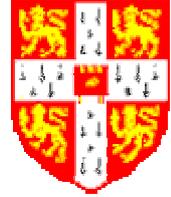




Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club



A Child of Our Time (1939–41)

words & music by Michael Tippett (1905–98)

Conducted by Alan Reddish

*Saturday 5th November 2005 at 6.30 pm
in the United Reform Church, Pond Square, Highgate, N6*

Concert No 1931

CHORUS***Sopranos***

Evelyn Bercott
Sue Estermann
Rachel Goodkin
Pip Kings
Pamela Markle
Lyn Parkyns
Ruth Pitman

Altos

Rachel Cooke
Oenone Cox
Livia Gollancz
Norman Parkyns
Vivien Price

Tenors

Brian Blandford
Alan Mayall
Colin Myles

Basses

David Banbury
Michael Crowe
Giles de la Mare
Christopher
Reynolds
Richard Shaw
Peter Sowerby
Andrew Westlake

The solo rôles will be taken by members of the chorus, as indicated in the text below.

ORCHESTRA***Violins***

Evelyn Chadwick (*leader*)
Peter Wall
George Gregory
Martin Young
Edmund Booth
Cathy Bird
Peter Lindsey*

Violas

Keith Daley
Jean-Luc Muller*

Cellos

Tim Handel
Joan Cohen
Helen Braverman

Basses

John Nissen*
Dick Hammett*

Flutes

Camilla Bignall
William Phipps

Oboes

Clare Shanks
Malcolm Turner

Cor Anglais

Nicholas Murray

Clarinets

Barbara Wyllie

Bassoons

Jo Rushton
Elizabeth Boyden

Contrabassoon

Mark Flanders*

Horns

Adrian Rushton
Peter Peacock
John Asher
Alison Turley

Trumpets

Frank Burgum
Paul Franklin

Trombones

Alan Tomlinson*
Alan Jack*
Charles Macworth-
Young*

Timpani/Percussion

Andrew Westlake

* *guest*

“...the darkness declares the glory of light”

A Child of Our Time was written by Michael Tippett during the early years of the war as a personal response to contemporary events, in particular the enforced deportation of Polish Jews from Germany leading to the assassination in autumn 1938 of the German diplomat *Vom Rath* in Paris by a young Jew called *Herschel Grynszpan*, and the subsequent reprisals as ‘Kristallnacht’. However, the particular circumstances are generalised into a very individual meditation on human violence and oppression, most strikingly by the use of familiar spirituals reflecting the African-American experience of slavery, as a modern equivalent for Bach’s use of chorales in his cantatas and Passions. This is only the most obvious example of the extraordinary breadth of allusion in both words and music. Tippett took his outline to T.S. Eliot, inviting him to write the text, but Eliot persuaded him to write his own, as he continued to do subsequently, in his idiosyncratic voice, in later works. Here, the appalling events are interpreted in the language of Jung and the ‘dark shadow’, while the cycle of the seasons is invoked to find hope in the midst of despair. (Whether his pacifism was an appropriate response to Nazi policies is more controversial.) In the music, his enthusiasm for Tudor and baroque music, Purcell, Bach, Handel, Beethoven, and modernity (the violence, and neo-classicism, of Hindemith and Stravinsky), are all in evidence – and, unusually for his time, a serious view of jazz, not for frivolous or ironic effect, but as the impassioned voice of the oppressed, with ‘blue’ major-minor inflections completing the circle back to Elizabethan times.

Over sixty years later, his concerns are still very much with us.

AR

PART I

Chorus

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

THE ARGUMENT

Alto solo

(Oenone Forrester)

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!

SCENA

Chorus

Is evil then good?
Is reason untrue?

Alto

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

Chorus

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

The Narrator –

bass solo

(Michael Crowe)

Now in each nation there were some cast out by
authority and tormented,
made to suffer for the general wrong.
Pogroms in the east, lynching in the west;
Europe brooding on a war of starvation.

Chorus of the

Oppressed

Tenor solo

(Alan Mayall)

When shall the usurers' city cease,
And famine depart from the fruitful land?
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?
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?

Soprano solo

(Evelyn Bercott)

A SPIRITUAL

Chorus and soli
(Lyn Parkyns, Alan
Mayall)

Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord,
Nobody knows like Jesus.

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

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

Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord,
Nobody knows like Jesus.

Duet
(David Banbury,
Oenone Forrester)

SCENA

Narrator
Alto

The boy becomes desperate in his agony.
A curse is born.
The dark forces threaten him.

Narrator

He goes to authority.
He is met with hostility.

Alto

His other self rises in him, demonic and destructive.

Narrator

He shoots the official.

Alto

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

Narrator

They took a terrible vengeance.

THE TERROR

Chorus

Burn down their houses! Beat in their heads!
Break them in pieces on the wheel!

Narrator

Men were ashamed of what was done.
There was bitterness and horror.

Chorus and solo
(David Banbury)

A SPIRITUAL OF ANGER

Go down Moses, 'way down In Egypt land;
Tell old Pharoah, to let my people go.

When Israel was in Egypt's 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 Pharoah, to let my people go.

*The boy sings in his
prison
(Alan Mayall)*

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!

*The Mother
(Lyn Parkyns)*

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.

*Alto solo
(Vivien Price)*

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

*Chorus and solo
(Evelyn Bercott)*

A SPIRITUAL

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 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.

Chorus

PART III

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

*Alto solo
(Oenone Forrester)*

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.

*Bass solo (Michael
Crowe) and Chorus
Bass*

SCENA

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

Chorus

How shall we have patience for the consummation of the
mystery?

Bass

Who will comfort us in the going through?
Patience is born in the tension of loneliness.
The garden lies beyond the desert.

Chorus

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

Bass

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

Chorus

What of the boy then? What of him?

Bass

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

*Chorus and soli (Alan
Mayall, David
Banbury, Lyn
Parkyns, Oenone
Forrester)*

GENERAL ENSEMBLE

Tenor

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

Bass

Then courage, brother, dare the grave passage.

Soprano

Here is no final grieving, but an abiding hope.

Alto

The moving waters renew the earth.

(Chorus repeat

It is spring.

words of soloists)

A SPIRITUAL

*Chorus and soli (Lyn
Parkyns, Vivien
Price, Alan Mayall,
David Banbury)*

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, 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 down my crown at Jesus' feet.

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