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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE PIANO SONATAS OF SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT:  
A CONTEXTUAL AND ANALYTICAL STUDY

A Document

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

By

AMANDA LEIGH STRINGER  
Norman, Oklahoma  
1999

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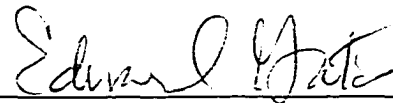
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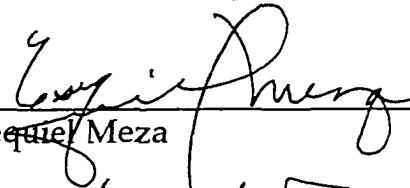
THE PIANO SONATAS OF SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT:  
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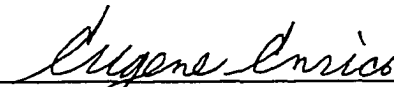
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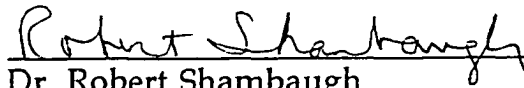
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THE PIANO SONATAS OF SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT:  
A CONTEXTUAL AND ANALYTICAL STUDY

BY: AMANDA LEIGH STRINGER

MAJOR PROFESSOR: EDWARD GATES, D.M.A.

The purpose of this study is to provide an introduction to the work and life of Michael Tippett through an examination of his piano sonatas. Tippett wrote four highly individual piano sonatas that together constitute a major contribution to the genre. This study presents background information on and analysis of Sonata No. 1 (1930), Sonata No. 2 (1962), Sonata No. 3 (1973), and Sonata No. 4 (1984). While much of the discussion centers around construction, style, and meaning in the piano sonatas, substantial attention is given to some of Tippett's other works and to the biographical and philosophical components that influenced these compositions.

This document consists of an Introduction, Prelude, three Interludes, four Chapters (one covering each sonata), and a Postlude. The Introduction consists primarily of a previously unpublished transcript of a British Broadcasting Corporation radio program in which Christopher Wines interviews the renowned pianist Peter Donohoe on the subject of Tippett's piano sonatas.

The Prelude summarizes Tippett's formative years—those leading up to the composition of Sonata No. 1. Between each subsequent chapter are Interludes that link the discussions of the individual sonatas. These interludes lead the reader through Tippett's life, bridging the decades between sonatas with information about his political and moral beliefs, his intellectual

pursuits, his multi-faceted and various public personae, and the forces which influenced his music. While the chapters focus mainly on the piano sonatas, the interludes will help the reader understand the evolution of Tippett's musical style and personal philosophy.

Because each of the sonatas has unique characteristics and represents a different stage of Tippett's compositional life, the analytic approach varies among the sonatas. While not rejecting traditional methods where they are useful, the focus is on the listener's aural experience, with the goal of revealing the strengths and celebrating the differences between the individual sonatas. Topics addressed include form and construction, harmonic language, rhythmic language, and symbolism. Diagrams are used where they help to clarify form. Special attention is given to Sonata No. 4, for it is the largest, most complex, and least researched of the four sonatas. The Postlude which concludes the document is a summary of Tippett's style and influences.

**THE PIANO SONATAS OF SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT:**  
**A CONTEXTUAL AND ANALYTICAL STUDY**

**Purpose of Study**

Sir Michael Tippett (1905-1998) is one of the most beloved and important English composers of the twentieth century. In the Festschrift compiled to honor Tippett's eightieth birthday, Peter Maxwell Davies wrote: "Michael Tippett is the most ruggedly individual composer among today's composers—an elemental force, a prime mover."<sup>1</sup> According to Wilfred Josephs: "There cannot be many English composers of my generation who were not . . . influenced by the music of Michael Tippett."<sup>2</sup> "I don't know of another composer currently creating whose output is such a mixture of applied intelligence and achieved beauty," added Andre Previn.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his long and productive life Tippett wrote primarily in traditional genres such as the oratorio, symphony, and string quartet, and was particularly admired as a composer of opera. Tippett came to composing relatively late, beginning his career in a strictly neoclassic vein and going on to experiment with a variety of forms and styles. Although he was certainly

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<sup>1</sup>Geraint Lewis, ed., *Michael Tippett, O.M. : A Celebration*. (Turnbridge Wells: Baton, 1985), 7

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

aware of the trends and aesthetics of twentieth century music, Tippett never aligned himself with any particular school or group of composers. Rather, his sympathetic reaction to modern social issues inspired and guided his musical processes, especially later in his career. Tippett's sensitivity toward humanity is emphasized in one of his most poetic and memorable essays:

I know that my true function within a society which embraces all of us is to continue an age-old tradition, fundamental to our civilisation, which goes back into pre-history and will go forward into the unknown future. This tradition is to create images from the depths of the imagination and to give them form, whether visual, intellectual, or musical. For it is only through images that the inner world communicates at all. 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 a world torn by division. And in an age of mediocrity and shattered dreams, images of abounding, generous, exuberant beauty.<sup>4</sup>

This hope-filled, visionary attitude permeates Tippett's music, and his public philosophizing about life and art reveal a man in search of truth. Tippett wished to examine, inspire, and heal through music, and one cannot embark on a study of his work without acknowledging and understanding those forces which generated it.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide the pianist with an introduction to the work and to the life of this extraordinary composer through an examination of his piano sonatas. Tippett wrote four highly individual piano sonatas that together constitute a major contribution to the genre. This study will present an analytical and historical discussion of Sonata No. 1 (1930), Sonata No. 2 (1962), Sonata No. 3 (1973), and Sonata No. 4 (1984). While much of the discussion will center around construction, style, and meaning in the piano sonatas, substantial attention will be given to some of

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<sup>4</sup>Michael Tippett, "Poets in a Barren Age" (1971-2), *Moving Into Aquarius* (London : Paladin, 1974, 2d ed., rev. and enl.) , 155-6.



Tippett's other works and to the biographical and philosophical components that influenced these compositions.

Yehudi Menuhin's contribution to the above-mentioned Festschrift characterizes Tippett's core conviction:

Perhaps what distinguishes the great English composer from his colleagues the world over is the somewhat old-fashioned concept, now often discredited by the over-sophisticated, cynical and brutal, that the good and the beautiful are broadly synonymous.<sup>5</sup>

This study will seek to help the pianist discover what it means for the good and beautiful to be synonymous, a concept most devotedly pursued by Tippett the man as well as Tippett the composer. To accomplish this goal, the study will explore the unique qualities of each individual sonata as well as those traits they share.

### Need for the Study

As his colleagues and admirers have stated, Tippett has proven himself an important figure among twentieth century composers, one whose life and work deserve study. Despite this, Tippett's piano sonatas are relatively unknown to many pianists. Because so little has been written about the sonatas, even pianists who are familiar with the works are often uninformed about their structure and significance. Most writing on Tippett focuses on his operas, oratorios, and symphonic works, and studies devoted to the piano sonatas are often general and unspecific. The most substantial treatment of the piano sonatas—Frank Edward Scott's "An Essay on Sir Michael Tippett's

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<sup>5</sup>Lewis, *A Celebration*, 87.

Three Piano Sonatas"<sup>6</sup>—was written before the fourth sonata, and much important scholarship, was in existence. Scott's discussion begins with an introduction that places the sonatas within the framework of his dramatic works (oratorios and operas), and his discussion concludes with a brief summary of Tippett's changing style. Neither of these sections adequately address Tippett's growth as a composer or accounts for the individuality of each of the four sonatas, nor do they relay much information about Tippett's personal belief system. The evolutionary journey of Tippett's compositional style and personal philosophy through his life is key to a full understanding of his music. Furthermore, because there is not a single complete analysis of the complex Sonata No. 4, this uncharted territory needs to be explored. Pianists should have access to a discussion of the piano sonatas that draws on the wealth of information Tippett has so willingly shared about his life, ideas, and compositional inspiration.

### Design and Procedure

This document consists of an Introduction, Prelude, three Interludes, four Chapters (one covering each sonata), and a Postlude. The Introduction is primarily a previously unpublished transcript of a British Broadcasting Corporation radio program in which Christopher Wines interviews the renowned pianist Peter Donohoe on the subject of Tippett's piano sonatas. (In researching the topic of Tippett's piano sonatas, I discovered this interview at the British National Sound Archive and received permission to transcribe it.) This interview provides an appropriate and meaningful

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<sup>6</sup>Frank Edward Scott, "An Essay on Sir Michael Tippett's Three Piano Sonatas." (D.M.A. diss., University of Iowa, 1978).

introduction to the piano sonatas because, as Tippett's long-time companion and biographer Meirion Bowen has written, ". . . for Tippett it is self-evident . . . that what the composer does is incomplete without the contributions made by the performers."<sup>7</sup>

The Prelude summarizes Tippett's formative years—those leading up to the composition of Sonata No. 1. Between each subsequent Chapter are Interludes that link the discussions of the individual sonatas. The Interludes lead the reader through Tippett's life, bridging the decades between sonatas with information about his political and moral beliefs, his intellectual pursuits, his multi-faceted and various public personae, and the forces which influenced his music. The Interludes are intended to help the reader understand the evolution of Tippett's musical style and personal philosophy and also enhance the flow of the paper.

The Chapters focus mainly on the music. The analytical approach I take in discussing the individual sonatas reflects Tippett's own instinctive approach to composition. A statement by Mr. Donohoe in this introductory interview recognizes this important facet of Tippett's creative process:

It seems very obvious to me that when Tippett writes something down he doesn't calculate anything mathematically, at least not in any complex way. He just feels it and it comes out and that's it. . . .

