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## Tippett Studies

Michael Tippett (1905–1998) was one of the major figures of British music in the twentieth century. This collection of studies is the first completely new, internationally available book on the composer to appear for over a decade and includes the thinking of established scholars and new commentators. Detailed analyses of individual works are counterpointed against critical investigations of contextual issues, such as the composer's relationship to the past, his 'Englishness', his fascination with ancient Greece and his pursuit of the visionary. The book covers all of Tippett's style periods and many of the key genres within his *œuvre*. What transpires is a rich portrait of an artist whose work reflects the century's triumphs and tragedies with particular intensity and who is upheld by younger generations of composers as a source of inspiration and example.

DAVID CLARKE is Senior Lecturer in music at the University of Newcastle. He is author of a forthcoming monograph on Michael Tippett.

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To Ian Kemp

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## Preface

In the late 1990s little justification is needed for a book on Michael Tippett – a composer who in his own lifetime attained a canonical position in British music and prominence internationally. However, it is perhaps surprising that despite the levels of institutional recognition accorded him, Tippett (1905–98) has not been the subject of more widespread scholarly attention. For example, while the period between approximately his seventy-fifth and eightieth birthday years saw the publication of what still remain key texts on the composer – including most notably Ian Kemp’s substantial monograph, Arnold Whittall’s extensive technical investigation of Tippett’s (as well as Britten’s) *œuvre* and Meirion Bowen’s introductory volume<sup>1</sup> – no new comparable book-length studies materialised as the composer approached and entered his nineties.<sup>2</sup> Against this background, then, *Tippett Studies* will, I hope, be seen as a timely venture. The essays below, the work both of established commentators and of new contributors to discourse on Tippett, can be claimed collectively to represent a significant expansion of research on the composer. Many of the studies were originally presented as papers at the Newcastle University International Tippett Conference in 1995, and the volume as a whole continues the philosophy of that event: to offer new perspectives on Tippett, while re-assessing and building on existing scholarship.

In a heterogeneous compilation such as this it would of course be gratuitous to make claims for a neat overall structure. That said, across essays

- 1 Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and his Music* (London, Eulenburg Books, 1984); Arnold Whittall, *The Music of Tippett and Britten: Studies in Themes and Techniques* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Meirion Bowen, *Michael Tippett* (London: Robson Books, 1982).
- 2 Notwithstanding two less widely available books published in the intervening period: Margaret Scheppach’s *Dramatic Parallels in Michael Tippett’s Operas: Analytical Essays on the Musico-Dramatic Techniques* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), and my *Language, Form, and Structure in the Music of Michael Tippett*, 2 vols. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1989). Additionally, Kemp’s, Whittall’s and Bowen’s studies have been re-published in further editions (either reprinted or revised).

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which encompass a range of genres and style periods a number of recurring themes may be detected. Their appearance may to some extent have been a matter of synchronicity, but together they invite a network of narratives such that the volume as a whole can with some justification be considered to be greater than the sum of its parts.

One such narrative has to do with attempts to tease out connections, or homologies, between biographical knowledge and musical inquiry. In the first two chapters, Anthony Pople and I seek to identify specific features of the character of the tonal language of Tippett's earlier style in relation to possible formative influences at the time of his apprenticeship: respectively the tutelage of R. O. Morris in the case of the *Fantasia Concertante*, and discourses around folk music in the case of the Concerto for Double String Orchestra. The concern of these studies to engage with details of musical language is also characteristic of many of the ensuing essays – a concern pursued sometimes in relation to questions of context, sometimes from a more purely immanent standpoint. This is surely a welcome development, given that in the past only a few have made sustained attempts in this direction. The recalcitrance of the music itself to analysis is no doubt a potential deterrent (one sometimes wonders whether Tippett through his quasi-intuitive creative temperament did not inoculate himself against music analysis), but, as a number of the contributors here demonstrate, that recalcitrance is best dealt with not by attempting to subvert it, but by embracing it. For example, Arnold Whittall's subtle analysis of possible parallels between technical musical strategies and dramatic content in *King Priam* demonstrates the importance of remaining alert to the tension between the specificity of musical particulars and the reductiveness inherent in the conceptual categories of analytical inquiry. As Whittall reminds us, analytical tactics should function as a trigger to thought, not as their own self-reproducing ends. And perhaps the fact that Tippett's music does not permit analysis to stop at reinforcing its own terms of operation is another index of its value.

