

■ *Nantwich Choral Society* ■

M TIPPETT
A Child of our Time

**R VAUGHAN
WILLIAMS**
Dona Nobis Pacem



**SATURDAY 22nd NOVEMBER
1997**

**The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30pm.**

Nantwich Choral Society

NANTWICH SINFONIA
(Leader: James Dickenson)

Fiona Motherway, *soprano*

Marjorie Seddon, *contralto*

James Gilchrist, *tenor*

David Campbell, *bass*

Conducted by
Stephen Buckman

NATIONAL FEDERATION
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~ PROGRAMME ~

DONA NOBIS PACEM

R Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

- I Agnus Dei
- II Beat! beat! drums!
- III Reconciliation
- IV Dirge for two veterans
- V The angel of death
- VI O man greatly beloved

The world that had been swept away by the Great War is at the heart of the cantata DONA NOBIS PACEM, composed in 1935 but incorporating the 'Dirge for two veterans' which Vaughan Williams had written before 1914. This sombre setting of a poem by Walt Whitman follows the frenzied clamour of 'Beat! beat! drums!' which together form a commentary on the horror of war and its aftermath. The first movement of the cantata contrasts the soprano's ethereal supplications with the frantically impassioned pleas of the chorus.

Vaughan William's aim in writing the cantata was to highlight the growing danger of war in Europe, and if by the time the work received its London premiere in February 1938 the confident optimism of the finale rang rather hollow, the final prayer for peace and 'good-will toward men' has a timeless relevance.

~ INTERVAL ~

A CHILD OF OUR TIME

M. Tippett

PART I

- The world turns (chorus)
- The argument (contralto)
- Scena (chorus & contralto)
- The narrator (bass)
- Chorus of the oppressed
- I have no money for my bread (tenor)
- How can I cherish my man (soprano)
- Steal away (chorus)

PART II

- The star rises in midwinter (chorus)
- The narrator (bass)
- Double chorus of persecutors & persecuted
- The narrator (bass)
- Chorus of the self-righteous
- The narrator (bass)
- Scena (solo quartet)
- Nobody knows (chorus)

Scena	(bass & contralto)
The narrator	(bass)
The terror	(chorus)
The narrator	(bass)
A spiritual of anger	(chorus & bass)
The boy sings in his prison	(tenor)
The mother	(soprano)
The dark forces rises	(contralto)
By and by	(chorus & soprano)

PART III

The cold deepens	(chorus)
The soul of man	(contralto)
Scena	(bass & chorus)
General ensemble	(chorus & quartet)
Deep river	(chorus & quartet)

'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

FIONA MOTHERWAY (soprano) comes from Western Australia. In 1994 she completed her studies at the Royal Academy of Music, London, graduating with the Dip.R.A.M. for Opera. At the R.A.M. she performed the roles of the Governess, 'Turn of the Screw' (Britten), Countess Lisa, 'Das Land des Lachelns' (Lehar), 'Semele' (Handel), and Fiordiligi, 'Così fan tutte' (Mozart) a role she has subsequently performed with other opera companies, including British Youth Opera. With the R.A.M. orchestra she was the soprano soloist in Mahler's 4th Symphony conducted by Sir Colin Davis.

An experienced operatic performer her repertoire includes the Countess and Susanna 'Le Nozze di Figaro', Musetta 'La Bohème', Pamina 'Die Zauberflöte', Gilda 'Rigoletto' and Olympia 'Les Contes d'Hoffmann'. Fiona has a particular interest in the operas of Handel and has performed the roles of Melissa 'Amadigi di Gaula', Atalanta 'Xerxes' and the title role of 'Semele'.

Fiona has given recitals at major London venues including Handel arias and duets at St John's, Smith Square and a French song recital at St Martin's in the Field. Her oratorio work includes Messiah (Handel), Creation, Nelson and Harmony Masses (Haydn), Requiem, C Minor, Coronation and Credo Masses (Mozart), Magnificat and Requiem (Rutter) and the Bach B Minor Mass.

MARJORIE SEDDON (Contralto) was born in Macclesfield and now lives in Betley, North Staffordshire. She trained as a biology teacher in Birmingham and it was then that she started singing lessons with Norma Goldie. She has since studied with Ellis Keeler and Jane Ginsborg.