Tippett himself wrote,

Michelangelo spoke as though, for him, the beautiful forms of his statues were already there beforehand in the stone . . . as if he merely uncovered them, by chipping away the stone surrounding the image inside. . . . [Mozart said] that his best works of music appeared to him all at once, as though the time taken to have sounded them were

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<sup>7</sup>Meirion Bowen, *Michael Tippett*. The Contemporary Composers Series, ed. by Nicholas Snowman. (London : Robson Books, 1997, 2d ed.) , xvii.

reduced to a single moment. . . . his greatest gift, according to him, was the phenomenal memory which enabled him to hold the music he had imagined for days in his head.

From my own experience, as one whose habit is to create things, this process of imagination is outside our control. It lives us, rather than we live it.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Meirion Bowen has recounted that Tippett was “baffled by analytic dissection of his compositions.”<sup>9</sup> Tippett concludes the aforementioned essay with the following remarks:

If, in the music I write, I can create a world of sound wherein some, at least, of my generation can find refreshment for the inner life, then I am doing my work properly. It is a great responsibility: to try to transfigure the everyday by a touch of the everlasting, born as that always has been, and will be again, from our desire.

Donohoe’s comment on the intuitive quality of Tippett’s music, along with these passages in which Tippett focuses on “imagination,” the “world of sound” and “[transfiguring] the everyday” emphasize the composer’s instinctive approach to composition. This is not to say that Tippett’s music is not carefully structured—indeed, it is—but rather that he avoids abstract, rigorous compositional systems in favor of sounds which primarily are intended to “[refresh] the inner life.” That Tippett was “baffled by analytic dissection of his compositions” further suggests that it would be unproductive to attempt an analysis which necessitates the use of prefabricated categories. Therefore, an analytical approach to his music must leave room for flexibility—flexibility which parallels Tippett’s compositional processes and complements his intuitive choices.

A basis for this approach can be found in theorist Nicholas Cook’s book

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<sup>8</sup>Tippett, *Aquarius*, “A Composer’s Point of View,” 7-12.

<sup>9</sup>Bowen, *Tippett*, xvii.

*A Guide To Musical Analysis*.<sup>10</sup> In the preface Cook discusses how musical analysis causes one to “develop an intuitive knowledge of what works in music and what doesn’t, what’s right and what isn’t, that far exceeds your capacity to formulate such things in words or to explain them intellectually.”

Cook further states:

Personally I dislike the tendency for analysis to turn into a quasi-scientific discipline in its own right, essentially independent of the practical concerns of musical performance, composition or education. . . . I think the emphasis many analysts place on objectivity and impartiality can only discourage the personal involvement that is, after all, the only sensible reason for anyone being interested in music.

What Cook *does* believe in is an “inductive” approach, one which emphasizes the way “listeners experience [music] rather than the way it looks in the score.” He defines a *musical* analysis as one which analyzes the *musical experience*.

Because I wish to emphasize the unique characteristics of each of Tippett’s four sonatas and because the sonatas represent different stages of his compositional life, the analysis is modeled on Cook’s approach. While not rejecting analytical methods where they are useful, I also discuss the listener’s aural experience, hoping to reveal the strengths of and celebrate the differences between the individual sonatas. Form and construction, harmonic language, rhythmic language, and symbolism are addressed. Diagrams are used where they help to clarify form. Special attention is given to Sonata No. 4, for it is the largest, most complex, and least researched sonata. All discussion is developed against the background of the related literature. The ending Postlude summarizes Tippett’s style and influences.

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<sup>10</sup>Nicholas Cook, *A Guide To Musical Analysis*. (London : W. W. Norton & Co., 1987), 1-3, 237-245.

### Related Literature

Most previous scholarship focuses on Tippett's operas, symphonic works, and oratorios. The two most useful studies are Ian Kemp's *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*<sup>11</sup> and Meirion Bowen's *Michael Tippett*.<sup>12</sup> Kemp's remarkably comprehensive book explores Tippett's career chronologically. In doing so it provides detailed biographical information about Tippett as well as analyses of Tippett's music. (In this way it will influence my own discussion.) However, Kemp devotes the bulk of his analysis to Tippett's concert hall works and operas; the first three piano sonatas are discussed only generally and in relation to these larger works. Kemp does not include any information on Sonata No. 4, since his book was published in 1984 before the work was available for analysis. Meirion Bowen's book is similar in content to Kemp's; he, too, focuses most analytical attention on Tippett's large-scale works, although the study is proportionately smaller than Kemp's. A second, revised edition of Bowen's *Tippett*, released in 1997, includes a cursory two-page discussion of Sonata No. 4. Because both Ian Kemp and Meirion Bowen were personal friends of Tippett (Bowen was his companion from the mid-70s until his death in 1998), biographical information in their books is especially interesting, as are their seemingly subjective interpretations of his music. Because of his close relations to Kemp and Bowen, we may surmise that Tippett read and approved of these subjective interpretations of his music. This point is relevant to my own discussion of his music, for I will address issues of meaning and symbolism

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<sup>11</sup>Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. (London: Eulenburg Books, Ltd., 1984).

<sup>12</sup>Bowen, *Tippett*.

in the piano sonatas.

Tippett's own numerous writings—especially the autobiography *Those Twentieth Century Blues*<sup>13</sup>—are of particular relevance to an understanding of his perspective and opinions. I will discuss these writings in detail in the paper's second interlude.

Articles and essays on Tippett's music abound. Because he was such a public and outspoken figure in Britain, his life seemed to invite constant comment and criticism. And, because his music is complex and often *sui generis*, many theorists have struggled to find tools and a language adequate to analyze it. An example is David Clarke's "The Significance of the Concept 'Image' in Tippett's Musical Thought—A Perspective from Jung":

. . . to trace the various ramifications of the term 'image' for Tippett is effectively to chart a detailed picture of his aesthetic principles. . . . Yet what is possibly unexpected is the full extent to which the composer situates the function of art within a model of Jungian depth psychology. And this holds on more than a general aesthetic level. It actually impinges on the nature of musical material, such that Tippett's musical images manifest in an often productive (though sometimes problematic) tension between the demands of musical syntax . . . and a desire to transcend it. For the analyst . . . this has predictable implications, since the material frequently offers resistance to the reductive categories inherent in analytical models predicated by rational thought.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The following are writings by Tippett: *Those Twentieth Century Blues: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1991); *Music of The Angels—Essays and Sketchbooks of Michael Tippett*, selected and edited by Meirion Bowen (London: Eulenburg Books, 1980); *Moving Into Aquarius* (see footnote # 2); *Tippett on Music*, ed. by M. Bowen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup>David Clarke, "The Significance of the Concept of Image in Tippett Musical Thought—A Perspective from Jung," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 121, pt.1 (1996) : 103.

Articles such as Clarke's, which examine Tippett's music from a new perspective, are liberating—they invite creative analysis and interpretation of Tippett's musical goals. Along with Tippett's own writings, they help one enter into the linguistic world of Tippett criticism, and they provide a foundation upon which to build an informed study.

Articles devoted specifically to the piano sonatas are short and, for the most part, general. British pianist Paul Crossley, a close friend and champion of Tippett's, has written two brief and very similar articles on the third sonata,<sup>15</sup> both of which are much like program notes—they outline the forms of the movements and relay Tippett's own comments on the work. Crossley has also contributed two pieces on the fourth sonata; they, too, are brief, yet at this point they are among the only published writings on this huge work.<sup>16</sup> Here in the United States, British-born pianist Clive Swansbourne has adopted a role similar to that of Crossley, and has both performed all the sonatas and written articles on three of them. One of Swansbourne's articles is an elementary performance guide to the third sonata,<sup>17</sup> but the usefulness of this guide is limited since the third sonata is so difficult that only the most accomplished and seasoned pianist would

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<sup>15</sup>Paul Crossley, "Tippett's Third Piano Sonata," *Composer* 70 (Summer 1980): 15-16; "Tippett's New Sonata," *The Listener* 89, no. 2304 (24 May 1973): 697.

<sup>16</sup>Crossley, "The Fourth Piano Sonata" in *Michael Tippett, O.M. : A Celebration*, 231-33 and "Tippett's Fourth Piano Sonata," in program book from the Britten/Tippett Festival of the London Sinfonietta. London Festival: September-December 1986 (various venues).

<sup>17</sup>Clive Swansbourne, "Michael Tippett's Third Sonata—A Performance Guide," *Clavier* 29/1 (January 1990): 18-20.



attempt it. Swansbourne's two additional articles,<sup>18</sup> as well as one each by Andrew Ball and Roger Green<sup>19</sup> (the only others written specifically on the sonatas) serve primarily as introductions to these four works. Like Crossley's writings, they tend to focus on the most obvious aspects of the sonatas and fail to provide detailed discussion.

Three dissertations provide the foundation for a more detailed study: As has been mentioned, Frank Edward Scott's "An Essay on Sir Michael Tippett's Three Piano Sonatas,"<sup>20</sup> which does not include a biographical or historical perspective of the works, was written before Tippett composed his fourth sonata and therefore is not comprehensive; H. Gerald Anderson's "The Derivation of Michael Tippett's Piano Works From His Operas: A Study of 'The Midsummer Marriage' with the Piano Concerto and 'King Priam' with Sonata No. 2"<sup>21</sup> juxtaposes passages of music from the compared works without substantial analysis; Irene Ruth Bowling's "British Piano Music Since 1945: A Selected Survey"<sup>22</sup> includes an interesting, although general,

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<sup>18</sup>Swansbourne, "Sir Michael and The Piano," *Musical America* 109n6 (1989) : 92-3; also "The Piano Music of Sir Michael Tippett," *Piano Quarterly* 37, no. 147 (1989) : 19-21.

