

Introduction

Tracing Tippett's creative development requires us to 'imagine what it feels like to be driven, whether we will or no, to spend our life fashioning ever new images; to consider how that must colour our beliefs – to have this dominating and imperative faculty within one' (*TOM* 239). If 'the coming to birth of archetypal images is inevitably disquieting and bewildering' (*TOM* 239), it did not dissuade him from entering, completely and without abandon, into the activity. Tippett's trust in his own faculties was an expression of his faith in the creative act, and indeed one of the 'true' fundamentals that provided both the foundation for his 'Aspects of Belief' and the material for his eponymous essay.¹ In it, Tippett affirms his belief that the faculty of the artist 'to create images through which these mysterious depths of our being speak to us is a true fundamental' (*TOM* 239) and the music he created as a result gave formal expression to this ability.

Tippett's music is familiar to many, some pieces more than others, but the process he went through to create it – and the creative cycle which it is an essential part of – has yet to be fully integrated into the scholarship or remains largely unknown. These details provide a new perspective on his creative development and insight into his progress-as-an-artist. The true chronicle of Tippett's creative development is his *oeuvre*, and this book attempts a full commentary on nearly all his orchestral music, a genre that represents a significant portion of his output.² Narrated by the composer's letters, writings, interviews and broadcasts, and supported by evidence from his sketchbooks and manuscripts, this study allows for a particular and penetrating exploration into the intentions of the composer, and the multiplicity of meanings that reside within his works. My efforts to recount the moments when Tippett first conceived his orchestral music are designed to recapture the circumstances under which these works were conceived, to document how his visionary aspirations were developed and sustained throughout the creative cycle, and to chart how the conception was transmuted from idea through to its realization in performance. The primary

¹ See Michael Tippett, 'Aspects of Belief', in *Tippett on Music*, ed. Meirion Bowen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 237–44.

² Excluded from this study are any associated or derivative work such as *The Ritual Dances*, or *Suite from New Year*, or any transcriptions of previous works such as *Triumph* or *Water out of Sunlight*.

sources offer the most reliable account of these events and to that end they are given particular attention in the present study.

Often the historical context for Tippett's music is well known and for select compositions Tippett provided a running commentary on his progress, and gave a detailed account of his intentions. In other cases he remained curiously silent on the matter. In both instances, a close reading of his manuscripts reveals traces of the circumstances under which the work was created and even contains hidden details about the composer. Together with his idea notebooks and sketches, they provide insight into his 'personal art-coefficient', where the 'unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed' merge.³ Throughout this study I will give the creative artist's perspective pre-eminence and allow it to direct the commentary. I seek to integrate the biographical, analytical and metaphysical accounts of his music and to demonstrate how the creative cycles associated with his orchestral music chronicle his creative development. This integrated approach will provide insight into the embodied conceptual programmes that were designed with careful consideration and executed with meticulous detail. Tippett believed what he was committing to paper were a series of dramatizations and processes within himself, and his essays were an attempt to provide an account of how these were manifest in the music: 'from its genesis and notation to its realization as actual sound' (*TOM* vii). Tippett's creative cycle was built around these stages: genesis, notation and performance, and they provide the structure for each chapter that focuses exclusively on a single composition and gives a detailed account of each.

Tippett studies have benefited greatly from the analytical, biographical and critical studies on the man and his music.⁴ The trilogy of investigative research forms the basis of the current study, and the present work should be considered both an extension of and complementary to the existing scholarship. But much of this scholarship was produced while Tippett was still professionally active, and therefore not all the later works were included. In addition to including those works, one of the primary goals will be to use some of the more recently uncovered materials to reveal previously unknown details about the composer and his methods. In

³ Marcel Duchamp, 'The Creative Act', from *Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts* (Houston, Texas, April 1957), ¶ 15.

⁴ See Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music* (London: Eulenburg; NY: Da Capo Press, 1984); Arnold Whittall, *The Music of Britten and Tippett*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 1990); David Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Thomas Schuttenhelm (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Michael Tippett* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) and 'Between Image and Imagination: Tippett's Creative Process' in *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Tippett*, ed. Kenneth Glog and Nicholas Jones (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Introduction

3

addition, I seek to identify *topoi* and inter-opus associations that link particular and often successive compositions, while demonstrating a consistency that is not immediately evident.