Marjorie made her Potteries debut as Carmen in a staged version of Bizet's opera. She has built a strong reputation as a soloist with her warm, beautiful voice and sensitive artistry.

Previous engagements include singing Clod of Clay in the opera 'Lamentations of Thel' by Dmitri Smirnov, Didymus in Handel's 'Theodora' and Brahms's 'Alto Rhapsody'. Oratorio performances include Dvorak's 'Stabat Mater', Bach's 'St Matthew Passion', Handel's 'Judas Maccabeus' and many performances of 'Messiah'.

JAMES GILCHRIST (tenor) began working as a full-time singer a year ago. Until then he had been working as a hospital doctor. He currently studies with Janice Chapman.

James is much in demand as a consort singer, and increasingly as a soloist. His ensemble singing has mostly been with specialist early music groups such as The Sixteen, the Tallis Scholars, Gabrieli Consort, Cardinal's Musick and Clerk's Group. He has appeared with Polyphony and the Monteverdi Choir.

As a concert soloist, James has received critical acclaim for his many performances as Evangelist in Bach's passions. He will appear as Evangelist in Bach's Christmas Oratorio in St John's, Smith Square in December. He recently performed Britten's Serenade in the St Endellion Festival, and will sing Britten's St Nicholas with Westminster Abbey Choir and the English Chamber Orchestra in the Barbican later this year. He has recently recorded songs by Grainger with the Royal Northern College of Music.

James took part in a production of Acis and Galatea with Leicester University earlier this year, and recently appeared in concert performances of two Schubert operas with 'I Fagiolini' (which toured Norway). In October he took the role of Ferrando in Oxford University's production of Così fan Tutte. In the same month he appeared as Peter Simple in Vaughan William's opera Sir John in Love, in a broadcast concert performance at the Barbican, under Richard Hickox.

DAVID CAMPBELL (Bass Baritone) was born in Lincolnshire and was a chorister in the choir of Manchester Cathedral as well as a pupil of Chetham's School of Music. In 1987 he moved to London to continue his singing studies at the Royal Academy of Music with the help of a Foundation Scholarship, winning many awards, most notably the Chrichton Opera Prize, and participating in masterclasses with Elizabeth Soderstrom, Sir Geraint Evans, Niccolai Gedda and Luigi Alva.

Since leaving college David has been much in demand as an opera performer working with companies such as Opera of the South, DGOS Opera Ireland, Crystal Clear Opera, Opera East and Opera Brava. In 1995 David played the role of Gasparo in a new production of Donizetti's 'The Battered Husband' for the Covent Garden Festival of Opera and he also appeared in the award-winning production of Massogsky's 'Kovanshchina' by English National Opera, with whom he will be singing again during 1997.

David has given recitals throughout Britain and abroad and has made appearances at the Cambridge, Chester and Canterbury Arts Festivals. His numerous oratorio performances include 'Messiah', B minor Mass, 'Creation' and 'Elijah' with choirs such as Finchley, Kingston and Huntingdon Choral Societies and Nottingham Bach Choir as well as two previous appearances in Nantwich.

In 1992 he made his debut at St John's, Smith Square, singing Rossini's 'Petite Messe Solennelle', whilst in 1995 he sang 'St Mathew Passion' at the Snape Maltings Concert Hall, Aldeburgh. Future engagements include concerts with the Danesborough Chorus and Leek and Altrincham Choral Societies.

STEPHEN BUCKMAN (conductor) studied organ, harpsichord, composition, conducting and singing in London and Paris. He has divided his professional life between the concert hall and the theatre. Stephen has toured the U.K., France and Germany as organist, harpsichordist and conductor, and has worked as a musical director in London's West End and in New York.

As well as conducting, Stephen is well-known as a Voice Coach specialising in the field of vocal characterisation. He has broadcast on BBC television and radio. Stephen has written many orchestral and choral arrangements for broadcast and live performance, as well as scores for several radio and television plays.

Stephen began conducting Nantwich Choral Society in 1983, and has been the Conductor of Horsham Chamber Choir since 1993.



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