**32** **No. 30. A Spiritual**

**Chorus and Soli**  
Deep river, my home is over Jordan.  
Lord, I want to cross over into camp-ground.

O, chillun! O, don't you want to go,  
To that gospel feast,  
That promised land,  
That land where all is peace?  
Walk into heaven, and take my seat,  
And cast my crown at Jesus' feet.

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,  
Lord, I want to cross over into camp-ground,  
Lord!

Michael Tippett  
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# SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT

(1905 – 1998)

## A Child of Our Time (1939–41)

Oratorio for Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra  
with Text and Music by Michael Tippett

1-9	Part I	22:21
10-26	Part II	20:55
27-32	Part III	20:20
	TT	63:46

Pumeza Matshikiza soprano  
Dame Sarah Connolly mezzo-soprano  
Joshua Stewart tenor  
Ashley Riches bass-baritone  
BBC Symphony Chorus  
Wesley John chorus master  
BBC Symphony Orchestra  
Igor Yuzefovich leader  
Sir Andrew Davis

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