<sup>19</sup>Andrew Ball, "Tippett's Piano Sonatas: A Pianist's Reactions," *Music and Musicians* (January 1985) : 6; Roger Green, "Tippett's Piano Sonatas," *Piano Journal* 2/5 (1981) : 19-21.

<sup>20</sup>Scott, "Tippett's Three Piano Sonatas."

<sup>21</sup>Gerald H. Anderson, "The Derivation of Michael Tippett's Piano Works from His Operas" (D.M.A. diss., American Conservatory of Music, 1985).

<sup>22</sup>Irene Ruth Bowling, "British Piano Music Since 1945" (D.M.A. diss., University of Washington, 1989).

discussion of Tippett's music; Bowling's paper touches on all of Tippett's works for piano, yet devotes a mere eighteen pages to the topic.

Besides the brief program notes that Tippett himself provided his publisher Schott, other statements about the sonatas can be found on various CD and LP jackets, in the program book from the 1986 Britten/Tippett festival of the London Sinfonietta, and in music reviews.

### Introduction to the Piano Sonatas of Sir Michael Tippett

The following radio interview will serve as an introduction, a key note, to this study of Sir Michael Tippett's four piano sonatas. Here pianist Peter Donohoe talks to interviewer Chris Wines about the works from a performer's perspective, mixing anecdote with fact. The interview was originally broadcast at the intermission of BBC Radio 3's "Music for a While" program on Monday, January 16, 1995. The program (from Fairest Isle) was the third of five invitation concerts to celebrate the 90th birthday of Sir Michael Tippett and the 300th anniversary of Purcell's death.

A historical look at the solo piano sonata reveals that in the nineteenth century, after Viennese composers such as Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert brought the keyboard sonata to the fore, many composers' allegiance became split between the solo sonata and the character piece. The trend towards alternative forms has continued in the twentieth century: Debussy, Ravel, Schoenberg, and Webern wrote no piano sonatas and Bartók, Stravinsky, Copland, and Carter wrote just one apiece. Therefore, Tippett joins a small but distinguished group of contemporary composers—including Prokofiev, Scriabin, and Ives—in proving that the piano sonata can still be a powerful means of expression.

Tippett's four piano sonatas span his entire career, and through them it is possible to peer into many periods of the composer's long and fruitful life.

At the time of his death in January 1998, he was considered by many the greatest living English composer. Often Tippett, along with his friend Benjamin Britten, is credited with having brought British music back to the forefront of European art music, and his professional contribution was acknowledged through a proliferation of honors: he was made a Commander of the British Empire (1959) and a Companion of Honour (1979), and received a Knighthood (1966) as well as sixteen honorary doctorates. Furthermore, in 1983 he was chosen by the Queen to receive the highest British honor, the Order of Merit.

In the transcribed radio-interview which follows, many doors are cracked open, giving the reader a tantalizing glimpse of what is inside the fascinating but largely undiscovered world of Michael Tippett's art. Peter Donohoe's statements about Tippett's influences, his stylistic evolution, his pianism, and his importance as a modern British composer lead to questions about his total compositional output, his role as social activist and political commentator, and his place among the European modernists. The following chapters of the present study are an effort to find answers to these questions.

Tippett's Piano Sonatas: Peter Donohoe in Conversation with Chris Wines\*

**PD:** I have actually played all of Tippett's sonatas, sometimes within the same festival, and the first sonata is the most appealing to the audience—that's the first thing that one spots. I think a lot of people expect all Tippett's music to be rather less approachable than it really is, and particularly his early music. The first sonata is an incredibly exciting, jolly piece, with huge joy at the end. It really commands an audience from beginning to end; it's very melodic. Having said all that, it's, of course, rather traditional in style, and perhaps it's not fully developed yet—the style I mean—but it is still original and you do hear that it's very definitely Tippett; it's an individual voice. If I [were] being truly honest, I love playing that more than any of the others, although I realize that it's not the greatest one . . . but it's the most fun.

**CW:** When you say it's more "traditional," what exactly do you mean by that?

**PD:** Well, I really mean harmonically. It's tonal almost all the time. It's basically in G Major. [There are] a lot of jazz harmonies as well, particularly in the last movement, which has a very American influence generally. The first movement is very interesting in that it's a set of variations. When I say "interesting" [I mean that] it's unusual to begin a four-movement work

which basically is symphonic in scale with a set of variations, but that's what he's done. Gradually the variations really become less and less tonal, and the last variation—before the return of the theme—is rhythmically very convoluted, and sounds rather improvised, but it rises to this huge climax and bursts back into tonality at the end. It's terribly moving and rewarding to do because you can feel the tension rise in the audience if you really can pull it off. And people don't need to know it first [the sonata]—it's not one of those pieces you need to hear a lot. . . . It [produces] a very immediate reaction.

**PD:** The second movement is not really a set of variations, but has the feeling of one, on an old Scottish tune. I say "old Scottish tune" but it doesn't actually say that it is, and it sounds very Scottish! And then there is a scherzo, and a very jolly finale. I think that at least from the mood point of view this is really quite a traditional type of thing. But little things are different: for example, there's no trio in the scherzo—it's just a virtuoso triplet piece, which doesn't have really a contrasting section. It has a second theme but it's not a real contrast in the way that a scherzo and trio is.

**CW:** It seems very eclectic. You've described Scottish folk tunes, you've described jazz, you've described some of these old, traditional forms. . . .

**PD:** Perhaps that is a criticism in a way—it's saying that it's not [a] fully-developed style yet, which I'm sure is true. I'm sure Tippett would be the first to say so. But from my own point of view that doesn't matter. When I play it I just love doing it.

CW: What do you think his models were? Who were his models?

PD: It's very difficult for me, as a performer, to be very definite about it, but I know that Tippett himself claims that Beethoven is an enormous influence, and we do see a very definite influence of Beethoven's trying to expand the piano into an orchestra. He also says that Debussy's a great influence, and I can feel that intangibly without actually being able to say exactly what it is.

CW: Could we move on to the second sonata, [written] some ten, almost twenty years later? This is a very, very different work from the first sonata, isn't it?

PD: The second is very abrasive. It seems that he changed completely and decided to go for a rather astringent style during the early Sixties. It's got a lot in common with *King Priam*, the opera.

*Voice of Michael Tippett:* "In the second sonata there was deliberate reference to certain things I'd learnt—or taught myself to do—in *King Priam*, which meant that the sonata had some experimental ideas both in its form, and even the material, which is partly borrowed."

PD: It's rather intriguing to chart the progress of a composer. It doesn't really matter whether the composer is from this century or [when]ever. To actually play the music that goes across a composer's career and to see how one thing led to another is very, very fascinating for me as a performer, anyway. I think it's much better than selecting a small number of works from

each composer and just studying those. To see where they fit in to his development makes you play them differently, in fact. And it does seem that there is a sectionalization of Tippett's career as a composer. You get the feeling that he's rejected something completely and turned to another style, and then rejected that. The other one that springs to mind—basically doing it at the same time—is Stravinsky, who very obviously came to the end of a certain style then just changed, overnight, to something else.

The first thing that crosses my mind is the conciseness of the second [sonata]. It is, of course, obviously the shortest of the four. It's written in what appears to be a collage form. There is a section at the beginning marked "Tempo I", and a section at the end which is a return of the "Tempo I", and that does not reappear in the body of the piece at all—they're like bookends. And then within the piece there are, I think, up to eight different sections with different tempi. They get juxtaposed in what appears to be a random pattern. There is a feeling [of] a gradual development, but it's a very subtle one, and this is just the opposite of the first [sonata]. You really do need to hear this piece a lot, and you need to play it a lot to come to terms with it. Despite being the shortest one and probably the most frequently played, [this sonata is] actually in many ways the most difficult for the listener.

I played it in my competition in Moscow and I do remember that on the return of "Tempo I" at the end, when I arrived at the beginning of the final page, the audience burst into applause, and I'd got a considerable amount of music left to play before the end at that point. So I just had to wait until they'd stopped. I played the rest of the sonata which, in a way, fragments even more, and then disappears at the end with one single, quiet



note. At that point there was no applause at all. I think that was a test really. Perhaps they were testing me as to how I could cope with strange audiences!

**CW:** Tippett's made this radical departure, then, from the traditional sonata form in his second sonata. Where on earth does he go when he comes to his third sonata?

**PD:** Well, as so many of them do, he returns to a more traditional form. Although it's not totally traditional—of course it isn't—it's [in] three movements and it does have a feeling of a ternary shape, which is entirely traditional.

*Voice of Michael Tippett:* "And it turns out to be something larger than I had intended. I had intended to have a rest [with this] composition. . . that's to say, not quite so long in effort, not of such great necessities of emotional invention and technical invention and so forth. But in practice it turned out to have a character which, I must risk and say, is something analogous to the late Beethoven sonatas, in the sense that it comes at the end of a productive life and that it has a mixture of—if I again must risk—the intellectual power and emotional meaning, but, of course in very modernistic terms, in the sense that these particular notes wouldn't have been there. And in doing this I found that it was anything but a rest. I was, in point of fact, extremely exhausted in having to do it."