That said, the analysis of this music still calls for rigour and precision if it is to advance beyond mere descriptive platitudes: formalised methodologies still have their role. While some readers will be more sympathetic than others to certain of the approaches taken here, I have no doubt that the demands of close reading entailed by the studies in question will bring their

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own rewards. One recurring issue within the analytical seam of this book is the hybrid nature of Tippett's language, which even at its atonal extremes retains vestiges of its earlier tonal character, and even at its most tonal contains organisational features that prefigure its later, post-tonal attributes. This prompts commensurable pragmatism from contributors, though what is significant (and perhaps unexpected) is the extent to which Allen Forte's set-theoretical methodology has been productively applied. Those less familiar with the principles of Forte's theory of pitch-class sets might want to consult his primary text, *The Structure of Atonal Music*.<sup>3</sup> By and large, however, contributors have sought to incorporate explanation of their various applications; and to ease the way further, I have incorporated a glossary of some of the main theoretical terms from this methodology as an appendix to the present volume.

Another leitmotiv that surfaces in the following pages is Tippett's relationship to the musical past. This will perhaps increasingly provide the key to a fuller understanding of his music, and might well be seen in the light of the insistence of his one-time mentor T. S. Eliot on the importance of tradition in the forging of the new. Indeed, Tippett's shifts of style – his changing modernisms, one might say – could be construed in terms of the shifting nature of his relationship to different pasts. Such an assertion would seem to be corroborated by contributions below. Kenneth Gloag, for example, suggests that the neoclassical practice enshrined in a key work concerned with stylistic change, Tippett's Second Symphony, can be interpreted as a double play of defamiliarisation: a critical distancing from a Stravinskian neoclassicism which is itself defined by a processes of defamiliarisation from its own invoked pasts. In a not dissimilar vein, Christopher Mark independently suggests that the sequential treatment and patterns of transposition common to much of Tippett's music could be considered as metaphorical: as 'standing for' their counterparts received from the historical practices of Western tonal music. This implicitly throws different light on the 'recalcitrance question' of Tippett's language, for such musical gestures should be read, on this view, not in terms of their organic linkages to the work as a whole, but for their connotation of earlier stylistic patterns. And Alastair Borthwick arrives at a similar conclusion in his

3 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973.)

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analysis of tonal voice-leading figures in Tippett's decidedly extended-tonal Third Piano Sonata. These melodic entities signify primarily through reference to their 'historical archetypes', rather than themselves aggregating organically into sustained middleground structures as their traditional counterparts would have done.

A different gloss on Tippett's relationship to the past is provided in chapters by Stephen Collisson and Peter Wright. Collisson investigates the relationship between the Triple Concerto and the past represented by Tippett's own *œuvre*, while Wright explores the composer's return in his Fifth String Quartet to his beloved Beethoven, who was such a powerful influence in his earlier stylistic period. What both these commentaries suggest is that the *rapprochement* between Tippett's late works and his earlier period is not just a matter of style-reference, but also has to do with a re-adoption of a more organicist aesthetic. This stance need not necessarily be seen to conflict with the positions of Borthwick and Mark, since the works in question issue, broadly speaking, from a different, later moment in Tippett's *œuvre*; but in any case, the purpose of this account is not to render invisible potentially profitable differences of perspective.

Connections can also be made between Collisson's account of the transcendental in the Triple Concerto and Rowena Pollard and David Clarke's discussion of a related issue in *King Priam*. The latter essay likewise has a past connection, only this time the more ancient past of classical Greece, with which Tippett has an expressed (implicitly humanist) affinity. In addition to tracing the textual mediations whereby the composer reinvents the aesthetic of Greek tragedy, our intention is also to consider how this can be achieved through a modernist musical language. Like Collisson, we find that the transcendental – one of Tippett's abiding concerns – is conveyed not (or not just) as an immanent aspect of a particular kind of musical language, but through the strategic context in which those linguistic features are situated; interestingly Peter Wright makes a similar point with regard to the 'visionary moment' of heterophony that bursts into the development section of the first movement of the Fifth String Quartet.

My comments at the outset of this Preface alluded to the intertextual background against which *Tippett Studies* is set. In its widest sense that background is discourse about Tippett's music at large: a discourse which constitutes the reception history which, I would say, is assumed in one way