The immanent meanings in Tippett's music can be traced back to the choices he made in the creative cycle. Once his selections were made, and the processes defined and influences documented, their rendered effects must be measured. This requires an integrated analytic approach that can both measure and interpret. Scott Burnham, one of the chief advocates of such an approach, writes, 'if analysis is closer to hermeneutic interpretation than we generally imagine, some of the explicitly hermeneutic approaches of this century can be said to share the positivist concerns more often attributed to analysis'.⁵ Burnham cautions against a wholesale return to 'the "metaphorical" stage of music interpretation',⁶ and in order to maintain analytic objectivity this is avoided. There are instances when this is appropriate, especially considering Tippett's strong metaphorical tendencies, and thus I do indulge in it, but only when the composer has left sufficient evidence that it will reveal significant information about his creative cycle. This perspective views the composition as an open work, where the possibility of connection (re)places the work in a continuum of other music, and allows for the inter-opus references in Tippett's music to resound and expand. Burnham's approach places formalism and poetic significance on equal ground and 'involves acknowledging the poetic content and applicability of our analytic assumptions, as well as the analytic utility of our poetic observations, allowing the poetic and the analytic to mingle freely, as mutually enhancing perspectives, rather than covertly and stiltedly, as they have under the systematic oppressions of academic balkanization'.⁷

It was not in Tippett's nature to use this vocabulary but his creative cycle appears to support such an approach. If we accept that Tippett's works are 'open', then a similar interpretive approach seems appropriate to apply in the rendering phase. Kramer argues that:

Open interpretation aims not to reproduce its premises but to produce something from them. It depends on prior knowledge but expects that knowledge to be transformed in being used. Open interpretation concerns itself with phenomena in their singularity, not their generality. It treats the object of interpretation more as event than as structure and always as the performance of a human subject, not as a fixed form independent of concrete

⁵ Scott Burnham, 'How Music Matters: Poetic Content Revisited', in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford University Press, 1999), 197.

⁶ See Thomas Sipe, 'The History and Taxonomy of Beethoven Criticism', in 'Interpreting Beethoven: History, Aesthetics, and Critical Reception', Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania (1992).

⁷ Burnham, 'How Music Matters', 199.

human agency. It brings the interpreter as subject into contact, and sometimes conflict, with the subject(s) – both the agents and the topics – of what is interpreted. Open interpretation represents an alternative to both empiricism and dogmatism as sources of knowledge.⁸

Tippett's music is perhaps best described as having a 'double-sided autonomy': a paradoxical situation when the properties that sustain a work's formalist claim to autonomy exist alongside, and are even occasionally dependent upon, its extra-musical properties, and the analyses that follow the accounts of the specific creative cycles are designed to illuminate such properties.⁹ Lydia Goehr argues that 'the concept of the purely musical can be interpreted to include the extramusical without compromising the formalist claim that music is, and is fundamentally about its [tonally] moving forms'.¹⁰ She insists, and I agree, that the methods of traditional analysis comprise an important part of locating and investigating the music's 'enhanced formalism': a process by which absolute music becomes enhanced by an 'extra' or transcendental meaning. For Tippett, mediating these two sides required considerable skill. The techniques he developed to achieve this were uniquely conceived to suit the conceptual demands of the individual composition and will be discussed in detail in the separate chapters, but they were largely conceived as extensions of those he found so compelling in the traditions of music that inspired his own. Much of Tippett's music, especially the dislocating aspects of its construction, originates in practices that are outside the traditions of Western classical music. He did not hold these traditions in exalted reverence, but an investigation into his orchestral music benefits by identifying certain self-selected antecedents that can illuminate the interpretations.

The patterns of Tippett's compositional process were set early and he never deviated from them, and they are the constant by which comparisons of his diverse music can be made and assist in tracking his creative development. Tippett's progress-as-an-artist was a quest: to enter into the myth-making process through the reawakening of archetypal sounds that dispersed metaphorical associations and allusions. The experiences that triggered his creative impulse are integral to understanding his music, which abounds in the multiplicities it celebrates, and central to its design and manifested through the compositional strategies. The conceptual designs found at the core of his music give structure and resonance to the images

⁸ Lawrence Kramer, *Interpreting Music* (Berkeley, London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 2.

⁹ Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁰ Goehr, *The Quest for Voice*, 19.