**PD:** The debt to Beethoven that Tippett claims to owe in this particular work (not being an intellectual myself) is sometimes quite difficult to spot

[even though I have played] all the Beethoven sonatas several times, and in particular the “Hammerklavier,” which I think is the most obvious connection. First of all, there is the use of trills, which Beethoven used more than any other composer as a significant thing rather than an ornament, and I think that’s definitely true and very obvious in the first movement of the Tippett Third [sonata]. The feeling of mood, though, is the most important thing: the stretching of the piano; the feeling, perhaps, that it’s a rather frustrating instrument in that it doesn’t have enough color; it is a percussion instrument—it doesn’t sound like an orchestra. One can try to make it sound like an orchestra, and some actually succeed very well, but basically there is a limitation which obviously Beethoven felt in his late sonatas, and I really mean starting at the very least from the “Waldstein” [Op.53] onwards, you get this feeling that he wants it to be bigger than it is, and that’s my feeling from this work as well.

CW: It’s often been said that it’s almost a battle between the two hands—the pianists’ two hands. The right hand does one thing and the left hand does the other. . .

PD: . . . I do, but that applies to most of the repertoire in my case!

*Voice of Michael Tippett:* “I do get very fascinated with the idea of the hands as distinct objects and yet it’s one human being playing. Because I’m not a great pianist—in any kind of way, I can’t play the piano in these forms. And this means that I start, deliberately in the sonata, with the hands at the furthest distance on the piano they could be. And this element of moving the

hands from a central position where they're together to a separate position where they're right far apart and yet, playing with enormous vigor—both the left hand as well as the right hand—then, you see, this takes it away from certain kinds of playing. It isn't Chopin, because Chopin's left hand is never that kind. It's much closer to an 18th-century writer like Scarlatti. But this is something desperately strong in me, this feeling that I come to the piano sonata to use one human being—making music of great power and emotional dimension—using his two hands as though they were both one within himself and now at the same time two."

**PD:** You do get the feeling that you have to have two sides of your brain working at the same time. I can't do it on the radio, but you can see patting the head and rubbing the stomach, kind-of feeling about it. But it's by no means unique in that—of course it isn't, and particularly in the twentieth century. A lot of the work seems to me to have as fundamental to its structure the idea of the left hand mirroring the right. And I mean literally mirroring it—where the right hand goes up, the left hand goes down, and so on. And that is, in fact, exactly what happens at the very beginning of the work and continues for quite a long time. That is less of a battle than perhaps even the composer thought it was, because the fact that you go the opposite direction and you have the opposite hand, with the thumb at the opposite end of the hand (and all that kind of thing) actually makes it work rather more easily than you'd first think. I think it's when they write something for right hand and then double it in the left hand for power, that's when you have problems because everything is the other way around for the left hand. There are many, many passages like that [which] I'm sure the composer never

thought about. It becomes a technical nightmare because the left hand is just simply upside down all the way through.

CW: What about things such as piano sonority, texture?

PD: The texture of his writing is quite deliberately bare. It's not an accident, it's not an inadequacy in the way he writes for the piano, in my view. I think it's a very conscious decision to make it that way.

And there are many exceptions anyway. Let's take, for example, the second movement which is incredibly rich and sonorous—a set of variations on what he'd simply described as “seventeen harmonies.” [This] actually indicates that there is no melody, just a series of harmonies. Well, within those harmonies there's an enormous amount of buildup of sonorous sound and that seems to me to be the opposite of the bareness you get in the first and the third movements. So there is a great variety as in all great music—an enormous variety, an enormous amount of scope for choice-making on the part of the performer, without [his] ever contradicting anything.

CW: Well let's just recapitulate: the first sonata we've said is pretty eclectic; the second sonata—a complete rejection of traditional forms—is exploring something completely new; in the third sonata we have a rejection of that—and, once again, he's going back [to] historical models. So, why the fourth sonata? Why did he write a fourth sonata do you think?

PD: Well, the idea of rejection is a form of rebellion in a way, isn't it? Perhaps the real truth is that we all tend towards rejection when we're

younger, and then acceptance later. And it does seem to me that the fourth sonata is a sort of summing up of the whole thing. Now that's a very personal opinion, I've not heard the composer himself regard it that way. But it's the biggest of the four sonatas. It has the most movements and it's very extensive—I think I last timed it at something like thirty-eight minutes or so. It does explore the sounds of the piano in a very big way, as Tippett himself has said—that's something he wanted to get involved in. It's a more mature, more accepting, resigned work, and it's a very fascinating piece. It'll be very interesting to view it in another thirty years to see how it fits in.

I feel much closer to the ideas of Tippett than he states, and one of the main ones is that he's not an intellectual composer. Well, I'm not an intellectual performer. I guess, you know, I've done my bits of intellectual thinking, but I certainly don't approach anything from that standpoint. And I feel that there's an empathy. It seems very obvious to me that when Tippett writes something down he doesn't calculate anything mathematically, at least not in any complex way. He just feels it and it comes out and that's it and then he leaves it to us to do what we like with it, which is such an important aspect of the music and of the man. He does indeed say that he's an "indifferent pianist"—that's his own phrase, I believe.

I do think that it's worth saying, though, that in order to write for any instrument with such skill in the way that he does—against the instrument to produce this electric effect of constant strife and effort required—I think that his understanding of the instrument is quite as great as it is of any other instrument . . . of the orchestra, of the voice, and so on. Yes, it's true, it's not pianistic in the Liszt or the Prokofiev sense, but it's a very major contribution to the piano, to the piano's repertoire. And it's particularly significant to me

that it's a British composer that's done it, because actually the history of British piano music is not as rich as it is of operatic and orchestral and chamber music. There is a lot of it, as you say, but it's less mainstream, it's less exportable to other countries than other instrumental music or vocal music, and it's wonderful to have this. The [Piano] Concerto—there's another work, which I'm not so familiar with for piano and orchestra as well [the *Fantasia on a Theme of Handel* for piano and orchestra]—and then there are these four, fabulous sonatas. It's a very important contribution to piano music.

\*Transcribed and edited by Amanda Stringer with permission from the British Library National Sound Archive (29 Exhibition Road, London, England, SW 7). Peter Donohoe speaking to Chris Wines at Studio 1, Pebble Mill. Program broadcast from Fairest Isle; entitled "Music for a While"; 7:30 p.m. Monday, January 16, 1995. Michael Berkeley presents the third of five invitation concerts to celebrate the 90th birthday of Sir Michael Tippett and the 300th anniversary of Purcell's death.

## Prelude

Piano Sonata No. 1 is Michael Tippett's first published work. Along with his String Quartet No. 1 and Concerto for Double String Orchestra, the piece represents a watershed point in Tippett's career, for these are the first works he considered mature. However, before embarking on a discussion of Piano Sonata No. 1, one should find it enlightening to look at the years which led up to this first work. As with many persons, the seeds of Tippett's distinctive personality and career were planted during his childhood and adolescence. By considering, in turn, Tippett's upbringing, his exposure to music as a child and his development as a musician, and by examining the world he grew up in, one can understand more fully how and why he developed into the person he was.

Tippett (born January 2, 1905) was raised by two intellectually adventurous parents. Although they were part of the upper middle-class, they espoused non-establishment views: his father was a "liberal humanist temperamentally committed to the tenets of *laissez-faire* and the Manchester Liberals."<sup>1</sup> His mother was a novelist, Labour Party member, and active suffragette (for which she once went to prison). The elder Tippetts likewise fostered a spirit of independence in their two children, and Michael

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<sup>1</sup>Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. (London: Eulenburg Books, Ltd., 1984), 4.

seemingly adopted it eagerly. For instance, at age nine when he attended his first school—Brookfield Preparatory School—he wrote and circulated an essay which denied the existence of God. Later in his schooling, he constructed such a powerful argument for atheism that his headmaster, fearing he would negatively influence other students, forced him to live in isolation.

Throughout his youth Tippet was known as a “brilliant but somewhat wayward and rebellious pupil,”<sup>2</sup> and this stance on religion was only one of many nonconformist ideas he would publicly champion in his lifetime.

Like their ideas on politics and religion, the Tippet family’s domestic situation was untraditional. Because of financial difficulties brought on by World War I, Tippet’s parents lived abroad for nearly twenty years while he was in school. Initially they moved to a hotel they owned in Cannes, but after being forced to sell it, they lived in a succession of inexpensive hotels in France, Corsica, and Italy. Tippet has said that not having a “fixed home to return to for vacations”<sup>3</sup> caused feelings of insecurity in him, although one cannot help but wonder if his strong sense of self and unfailing self-reliance in adulthood were not positive byproducts of this situation. At the very least, he gained a fluency in French and a cosmopolitan outlook on the world from his youthful travels to visit them.

Although a fine education and travels to the Continent may have fed the young Tippet’s intellect and spirit of independence, he was severely deprived on the musical front. Because his parents were ignorant about

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<sup>2</sup>David Matthews, *Michael Tippet: An Introductory Study*. (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1980), 16.

<sup>3</sup>Meirion Bowen, *Michael Tippet*. The Contemporary Composers Series, ed. by Nicholas Snowman. (London : Robson Books, 1997, 2nd ed.) , 3.



music and because he did not have access to a radio or gramophone recordings, he heard very little classical music as a child. He studied piano almost continuously from age 5, but his musical exposure was limited mainly to those pieces he learned as a student: Preludes and Fugues from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, sonatas of Beethoven and Schubert, and a few works by Chopin. Tippett did not attend his first orchestral concert until he was fourteen, and experienced only isolated musical events before he went to college. His musical gifts were thus slow to develop, and this tardiness followed him right into his career in composing.