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or another in all writings on the composer, even if such a history has still to be formally written. The final two chapters of this book relate to that history in a more explicit way. Wilfrid Mellers's deeply felt personal memoir might in the best of senses already be considered a historical document, for a number of reasons. Most obvious is the case made by Mellers himself, that his account is told from the standpoint of a near-contemporary and one-time close associate of the composer himself. Secondly, Mellers represents a point of contact between the present book and the earlier anthology *Michael Tippett: A Symposium on his 60th Birthday*<sup>4</sup> – a volume to which Mellers contributed, which Ian Kemp edited, and which, as the first full-length book on the composer, surely marked an important stage in the reception of Tippett as an artist of stature. Thirdly, Mellers's stance in his memoir is typical of many within the reception history of Tippett's music: one which asserts that the early works are the stronger ones; that the music written after *King Priam* is not quite of the same calibre. Although Mellers also admits qualification to his basic premise, others have been more explicitly polemical, not least the late Derrick Puffett on the occasion of the composer's ninetieth birthday.<sup>5</sup> In the final chapter of this volume, Peter Wright picks up the gauntlet, arguing that the Fifth String Quartet refutes any claim that Tippett's creative powers might have dwindled in his later years. In dedicating his essay to his former teacher's memory, Wright makes the point that Puffett's views (and those of others like him) need to be taken seriously, but at the same time contends that the force of any counter-argument comes through close, thoughtful reference to the music itself. And in effect Wright's is not a lone voice in this volume, given that a number of chapters consider Tippett's later works in the kind of detail and with the kind of incisiveness that has not always accompanied negative critiques made elsewhere. If in its own way *Tippett Studies* adds to the level of informed debate about Tippett's music, and begins to effect a shift in perceptions of it, then the contributors' purpose will have been served.

As ever, a project such as this could not have been undertaken unaided. My thanks go to Penny Souster and Arnold Whittall for their support, especially in the planning stages; to Schott & Co. Ltd for kind per-

4 (London: Faber & Faber, 1965.)

5 'Tippett and the retreat from mythology', *The Musical Times* 136, no. 1823 (January 1995), 6–14.

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mission to quote from Tippett's and Stravinsky's works; to Meirion Bowen for various points of consultation; to Grove's Dictionaries of Music, *Music Analysis*, the Society for Music Analysis, The Royal Musical Association, the Vice-Chancellor's Office, Arts Faculty and Music Department of Newcastle University, all of whom gave financial support to Newcastle University International Tippett Conference 1995, papers from which form the basis of much of this book; to Susan Lloyd, Frances Hopkins and Leo Nelson for unburdening me of some of the more onerous aspects of producing the typescript; to Gavin Warrender and Tim Poolan for assistance with various of the music examples; and to David Robinson for his forbearance at my rather too lengthy absences while editing this book.

And one final but important acknowledgement: there is no question that this venture would have not been possible without the achievement of previous scholarship. In particular, students of Tippett's music continue to owe a major debt to Ian Kemp. The significance of his *Symposium* celebrating Tippett's sixtieth birthday has already been mentioned; but his own life-and-works study, *Tippett: The Composer and his Music*, continues to be a mine of information and wisdom on its subject, and if the number of references to this work in what follows is anything to go by, its status will remain definitive for a long time to come. In dedicating our book to him, we contributors celebrate his seminal role in the enterprise of Tippett studies.

Sadly, Sir Michael Tippett died shortly before *Tippett Studies* was due to go to press. However unwished, his passing establishes a kind of closure – in effect a historical vantage point – which was absent when these essays were written (notwithstanding the fact that the composer's *œuvre* had by then already been declared complete). This is to suggest that the experience of reading what follows will inevitably be a subtly different one from that originally envisaged, given the significant change of biographical context. That the book was not consciously intended as a retrospective (one can only speculate how the contents might have differed if it had been) will not undo the fact that it might nevertheless now be read as such. But since the serious-minded engagement of the authors in any case always constituted its own implicit testimony to Tippett's music, it is indeed fitting here by way of memorial to underline the tribute paid by these studies to a remarkable artistic creator.

DAVID CLARKE

## References to Tippett's scores and essays

With few exceptions Tippett's scores tend to employ rehearsal figures rather than bar numbers. Score references in this volume are accordingly made using the term 'Fig.', with suffixes where necessary to designate points a given number of bars before or after any such figure. Thus, for example, 'Fig. 4<sup>+3</sup>' means 'three bars after Figure 4', or 'the third bar of Figure 4' (taking the first bar to be that in which the figure itself appears); while, conversely, 'Fig. 8<sup>-1</sup>' means 'one bar before Figure 8'.

Bar numbers are used only for references to the opening of a piece, before the appearance of the first rehearsal figure, or on the rare occasions when a score does not employ rehearsal figures at all.

Most of Tippett's essays were originally compiled in the now out-of-print collections *Moving into Aquarius* (2nd edn, St Albans: Paladin Books, 1974) and *Music of the Angels: Essays and Sketchbooks*, ed. Meirion Bowen (London: Eulenburg Books, 1980). Many, though not all, of these writings are included alongside others (some new) in the more recent *Tippett on Music*, ed. Meirion Bowen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). When an essay appearing in one of the earlier anthologies and *Tippett on Music* is cited, footnote references will be given to both volumes, though any quoted material will normally be from the earlier version of the text if there is any variation.