

Nantwich Choral Society

MICHAEL TIPPET A CHILD OF OUR TIME

GERALD FINZI LO! THE FULL FINAL SACRIFICE



SATURDAY 11th APRIL 1992

The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30 p.m.

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA
Leader: Andrew Long

Catrin Ley, soprano

Susan Pascoe, contralto

Robert Horn, tenor

Martin Bussey, bass

conducted by
Stephen Buckman



— PROGRAMME —

Gerald Finzi

(1901 - 1956)

LO! THE FULL FINAL SACRIFICE

Gerald Finzi's anthem "Lo! The Full Final Sacrifice" was composed in 1946, originally with organ accompaniment, but, like Elgar's *Sursum Corda*, we will be hearing it without the organ, in a version which the composer made for a performance the following year using the instrument he understood best of all, the orchestra.

Finzi was by nature a passionately dedicated yet introverted man, happiest when working in contemplative isolation, and his music reflects this. Each of his relatively small number of compositions was painstakingly polished before being presented to the world and each has an intensity that is tempered by the austerity of his musical style. "Lo! The Full Final Sacrifice" uses a text by Richard Crashaw, one of the 17th century English metaphysical poets whose temperament was so close to Finzi's own. By capturing the essence of each section of the poem and eschewing mere word-painting, Finzi puts the words into relief and actually heightens the medieval ecstasy of the poetry through the very restraint of his sometimes transcendently beautiful music.

Sir Edward Elgar

(1857 - 1934)

SURSUM CORDA

"*Sursum Corda*" was one of Elgar's earliest published works and was written for a visit to Worcester by the then Duke of York in April 1894. It is a short but by no means slight piece and was originally scored for brass, timpani and strings with a prominent part for solo organ, although in tonight's performance the organ is replaced by the woodwind section of the orchestra. Two years earlier, Elgar had had his first major success with the "Serenade for Strings", and some of the technical assurance and quality of that piece can also be heard in the string writing of "*Sursum Corda*".

INTERVAL

Sir Michael Tippett

(1905 -)

A CHILD OF OUR TIME

"A CHILD OF OUR TIME", as Sir Michael Tippett has written, "arose out of the general situation in Europe before the Second World War. But a Europe, for me, stretching out through its torments towards Russia in the East, and even America in the West. So that though, after much searching, the final jolt into compassion came from a particular political event, I knew from the first that the work itself had to be anonymous and general, in order to reach down to the deeper levels of our common humanity ... When in November of that year (1938), the cruellest and most deliberate of the Nazi pogroms was launched on the pretext of an incident in Paris, the personal amalgam of general compassion for all outcasts and particular susceptibility to the Nazi horror fused into a clear artistic image".

What had happened in Paris was that, while in hiding at his uncle and aunt's house there, a 17-year old Polish Jew called Herschel Grynszpan had shot and injured a German diplomat in a desperate act of protest at the expulsion of fellow Polish Jews, including his own mother, from Germany. His misguided action gave the Nazis a focus for rising anti-semitism which led not only to his own death but also to the death of six million other Jews in the concentration camps and gas chambers of the Holocaust.

Tippett immediately began putting together a text for "A Child of our Time" and started composing the music for the oratorio in September 1939, two days after war broke out. The music that these events drew from the composer is naturally often tragic and sombre, but there are also exciting moments, sometimes angry or aggressive, particularly for the chorus, while the soloists have some of the most beautiful music in the piece, full of sorrow and tenderness. All these moods are reflected in the five well-known Negro spirituals that occur at key-points in the drama as deliberate modern equivalents to the Lutheran chorales in Bach's settings of the Passion.

Handel's *Messiah* gave the work its three-part structure, in which the central action is foreshadowed and meditated upon in the two outer sections. In the composer's own words, "Part 1 deals with the general state of oppression in our time; Part 2 presents the particular story of a young man's attempt to seek justice by violence and the catastrophic consequences; while Part 3 considers the moral to be drawn, if any. "A Child Of Our Time" is indeed a Passion, in which the boy's death is presented as an atonement for the world's evil, so that out of winter there can be a hope of spring. The message of "A Child Of Our Time" is printed at the front of the score like a motto, in a line from T. S. Eliot:

"The darkness declares the glory of light".

Colin Bromelow