Tippett's decision at age seventeen to make writing music his life's calling seems, from one point of view, extremely naive. Although we know that the idea initially came to him after attending that first orchestral concert at age fourteen, it is hard to understand how someone with such limited exposure to classical music could so resolutely commit, at such a young age, to becoming a composer. Once the decision was made, however, Tippett proceeded with confidence and focus. The first step he took towards accomplishing this goal was to order Charles Stanford's *Musical Composition* so that he could teach himself the fundamentals of composition. When he informed his surprised and baffled parents of his career choice, they immediately consulted his headmaster and the conductor Malcolm Sargeant, both of whom urged them to dissuade him from pursuing a musical career. Tippett, however, refused to allow any discouragement to squelch his ambition. He persisted until finally, in 1923, his parents agreed to pay his fees at the Royal College of Music on the condition that he would make the doctorate in music his goal.

Upon enrolling in the RCM, Tippett completely submerged himself in

music. During his years there, he voraciously devoured the concert life of London (which provided him with a wide knowledge of the classical repertory), and in particular became so interested in the music of Beethoven that sometimes he would go for long periods of time without studying or listening to anything else. Under the tutelage of Charles Wood and C.H. Kitson, Tippett eagerly pursued studies in composition. (He purposely avoided studying with Vaughn Williams, who also taught composition at the Royal College, out of fear he would simply become a “slavish imitator.”) He was a committed, enthusiastic student, and he was determined to find his own individual voice. Despite his hard work, however, Kitson and others on the faculty (like his headmaster and Sargeant before them) expressed reservations about his pursuing a career in composition. Nevertheless, Tippett remained determined.

After graduating from the RCM in 1928 he moved to Oxted in Surrey (a town about 20 miles south of London) where he became conductor of the local choir and also taught French. He accepted this post primarily so he would have time to compose. In the next few years he continued to educate himself through conducting and composing. A 1930 concert of his works in Oxted left him so dissatisfied that he withdrew the pieces from circulation and pursued yet more composition lessons—this time with R.O. Morris, an expert in 16th century counterpoint. The years immediately following this period of study proved to be a complex web of frustration, perseverance, and political engagement.

The depression of post-war England profoundly affected people from all walks of life, and Tippett was certainly no exception. Seeing his country ravaged by unemployment and destitution strengthened his already existing

left-wing political beliefs. A profound sense of social obligation burdened him until, in 1932, he was able reconcile his socialist beliefs and his desire to pursue a musical career by becoming conductor of the South London Orchestra (for unemployed musicians) and director of choirs run by the Royal Arsenal Co-Operative Society (which was directly associated with the Labour Party). Throughout the decade he became increasingly active politically. In 1935 he briefly joined the Communist Party (although his pacifist views soon led him to sympathize more fully with the Trotskyites), and in 1935 he even wrote a play called *War Ramp* which “confronted the conflict of political idealism and pacifism.”<sup>4</sup> The internal political debate that so consumed him while he was writing *War Ramp* eventually led him to adopt a strictly pacifist stance which would remain with him throughout his life.

So by the late 30s the budding composer, having come of age while a war was raging in Europe and having seen its horrific after effects, was simultaneously on the threshold of his musical career and in the middle of intense political activity. Intellectual confidence and individuality had been his from childhood; until this point his passion for music and unshakable determination had sustained him professionally. His moral conscience determined that in some way all these things—intellect, sympathy, politics, music, and determination—would eventually come together in his work. Yet his first works, written during this time, express a musical innocence untainted by experience of the world around him. Only later would Tippett understand fully how he might fuse his personal beliefs with his musical gifts.

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<sup>4</sup> Author unknown, “Obituaries: Sir Michael Tippett.” *London Times*, 10 January 1998, internet access.

### Sonata No. 1

Sonata No. 1 was completed in its original form in 1938, and in 1939 Tippett tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade both Oxford and Boosey and Hawkes to publish it. Luckily, that same year Tippett was introduced to Willy Strecher of B. Schott's Söhne in Mainz, and Strecher encouraged him to send the score, as well as copies of his other works, to Germany.<sup>1</sup> Because of the outbreak of WW II publication was delayed, and it was not until after he had arranged for a gramophone recording of the sonata to be made (with pianist Phyllis Sellick) that Schott in London produced a "rough-and-ready" edition.<sup>2</sup> This edition of the "Fantasy Sonata," as it was originally called, was finally published in 1942. Twelve years later Schott issued a new, "cleaner" edition, and at this time the composer renamed the work "Sonata No. 1."

The title "Fantasy Sonata" reflects the strictness with which Tippett defined large-scale classical forms in his early compositional years. Because the work begins with a set of variations and the traditional "sonata-allegro" movement is placed third (of four movements), Tippett felt uncomfortable calling the work a "sonata" proper.

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<sup>1</sup>The other works which Tippett sent to Strecker are the Symphony in Bb (1939), *A Song of Liberty* (1937), and the Concerto for Double String Orchestra (1939).

<sup>2</sup>Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 51.

Although he had written the variations some years earlier and originally intended for them to stand on their own, his decision to incorporate them into a larger work, thus beginning a four-movement sonata with variations rather than a sonata-allegro, surely presented a problem the composer relished. In these early years he embraced neoclassic ideals and, like his most celebrated influence Beethoven, challenged himself to experiment with matters of weight and balance in the classical sonata structure.

### Third Movement

As a student Tippett had studied Beethoven intently, and his high regard for Beethovenian sonata-allegros led him personally to deem them an “archetype.” By the time he wrote the third movement of Sonata No. 1, he had concluded that the core element of the Beethovenian sonata-allegro was the argument between the “passionate” and the “lyrical.” This battle between two disparate worlds and its subsequent resolution was to him a metaphor for human feelings, and a tight argument that “demands counter-balance of movements expressing singleness of emotion.”<sup>3</sup> This theory was at the center of Tippett’s early compositional life, and his first works illustrate a preoccupation with the sonata-allegro form and where it should be placed. For example, in his String Quartet No. 1 (1945) the sonata-form movement is placed second, and in String Quartet No. 2 (1952) it is last.

While Tippett’s experimentation with large-scale form may have proved educational to the developing composer, in the case of Piano Sonata No. 1 it is not entirely successful. In reference to Sonata No. 1 Tippett has written: “My intention was to make this [sonata-allegro] movement the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 88.

pivotal point of greatest intensity in the whole piece.”<sup>4</sup> The resultant movement is a hybrid scherzo/sonata-allegro that doggedly retains its scherzo properties, thus diffusing its role as a dramatic “anchor” of the sonata. Aurally it seems that the music is propelled forward by scherzo-like gestures clothed in a continuous, rapid, triple meter rather than the unfolding drama of contrasting motives and their development. Yet close examination reveals that this is a tightly organized sonata-allegro form. Ian Kemp speculates that in actuality Tippett was forced into placing the sonata-allegro movement third, since to place the movement second would have generated too much activity at the beginning of the sonata, and to position it last would have been too ambitious a goal for a relatively inexperienced composer.<sup>5</sup> Despite the third movement’s failure to fulfill Tippett’s intention, however, it is certainly not without charm and exuberance.

Six different types of material constitute the essential sonata-allegro parts:

Example 1: Tippett Piano Sonata No. 1, iii: musical material

a) First idea, measures 1-6



<sup>4</sup>Michael Tippett, liner notes accompanying recording “Sir Michael Tippett,” EMI Records Limited, Hayes Middlesex England; compilation 1984, digital remastering 1991.

<sup>5</sup>See Kemp p. 131.

b) Second idea, measures 22-26



c) Third idea, measures 27-39



d) Fourth idea, measures 63-73



e) Fifth idea, measures 85-90



f) Sixth idea, measures 97-106



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for Schott & Co. Ltd., London.

The opening gesture of the exposition (see Ex. 1a) is a chromatic, contrapuntal figure in octaves which is, in its tempestuous, driving character, somewhat reminiscent of Prokofiev's piano music (especially the first movement of Sonata No. 2 in D Minor). Despite the key signature of two sharps, Tippett's opening idea sounds as if it is in F# Minor. (This point will become relevant



at the discussion of the secondary area material.) The tension of this sinister music is released in the second figure, a burst of A Major sunshine amidst the darkness (see Ex. 1b). These two ideas combined constitute the “primary” area of the sonata-allegro and merge easily into the third, “transitory,” material (see Ex. 1c).

In this transitory material there is a slight glimpse of what will prove to become characteristic Tippett: homorhythmic music that is fast but lacking both harmonic energy (as in the first movement of Beethoven’s Op. 53 Sonata, for instance) and emotional power (as in the finale of the Chopin Bb Minor Piano Sonata, for instance). Though it is devoid of much timbral, coloristic, sonorous, harmonic, or melodic interest, it still creates a kind of perpetual motion that is uniquely Tippett. This sort of “sprung rhythm” (a term conceived solely in reference to Tippett’s music) can be heard in many of his works, such as the first string quartet (first movement) and the third piano sonata (third movement). At it’s finest, this rhythmic drive may be “ecstatic” or “kinetic”, though at other times it may sound tedious (as in the third sonata, third movement). Here, however, it is simply inoffensive filler that, at least as far as texture is concerned, successfully sets up the secondary area (the fourth idea, Ex. 1d), which appears in the key of F# Major.