Introduction

5

that connect the original experience to its archetype, to which the compositional strategies give it a significant resonance. The strategies he employed allow for significant associations to resonate strongly while remaining entirely independent of any affiliation with the origin. If the music resounds in ambivalent tones, it is because the evocation of the conditions – the temporary and unstable contemporary embodiments of the models on which it is based – require it. Conversely, its power lies in its ability to reveal the images that were preconceived but drawn deliberately incomplete to provoke further inquiry into the significance of such combinations, and its origins.

Tippett's desire to be a composer arose quite spontaneously, as did the activation of the creative cycles. While intuition provided a stimulus for the initiation of the cycle, the structure of his compositions and the execution of the compositional process were consciously directed. He explained: 'As a creative musician, I can designate two general categories of activity which enable me to capture and express this inner flow of experience. One entails spontaneity and accident; the other, a more self-conscious process of testing and measuring.'¹¹ Spontaneity, as distinct from choice and measurement, still held the capacity to reveal authentic truths, and Tippett continued to explore its potential throughout his creative development. His compositions required a careful balance between 'spontaneity and measurement' and an investigation into his creative cycle demonstrates how this was calibrated.

The creative condition

The principal event in any creation narrative is its beginning. Origins, while significant, are also often remote, and accurate accounts of their occasions can be difficult to recount. The genesis of a complex and multivalent art-object presents considerable challenges in this regard as its inception is rarely traceable to a single experience, and the protracted creative process involved in producing such an object must admit successive experiences as equal in their influence to the ones that activated the creative cycle from the beginning. To locate the origin of a musical composition – to trace the trajectory of its development as it arcs and accelerates towards a performance – requires a broad inquiry that should include the precondition, apprehension and rendering. Because every informed performance is a

¹¹ Keith Spence and Giles Swayne, 'The Composer's World', *How Music Works*, ed. Keith Spence and Giles Swayne (London and New York: Macmillan, 1981), 347.

recreation of a composition's genesis, and an opportunity to re-enact moments from the creative cycle that led to its manifestation, it should also include key moments from its reception history. The orchestral music of Michael Tippett invites such critical inquiry as the creative cycles that produced his visionary music, including the projection of strong imagery and the *re*-presentation (in performance) of the embodied conceptual designs that remain at the core of his compositions, provide new insight into his creative development.

The arc of Tippett's creative development was long but it made a slow and deliberate bend towards originality. Tippett was a late-bloomer, his first mature compositions did not begin to appear until he was in his thirties, but he discovered his creative mandate quite early in his creative development – adopted from a line in Yeats's *Lapis Lazuli*: 'All things fall and are built again / And those that build them again are gay' – and displayed it, unapologetically, at the climax of his first opera *The Midsummer Marriage* (1946–52). The compositions that predate the opera reach always towards this mandate, and the ones that follow in its wake reaffirm it. With each mature composition, Tippett recreates the primordial catastrophe – the making and shattering of the world – and the creative act that follows is a natural consequent to the first-order destruction. Tippett preferred, like Yeats:

to call it activation of the Great Memory; that immense reservoir of the human psyche where images age-old and new boil together in some demoniac cauldron; images of the past, shapes of the future; images of vigour for a decadent period, images of calm for one too violent; images of reconciliation for worlds torn by division; images of abounding, generous, exuberant beauty in an age of fear, mediocrity, and horror comics. (TOM 281)

Although he greatly admired Yeats, and placed himself firmly within the Yeatsian tradition – appropriating and adapting the poet's creative conceits for his own – Tippett never succumbed to occultism. Instead, he held fast to his own mytho-poetic path that led him to increasingly original conceptualizations that inform his music. With the exception of Wagner, no other composer matches Tippett's myth-mining or myth-making capacity. In addition to the mytho-poetics that inform his music, especially the operas, which loom large over the orchestral works that were composed in their wake, or which served as strong precursors to them, it provided him with a foundation for the origins of the creative instinct. Fashioning his own version of a Yeatsian mask, Tippett remarked: 'I feel curiously objective about composition. I am the person to whom the inspiration comes, but I know I that am not its originator' (SOE). Tippett believed 'the drive to create

Introduction

7

has been so constant through the ages, and is so intense in its operation, that it is difficult for those submitting to it not to feel it as evidence of things beyond the individually personal' (*MOA* 33). According to Tippett, the creative artist was to mediate the conscious and the unconscious, and from it fashion the details of the composition:

It is the feeling a creative artist has when he knows he has become the instrument of some collective imaginative experience – or, as Wagner put it, that a myth is coming once more to life. I know that, for me, so soon as this thing starts, I am held willy-nilly and cannot turn back. But I know also that somewhere or other, in books, in pictures, in dreams, in real situations, everything is sooner or later to be found which *belongs* for all the details of the work, which is, as it were, ordained. And everything is accepted or rejected eventually according to whether it *fits* this preordained *thing*, which itself will not be fully known until it is finished. This method of acceptance or rejection of material presented to or found by the mind is that used, of course, in fashioning any work of art. (*TOM* 201)

Tippett's creative drive was constant and obsessive. Plato's Phaedrus, who characterized this drive as divine madness or possession by a god, was the foundation for understanding his own procreative compulsion. Tippett wrote: 'From my own experience, as one whose habit is to create things, this process of imagination is outside of our control. It lives us, rather than we live it' (*TOM* 4). But it was psychology not philosophy that offered him the most compelling explanations of creative drive, and his own writings on the topic make liberal use of the concepts and terminology commonly found in psychological texts, especially those of Carl Jung, whose writings he read in great quantity in the late 1930s, the same time he was approaching his creative maturity. He also understood these drives were not inexhaustible, and thus he planned regular breaks and holidays to relieve the stress of his composition schedule. While his creative drive remained strong throughout his life, it did eventually cease. Shortly after he completed *The Rose Lake* (1991–3) he remarked: 'I've finished now. I've stopped. It stopped. It's very curious. It happened about three years ago. And now I have had to make a new lifestyle in which it doesn't exist.'¹²

Ezra Pound believed artists were the antennae of the race. Both Pound and Tippett reinstated the ancient belief that the creative artist must possess both intuition and a talent for invention. Tippett drew further distinctions and placed special emphasis on the creative artist

¹² 'David Peat Interviews Composers: Sir Michael Tippett 1905–1998', June 1996, www.f davidpeat.com/interviews/tippett.htm (accessed 1 July 2012).

as distinct from the artist creator.¹³ The latter put the emphasis on ‘the importance of fantasy and imagination, and the mystery in our sense of the Beautiful’ while the former focused the mind on ‘the artistic man as creator; to imagine what it feels like to be driven, whether we will or no, to spend one’s life’ fashioning new images and ‘to consider how that must colour our beliefs – to have this dominating and imperative faculty within one’ (*MOA* 51–2). Although Tippett believed ‘those who are able make an *a priori* judgement, a kind of prophecy, based on some intuitive apprehension, which enables them to imagine the music in its clear statement, such as the composer has done in the process of creation’, he did not expect the music – his music – would ever find a ‘big public’ (*MIA* 91).¹⁴ He remained keenly aware of the ‘wide and enduring disrelation between all new art and the big public’, but believed the role of the artistic creator was to: ‘affirm simply that I know of no other absolute in this matter than the power of such creative energies as I possess; that I look, therefore, at public and patronage through the eyes of a dedicated person, who must do what he has to do, whether the issue is acceptable or not; that my passion is to project into our mean world music which is rich and generous’ (*TOM* 278–80).

Ultimately, Tippett’s creative condition hinged on the cultural condition that he sought to occupy, comprehensively. He accepted completely his position in a cultural moment that asks (*pace* Hölderlin) ‘What are poets for in this barren age?’ and affirmed his belief in the creative act as an activity that puts *remaking* – binding together fragments of the past where his original material was conceived to allow specific and intended associations to resonate strongly throughout – as a fundamental precondition of his aesthetic enterprise. Despite the spiritual malady of his ‘barren age’ (*MIA* 150), Tippett submitted entirely to the creative drive that was constant through the ages and went in search for eternal images to transcend the immediate ones of his inheritance. A closer examination of Tippett’s creative cycles, with a special emphasis on his orchestral works, will provide an objective assessment of his accomplishments, and a more accurate measure of his progress-as-an-artist in his process of individuation as a composer.

¹³ See Michael Tippett, ‘What I Believe’, in *Music of the Angels: Essays and Sketchbooks of Michael Tippett*, selected and ed. Meirion Bowen (London: Eulenburg Books, 1980), 51–2.

¹⁴ See Michael Tippett, ‘What do We Perceive in Modern Art?’, in *Moving into Aquarius* (Frogmore, St Albans, Hertfordshire: Paladin Books, 1974), 91. See also Michael Tippett, ‘A Composer and His Public’, in *Tippett on Music*, ed. Meirion Bowen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 277–81.

