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978-0-521-02884-4 - The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett: Modern Times and Metaphysics

David Clarke

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The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett

Tippett is often cast as a composer with a strong visionary streak, but what does that mean for a twentieth-century artist? In this multi-faceted study, David Clarke explores Tippett's complex creative imagination – its dialogue between a romantic's aspirations to the ideal and absolute, and a modernist's sceptical realism. He shows how the musical formations of works such as *The Midsummer Marriage*, *King Priam* and *The Vision of Saint Augustine* resonate with the aesthetic and theoretical ideas of key figures in modern Western culture – some known to have been influential on the composer (such as Jung, Wagner and Yeats), others not usually associated with him (such as Kant, Nietzsche and Adorno). These interpretations illuminate the struggle between the rational and irrational in Tippett's music, and suggest that this might ultimately contain an apprehension of an emancipated future society. Analyses of late works such as the Triple Concerto and *Byzantium* also speculate on Tippett's gay sexuality as a (literally) critical element in his creative and political consciousness.

DAVID CLARKE is Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and is one of the leading commentators on the music of Tippett. He is the author of *Language, Form, and Structure in the Music of Michael Tippett* (2 vols., 1989) and the editor of *Tippett Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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To my colleagues: Ian, Eric, Agustín, Richard and Magnus

And in memory of my late colleague, Isobel

Last, not least, to Davey

Moral and metaphysical ideas and symbols are as indispensable to Mr Tippett as Celtic mythology or Indian theosophy was to Yeats; even when they are obscure, they convey to the straining, often puzzled, but always moved and at times wholly transported listener a vision of experience about whose authenticity there can be no doubt.

(Isaiah Berlin, in *Michael Tippett: A Symposium on his 60th Birthday*, ed. Ian Kemp (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 62)

The metaphysical categories live on, secularized . . . What metaphysics has to ponder is the extent to which [subjects] are nonetheless able to see beyond themselves.

(Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1996), 376)

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References to Tippett's scores and essays

With few exceptions Tippett's scores employ rehearsal figures rather than bar numbers. Accordingly, score references in this volume employ the term 'Fig.', with suffixes where necessary to designate points a given number of bars before or after the rehearsal figure in question. For example, 'Fig. 2⁺⁴' means 'four bars after Figure 2', or 'the fourth bar of Figure 2' (taking the first bar to be that in which the figure itself appears); conversely, 'Fig. 7⁻¹' means 'one bar before Figure 7'.

Most of Tippett's essays were originally compiled in the now out-of-print collections *Moving into Aquarius* and *Music of the Angels: Essays and Sketchbooks* (ed. Meirion Bowen). Many, though not all, of these writings are included alongside others (some new) in the more recent *Tippett on Music* (ed. Bowen). When an essay appearing in one of the earlier anthologies as well as in *Tippett on Music* is cited below, references are given to both volumes, though any quoted material is from the earlier version of the text if there is any variation.