Because the primary area (which utilizes a two-sharp key signature) sounds as if it is in F# Minor rather than B Minor, the secondary key of F# Major is aurally surprising; one might rather expect to hear a secondary key of A Major. Here the listener wonders if this aural effect was purposeful or not. A speculative voice reminds us that Tippett was still an inexperienced composer at this time, yet a look ahead proves that a non-rigorous methodology will remain with him throughout his career.

Kemp describes this subsidiary section (secondary area) as “rapt lyricism”<sup>6</sup>—lyric with respect to its ingenuous and simple melody, but rapt with respect to its rhythmic complexity: the accompanimental left hand figure remains in the 6/8 meter in which the piece began while the melodic line above it is in 3/4. Before moving on to the fifth idea Tippett switches the parts, giving the left hand a chance to sing the tune and the right hand an opportunity to sparkle.

A comparison of the primary and secondary materials of Sonata No. 1’s third movement illustrates how Tippett is able to implement his ideas musically. These first 84 measures are a fine example of Tippett’s theory that the sonata-allegro form is an argument between the “passionate” and “lyrical”.

The fifth and sixth ideas (Ex. 1e and 1f) are akin to the first and second and constitute the “closing” section of the exposition. The fifth is a somewhat jazzy play of 5ths and octaves with the hands an octave apart; its texture and rhythmic drive are like that of the “transitory” material (Ex. 1c). Here the key scheme repeats that of the primary area of the exposition: a key signature of two-sharps, sounding, however, in F-sharp Minor. After a sequential move to A Major, the music then erupts into a sixth and final idea in this key (which is similar to idea 1b in mood and effect). The exposition ends with a snippet of the fifth idea in F# minor, which leads directly into the development.

The development is straightforward in its treatment of the themes. Initially, the opening figure of the sonata (Ex. 1a) is treated sequentially,

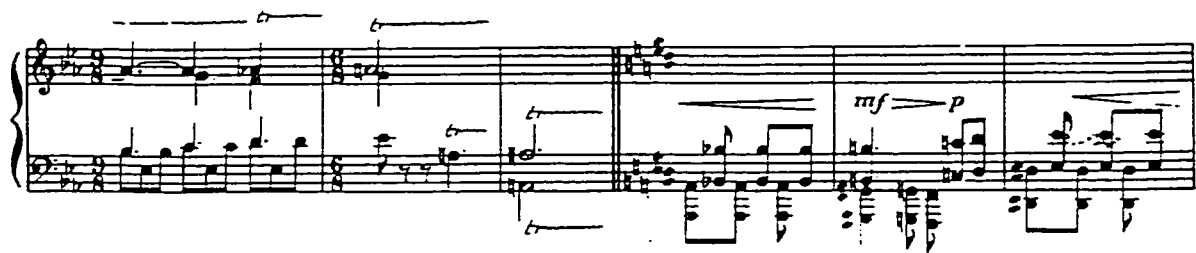
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<sup>6</sup> Kemp, *Tippett*, 136.

descending though the keys of F# Minor, A minor, C# Minor, E Minor, and D Minor. Intensity is at a maximum here because of the *absence* of the second idea, which, in the exposition, functioned to dissipate the tension of the first idea. This effect of repression continues into the development of the secondary area music, where it appears in E-flat Major (measure 158). This time the material is embellished at its entrance and departure with sparkling trills, which signal the journey back to the home key of B Minor.

As has been mentioned, the secondary material is presented in Eb, the dominant of which is Bb—obviously an essential note to the key, and here especially prominent in the melody. The trill that ends the presentation of the secondary material in the development is written on A-natural but may also be *heard* as a downward trill on Bb. Thus, when it slows to quavers (eighth-notes) and metamorphoses into figure 1a as presented in the development, it is not immediately apparent whether it is functioning as more development or as a retransition to the recapitulation.

Example 2: Piano Sonata No. 1, iii (measures 172-177)



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Because the listener is not aurally aware that Tippett has now returned to a two-sharps key signature, it is not until the recapitulation of the second figure of the primary area in measure 187 that the listener realizes that this music has functioned as a retransition. This joyful idea releases the tension of the retransition and functions as a starburst of reconciliation; a short restatement of the opening idea follows.

After this (beginning in measure 200) Tippett quickly catapults into the kinetic transitory material (linking the primary and secondary areas) which, strangely, sounds as if it has been expanded although it is the same length (35 measures) as in the exposition. When a recapitulation of the secondary area appears in F Major, a key very distant from the primary area's "written" key of B Minor and "aural" key of F# Minor, it comes as a surprise and is also somewhat disorienting to the listener. Tippett must have felt this to be true himself because through a bizarre manipulation of the theme he twists the harmony to B Major, and then B Minor by the start of the closing material.

The rest of the movement is firmly grounded in B Minor and is an almost exact repetition of the exposition's closing section. It ends quietly (marked "*sempre p*"), with a play on the fifth, jazzy gesture. In the final analysis the impish quality of this music and lack of a coda distinctly color this movement as a scherzo rather than a sonata-allegro. It's exhilarating spirit outweighs its formal weaknesses, and overall it is quite exciting.

### First Movement

Sonata No. 1 begins with an elaborate set of variations which explore a variety of styles. The first movement is very firmly rooted in a G Major tonality, only straying from home temporarily in variations IV and V, which

are in the keys of Bb Major and Bb Minor, respectively. The theme itself sounds very much like a folk-song and is in two parts. The most interesting aspect of the movement is its rhythm, for in each variation (except variation III) Tippett divides the meter differently into asymmetrical parts. The use of *free-additive rhythms* will become one of Tippett's most prominent stylistic traits, so it is important to note that here, in his early work, the seeds of this technique are germinating in his experimentation with *fixed-additive rhythms*. ("Free additive" refers to rhythms in which the beat is always changing, whether the interior construction is asymmetrical or not; "fixed additive" simply refers to asymmetrical meter. The terms were defined by Curt Sachs.)<sup>7</sup> The time signature of the opening theme is 3/4 + 2/4, but throughout the variations Tippett manipulates the rhythm as skillfully and creatively as the theme itself. Indeed, the success of the movement is indebted to the way Tippett dresses the theme in rhythmic complexity and colorful textures.

The movement begins with a heraldic call to attention: the first half of the theme is presented in resounding octaves and invites the listener to indulge in this joyful movement. After capturing our attention, Tippett then harmonizes this material with a beautiful, lush, rolling bass accompaniment. The second half of the theme is primarily a jaunty play of successive harmonic intervals, but is interspersed with both the more direct, sparse style and the rolling-bass style of the opening.

The variations which follow are a veritable joy-ride, exploring a wide palette of styles and emotions. They are more harmonically than melodically based, which (again) reminds one of Tippett's model, Beethoven. Variation I

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 102.

(marked 3/4 + 5/8) retains some of the pianistic textures of the original theme with its successive harmonic intervals doubled between the hands, but more prominent is a lively, frolicsome, quintuplet figure which splashes up and down the keyboard. Whatever its guise, the quintuplet gesture is always answered by a reminiscence of the melody.

The second variation is a vigorous, contrapuntal study in which the right-hand theme and the left-hand countertheme bounce off one another in a virtuosic display of octaves. Its immense energy and power reminds one of Brahms' *Handel Variations*. Here, rhythms derived from the 4/4 + 2/4 time signature are more irregular and complex than before, intensifying this variation's Baroque, imitative nature. A forceful ending marked "*f*" nicely sets up the serene variation III. A marked contrast to what comes before and after it, the third variation is in a more-regular 4/4 and is marked "*meno mosso*." It is written on three staves, and though the outer two represent a very simple melody and chordal accompaniment, the inner stave consists of rapidly-ascending scales that add glimmer and nuance to the music. In *The History of Keyboard Music*, F. E. Kirby describes the variation technique of the English virginalists: "Common devices are. . . the employment of extremely rapid scale-passage work in one hand punctuated with sharp chords in the other." It is no wonder that the names of Gibbons and Byrd come to mind when hearing this variation.

A long and improvisatory, modulatory run from the note G<sub>3</sub> to B-flat<sup>2</sup> leads the listener into variation IV and the key of B-flat Major. The most prominent characteristics of this variation are its persistent dotted rhythm (the time signature is now 3/2 + 3/4) and bare, two-part texture. The rhythm gives the music a folk-like quality, and as it skips along one is reminded of

cowboys and the American West—a place as yet undiscovered by Tippett, but one for which he will develop a great love and appreciation in the Sixties. It is this combination—transparent textures, quartal harmony, and folk-melodies—that flavor Tippett’s early work (consider the *Concerto for Double String Orchestra*) with hints of Copland, the quintessential “American” composer. Indeed, this kinship may account for the wide reception of Tippett’s music in America at a time when it was virtually ignored on the European Continent.