The creative cycle

Tippett’s creative cycles were often long and protracted, but they typically followed a similar pattern.¹⁵

Phase	Condition
Precondition–Preconception	absence
<i>Einfall</i> –experience	acquisition
Image–Accretion	accumulation
Transformation–Notation	transmutation
Performance–Reception	projection

Each cycle recognized a unique condition that initiated a different phase. Traversing between phases required a poetic crossing and an inflation of intention. The progression of phases was continuous and the process accumulative. This is not, of course, a universal theory of creativity but rather a paradigm for understanding Tippett’s creative cycles as he experienced them from beginning to end. The details of each phase are unique to the individual cycles and essential for understanding the compositions and thus are included in the chapters that correspond with each.

In the Precondition–Preconception phase, we find Tippett prepossessed and unaware of the immanent impulse about to be activated by the discovery of an ironic absence – a gap or ending in the historical continuum – that will allow his authentically original composition to resonate.¹⁶ Although the Precondition–Preconception phase includes an account of the creative artist just prior to their apprehension of the art-object, it also includes the broader cultural context of the historical moment. Tippett employed archetypal imagery and corresponding sounds partly in an effort to conceal and transcend the immediate experiences that initially activated the creative cycle. He believed it was the artist’s responsibility ‘to give formal clarity to these analytically unknowable transcendent intuitions’, and also to provide works of art that can ‘endure to enrich later minds when the whole social life from which they sprang has disappeared’ (MOA 25).

Tippett’s *Einfall*–experience – the inspirational spark that gave his creative cycle propulsion – was an involuntary and spontaneous response to something external. Tippett often relied on a ‘trick of correspondence’ between the external stimulus and the internal impulse, ‘for the “thing” inside only works if the proper image is offered from the outside’ (TOM 3). This ‘trick of correspondence’, between the creative impulse and the ‘image

¹⁵ See Schuttenhelm, ‘Between Image and Imagination’, 103–18.
¹⁶ See Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of our Climate* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 375.

that is there already, waiting to be activated', provided the necessary charge that allowed the conceptual programme to develop and in so doing the composition acquired its purpose and inevitability.¹⁷ In order for this to be genuine, Tippett asserted it must be involuntary. The apprehension of the initiating concept should be immediate and unprompted and not intentionally premeditated. He explained: 'I would never say go into this as a deliberate act in order to discover. My acceptance of, or way down into, the collective unconscious – did I use it, did I know I was doing it, as a sort of calculated technique for producing revelation . . . no' (*Doty* 10).

Tippett found precedence for using conceptual programmes in the creative cycles of Eliot and Yeats. Discussing how this applied to his own cycle he explained:

One has to make the concept extraordinarily clear and the measurements extraordinarily clear before searching for the solidarity and actual expressions of the concept. I talked a lot about this with T. S. Eliot because he was fascinated by this division. And he said once, in his rather funny way, 'Of course, the words come last,' and it was literally so . . . I'm on that line. Therefore, I know already what the accident is that I'm hoping for; that the spontaneous I want tomorrow is going to fit into that place which I've put there today. The trust I have by now, in my own process, is that I have within reason never been let down. (*Doty* 40–1)

Tippett allowed spontaneity to provide him with the apprehension of the guiding image or concept that could suggest a new composition. To Tippett, the ability to remain open to the suggestive power of an unsolicited image was an essential quality of an artist. Tippett wrote: 'It seems to me that the artist is often after an element unknown to himself, a kind of spontaneity, which has been described many times and given many jargons from Plato onwards. This spontaneity is a conceptual spark, and a spark of self-fertilisation' (*Doty* 10). Once this had occurred, Tippett could proceed confidently through the creative cycle. He explained:

The *Anfall* [*sic*] as the Germans would say, then has to happen. That is more difficult. Once there, by what ever means one uses, then as far as I'm concerned, I can proceed from the start to the end. I can even write it down in full score to go to be made into a vocal score and be printed act by act before anything further is done at all. I never have to go back.¹⁸

¹⁷ Michael Tippett (and others) with Natalie Wheen, *Einfall*, radio broadcast (BBC Radio 3, 20 February 1995).

¹⁸ Richard Dufallo, *Trackings: Composers Speak with Richard Dufallo* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 355.