In contrast to the fourth, the fifth variation explores the sonorous capabilities of the piano, imitating the Javanese gamelan music Tippett had heard on a recording at the time of the variations’ composition. In an effort to create a new effect of unusually tuned semi-tones, he presents the theme in rapid, dry, open octaves; he then punctuates this with a denser, pedaled figure in which the tones blend to create an “Oriental” sound. An additional feature of this experimentation is the use of a  $13/16 + 3/4$  time signature. In the end, this final variation breaks into a cadenza-like, Lisztian display of virtuosity which sets up the coda, a simple restatement of the original theme—a technique employed by Beethoven in his Op. 109 variations (and one that will recur in the sonatas of Tippett). We remember how pianist Peter Donohoe found it extremely effective, commenting in the interview:

Gradually the variations really become less and less tonal, and the last variation—before the return of the theme—is rhythmically very convoluted, and sounds rather improvised, but it rises to this huge climax and bursts back into tonality at the end. It’s terribly moving

and rewarding to do because you can feel the tension rise in the audience if you really can pull it off. And people don't need to [know the sonata first]. . . . It produces a very immediate reaction.<sup>8</sup>

### Second Movement

The second movement of Tippett's Piano Sonata No. 1, like the first, has a folk-style element to it. A modified version of the Scottish folk song *Ca' the yowes tae the knowes* is the basis for the movement, a rondo in which the lyrical and straightforward folk-tune is offset by sections of studied two-part counterpoint that are reminiscent of Hindemith. (Here one is also reminded of Brahms, who included a Scottish folk song at the end of the second movement of his first piano sonata.) Many theorists have criticized the contrasting materials of this movement as "too inconsistent stylistically," "not completely integrated," and "uncomfortably sectional,"<sup>9</sup> but although the two styles (folk-song harmonization and contrapuntal episode) are quite different, the themes *are* related:

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<sup>8</sup>See Introduction. Peter Donohoe speaking to Chris Wines at Studio 1, Pebble Mill; program broadcast from Fairest Isle; entitled "Music for a While"; 7:30 p.m. Monday, January 16, 1995; transcribed and edited from the National Sound Archive by Amanda Stringer.

<sup>9</sup>See Roger Green, "Tippett Piano Sonatas", *Piano Journal* 2/5 (1981): 19-21; Wilfred Mellers, "Michael Tippett in 1957", *Listener* 57 (March 28, 1957): 533; Kemp, *Tippett*, 134.



### Example 3: Sonata No. 1, ii, materials

m. 1

m. 17

*p*  
*cantabile mezza voce*

*pp espr.*

motive

motive

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In fact, because the folk-song and its lush harmonization mark this movement as more popular than classic, the more linear style of the two-part invention stands as a pleasing contrast—almost a “checks-and-balance” system. When the last statement of the folk-song enters after a relatively long episode of chromatically-colored counterpoint, it is heard as a breath of fresh air rather than a stylistic *faux pas*. Overall, this contemplative movement functions well as a moment of repose between the weighty first movement and the hard-driving third.

### Fourth Movement

Tippett ends the sonata with a charming and catchy rondo that has the distinct flavor of American popular music. Although the style of this work most resembles that of Louis Moreau Gottshalk—a colorful 19th century American pianist who wrote highly virtuosic music based on popular and salon tunes—there is no evidence that Tippett was familiar with Gottshalk’s work. An even more obvious comparison can be made to Debussy’s *Golliwog’s Cake Walk*, especially in the final, coquettish gesture:

Example 4: Sonata No. 1, iv (measures 150-151)



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As has been exemplified by the use of both folk-song and counterpoint in the second movement of this sonata, Tippett was, at this time, very interested in integrating the vernacular and classical idioms to create music that was, in his words, “clear of a heavy, Germanized and too serious [nature].”<sup>10</sup> In this last movement he has done exactly that; despite the limitations imposed by his principle use of two-part textures throughout, the music displays the brilliant, toccata-like capability of the piano (reminding one of Scarlatti) within the realm of a jazzy style (especially the flattened 7ths). And despite its nontraditional tonal organization, the movement is the perfect ending to this highly-successful sonata.

The delights of Sonata No. 1 stem from the fact that it is both so heavily influenced by other composers and that it also reveals a true, individual voice. It simultaneously harks back to the past, acknowledges the present, and recognizes the future. The sonata is indebted to the past not only in being a significant modern example of the variation form for keyboard that

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<sup>10</sup>See Colin Mason, “Michael Tippett”, *The Musical Times* (May 1945): 137-41.

developed in England and Spain, but also in exhibiting specific stylistic traits of the English virginalists. As an early 20th century work, with its rhythmic experimentation in additive rhythms, it is influenced by Stravinsky and Bartók. And finally, foreshadowing his later piano works, it presents harmonically-based variations (to come in Sonata No. 3 and Sonata No. 4), writing for widely separated hands (also Sonatas No. 3 and 4), and, of course, contrapuntal textures and rhythmic experimentation.

Tippett was particularly attuned to his role as an “English” composer. His use of folk-song melodies and his acknowledgement of the English virginalists has already been mentioned, but also present in the first sonata is the influence of English madrigal music: The fast-moving dotted rhythm of the fourth variation of the first movement is an apparent tribute to fast-moving balletts of Elizabethan and Jacobean music from some 300 years before. While to us this has an “American” sound, it is impossible that Tippett could have intended this at the time the work was composed. We can assume that while Tippett worked to distance himself from his immediate predecessors (the English pastoral composers), he found his true roots in music from a much earlier period. It has even been argued that Tippett’s innovative rhythms and their subsequent development stem from the sounds of the English language.<sup>11</sup>

Because Tippett was not a pianist, he has often been castigated for a lack of innovation and use of non-idiomatic techniques when writing for the piano, especially in this early work. However, here it should be mentioned that many pianists from Peter Donohoe to Paul Crossley (who

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<sup>11</sup>Ian Kemp, “Rhythm In Tippett’s Early Music”, *Proceedings from the Royal Musical Association* 105 (1978-79): 142-53.

commissioned the third sonata) to Clive Swansbourne (who premiered the fourth sonata in this country) have commented on how pianistic Tippett's writing is.<sup>12</sup> Even without the testimony of these highly-respected performers, Piano Sonata No. 1 stands on its own as a successful and endearing piece of music because of its charming eclecticism and sincerity of expression. As Wilfred Mellers has stated, ". . . the music is fundamentally single-minded and simple-hearted. . . . It flows, indeed bounds, from a full heart."<sup>13</sup> It is this quality more than any other that makes Tippett's sonata enduring.

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<sup>12</sup>See Donohoe interview p. 23; Paul Crossley, "Tippett's Third Piano Sonata", *Composer* 70 (Summer 1980) : 15-16; Clive Swansbourne, "The Piano Music of Michael Tippett", *Musical America* 109, no. 6 (1989) : 92-3.

<sup>13</sup>Wilfred Mellers, "Tippett in 1957", *Listener* 57 (March 28, 1957) : 533.

### Interlude I

Nearly a quarter of a century passed before Tippett decided to work in the genre of the piano sonata again. The intervening years (1938-1962) were of utmost importance to his development both personally and as a public figure. While gaining recognition as a leading British composer, he also became increasingly active in political causes, and in 1940 he joined the Peace Pledge Union, a pacifist organization. His beliefs led him to register as a conscientious objector, and in 1943 he even spent two months in prison at Wormwood Scrubs for his refusal to serve in the war.

On a spiritual level, Tippett became interested in Jungian psychology and, through sessions with the renowned analyst John Layard, began to interpret his own dreams. His dedication to the exploration of Jungian principles exemplified his compassionate spirit and desire to find remedies for a broken world. His Jungian understanding of human nature and the unconscious mind as it applied to both his personal situation and larger social conditions led him to believe that man must recognize and confront the “light” and “shadow” within himself if he is to be a vessel of reconciliation. Though this belief would come to occupy a central role in his musical proselytizing, it can first be clearly witnessed in the work which finally brought Tippett to the fore of contemporary British music—the oratorio *A Child Of Our Time* of 1948. This work, which refers to the 1939 assassination

of a German diplomat by a 17-year-old boy who was protesting the Nazi persecution of his parents, reflects Tippett's refusal to divide his role as man/composer/social activist. Besides his Jungian beliefs, Tippett espoused Beethoven's view that art should not simply reflect life but help man transcend it by offering gestures of hope and aspiration rather than solely depicting the surrounding social scene (which for Tippett was defined by the horrors of two World Wars). In his collection of essays *Moving Into Aquarius* he wrote, "Deep within me I know that part of the artist's job is to renew our sense of the comely and the beautiful. To create a dream."<sup>1</sup>

Out of this conviction grew not only *A Child of Our Time* but also his first opera, *The Midsummer Marriage* (1954), considered by many to be the crowning achievement of his early years if not of his entire career. In addition to the music, Tippett also wrote the libretto for the work (a practice he would continue); and in drawing most obviously from Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) but also from Mozart (*The Magic Flute*), Yeats, Shaw ("Getting Married"), Christopher Fry, and T.S. Eliot, he displayed not only a vast general knowledge but also a comprehensive understanding of the human condition. In *The Midsummer Marriage* the protagonists are two lovers who quarrel, undergo separate journeys into disparate, unconscious worlds, and then emerge to understand one another and reconcile their differences. Through these lovers Tippett once again acknowledged the Jungian idea that through achieving self-knowledge humans may live more harmoniously—an idea he believed to be of essential truth whether it be applied to a single individual, a pair of lovers, or nations at war.

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Tippett, *Moving Into Aquarius* (London: Paladin Books, Granada Publishing Ltd., 1974), 153.

During this period between the first and second sonatas, Tippett wrote his only other works for solo piano: the *Fantasia on a Theme of Handel* and the Piano Concerto, both for piano and orchestra. The *Fantasia*, written around the time of *A Child of Our Time* (1939-41), is a set of variations on a theme from Handel's Suite in Bb of the 1733 *Suites de Pièces pour le Clavecin*. The thematic transformation in the *Fantasia* is more radical than that of the first movement of Piano Sonata No. 1; the goal of the work seems to be the creation of a sonata-form rather than a variation set. The first three variations serve as the first movement, the fourth functions as a slow movement, the fifth as a scherzo, followed by a development, cadenza, and fugal finale.<sup>2</sup> The *Fantasia* is by far the least performed of all Tippett's piano works and has not been exempt from criticism over the years. Interestingly, as in the first piano sonata, Tippett used the title "Fantasy" to describe a work that utilizes a theme and variations technique.

In contrast to the *Fantasia on a Theme of Handel*, the Piano Concerto (1953-5) has enjoyed much success. The piece is reminiscent of *The Midsummer Marriage* (in particular the opening passage), and Tippett himself has commented that the work grew out of the "sound world" of the opera. Indeed, the works share timbral colors (especially with the use of celeste) and stylistic traits (magical, shimmering passagework and lyrical melodic lines). Compare the following passages from the Piano Concerto and *The Midsummer Marriage*:

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<sup>2</sup>Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. (London: Eulenburg Books, Ltd., 1984), 183.

Example 5: Piano Concerto and *The Midsummer Marriage*

a) Piano Concerto, i, (measures 1-7):

MICHAEL TIPPETT

Allegro non troppo (♩.92)

8<sup>va</sup>

*pp doux et lumineux*

*pp dolce*

8<sup>va</sup> *basso*

(8)

*tr* *poco* *pp* **1**

*tr* *poco* *pp* *loca*

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b) *The Midsummer Marriage* (measures 476-478):

**(476) Lento (♩ ca 56)**

Fl. 1 2  
Ob. 1 2  
Clar. (A) 1 2  
Bsn. 1 2  
Horn 1 2 3  
Trp. 1 2  
Tromb. 1 2 3  
Cymb.  
Harp  
Chorus S. A. T. B.  
Vial. 1 2  
Via.  
Vcl.  
Bass

**(476) Lento (♩ ca 56)**  
a. (sulla corda)

Tippett THE MIDSUMMER MARRIAGE. © 1954 Schott & Co. Ltd., London. © renewed. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission of European American Music Distributors, Corporation, sole U.S. and Canadian agent for Schott & Co. Ltd., London.

While many 20th-century composers have treated the piano as a percussive instrument, Tippett's goal in his Piano Concerto was to write a concerto in which "the piano is used once again for its poetic capabilities." It is well known that he found inspiration for this work in Beethoven's 4th Piano Concerto, which he heard in 1950 at a rehearsal for a concert where his First Symphony was also being performed. Overall, the Piano Concerto is characterized by the distinctive use of quartal harmony, highly ornamented melodies, and an elaborate polyphonic texture. The three movements are traditionally designed—the first being a sonata-allegro form, the second a canon, and the third a rondo—and in general the relationship of piano to orchestra is genial rather than combative.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>David Matthews, *Michael Tippett: An Introductory Study* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1980), 58-9.

## Sonata No. 2

While Tippett's style hinted at change after the completion of *The Midsummer Marriage* in 1954, by 1958 he had utterly abandoned the style cultivated during his first period of composition. Of the cataclysm, Kemp has written,

... it seemed the product of change for change's sake, sad witness of a misguided attempt on Tippett's part to restore failing creativity by tearing his natural composing style from its roots and filling the void with all that was uncharacteristic of him—hard, intractable sonorities, an aggressively dissonant harmonic idiom and construction by means of stringing together gestures both crude and short-winded.<sup>1</sup>

The first product of Tippett's radical departure was a new opera, opposite on nearly every count from *The Midsummer Marriage*; even the title of the work, *King Priam*, bears witness to this fact. Derrick Puffett aptly describes this change in Tippett's style as a movement from "private myth" to "public myth."<sup>2</sup> Obvious differences between the operas lie in their structural, tonal, and stylistic characteristics. While *Midsummer Marriage* consists of only a few scenes, which flow smoothly into each other, *Priam* is made up of many scenes which end and begin abruptly, often with very different kinds of

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<sup>1</sup>Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. (London: Eulenburg Books, Ltd., 1984), 322.

<sup>2</sup>Derrick Puffett, "Tippett and the Retreat from Mythology", *Musical Times* 136, no. 1823 (1995): 10

musical material; while *Midsummer Marriage* is genially tonal, *Priam* is harsh and dissonant; while *Midsummer Marriage* is tempered by mellifluous melodies and fluid music, *Priam* projects the action in a declamatory style.<sup>3</sup>

The structure of *Priam* is most pertinent here, for its form is directly related to that of Piano Sonata No. 2. Most scholars refer to this sectionalized procedure as “mosaic” because of the way Tippett strings together sections of musical material without transition or development (indeed, Tippett originally contemplated calling this successor of *King Priam* “Mosaics”). In *Priam* the pattern is determined by the dramatic demands of the libretto, climaxes being created by the accumulation, rather than the expansion, of musical ideas. The disjunct character of Tippett’s music combined with his economic use of musical materials makes for a lean, almost antiseptic, sound.

Applied to the piano sonata, this concept of form is even more abstract. Sonata No. 2 is a short, one-movement work, but it is a radical departure from the earlier one-movement sonatas of Liszt and Prokofiev. Instead of integrating the characteristic movements of a traditional sonata into a larger whole, Sonata No. 2 is fantasy-like. It consists of eight bits of highly contrasted music, distinguished by their tempo markings, which are arranged to form a unified, if not congruent, whole. (See Diagram No. 1 at the end of this chapter.) Each fragment of material is very distinct, and though the various sections sound unrelated, a close examination reveals that much of the music is generated by a musical “cell”—three notes that are a half or a whole step apart. This is the basis for both melody and harmony for much of the sonata, and is utilized specifically in “Tempos” 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7.

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<sup>3</sup> Kemp, *Tippett*, 322.

Example 6: Piano Sonata No. 2—materials made from the 3-note cell

a) measures 1-4 (Tempo 1):

Tempo 1  
Lento (♩=c.100)

*ff risonando*

CDE

EFG

DEF

B<sup>b</sup>CD

b) measures 5-7 (Tempo 2):

Tempo 2  
Allegro (♩=c.112)

*ff strong, detached*

loco

loco

ten.

ten.

B<sup>b</sup>BC

GAbB<sup>b</sup>

c) measures 21-26 (Tempo 5):

Tempo 5  
Adagio (♩=c.54)

*p mars. secco*

*non troppo*

*p*

*f (secco)*

*p*

*non troppo*

BC<sup>#</sup>D

AB<sup>b</sup>B

D<sup>#</sup>EF<sup>#</sup>

d) measures 109-115 (Tempo 6):

Handwritten annotations for measures 109-115:

- Measure 109:  $D^bEF$  (circled), *f dark pecho*
- Measure 110: *f pecho ten.*
- Measure 111: *f p*
- Measure 112: *f p*, *espr.* (circled),  $D^bEF$  (circled)
- Measure 113: *pp*
- Measure 114: *f p pecho*
- Measure 115: *f p*

e) measures 174-180 (Tempo 7):

Handwritten annotations for measures 174-180:

- Measure 174: *f marcato martellato*,  $E F F^\#$  (circled)
- Measure 175:  $E F F^\#$  (circled)
- Measure 176: *gliss.* (circled)
- Measure 177: *gliss.* (circled)
- Measure 178: *gliss.* (circled)
- Measure 179: *gliss.* (circled)
- Measure 180: *gliss.* (circled)

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This organic relationship among the musical materials in combination with the patterning of the gestures creates a unique musical landscape.

Tippett himself has clearly explained:

Everything in the sonata proceeds by statement. The effect is one of accumulation; through constant addition of new material; by variation and repetition. There is virtually no development and particularly no bridge passages. The formal unity comes from the balance of similarities and contrasts.

The contrasts are the straightforward ones of timbres and speeds. But there are also contrasts of function. Music can appear to flow; or to arrest itself especially through the device of ostinato; or temporarily to stop in a silence. These kinds of contrasts are used constantly.<sup>4</sup>

A total of thirty-eight fragments of music, patched together in a kaleidoscopic mixture of both static and driving sound, constitute this work. Because Tippett presents many of these differing parts of music non-sequentially, the sonata becomes rather like a baker's dough—the basic ingredient of flour (new musical material) is introduced to the mixture a little at a time so as to assure a smooth and successful assimilation into the whole. Tippett gives his listener ample time to absorb the music of each new part by juxtaposing it with what has previously become familiar.

Because none of the eight basic musical gestures ("Tempi") are ever repeated verbatim (instead they are transposed, inverted, or reordered), there is always a sense of metamorphosis within this ever-changing sound world; here (as in the later music of Messiaen, which interested Tippett deeply), the listener experiences time circularly rather than linearly.<sup>5</sup> Particularly interesting is the end of the work, which functions as the climax. Here

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<sup>4</sup>Michael Tippett, program note obtained from Schott Publisher's Promotion Department, "Piano Sonata No. 2".

<sup>5</sup>Kemp, *Tippett*, 376.

Tippett breaks the materials into smaller and smaller units, simultaneously compressing and dissipating the tension. The second and final appearance of "Tempo I" sixteen bars from the end gives the work a cyclic feeling, although it, too, is fragmented and interspersed with the organic three-note motive. The work seems to crumble and fade away:

Example 7: Piano Sonata No. 2, measures 308-316

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for Schott & Co. Ltd., London.

On the whole, Sonata No. 2 is formally successful. Both Ian Kemp and Colin Mason have illustrated how it fits into a one-movement sonata form,<sup>6</sup> although one does not perceive such a structure when listening to the work.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 379-80; Colin Mason, "The Piano Works" in *Michael Tippett: A Symposium on His 60th Birthday*, edited by Ian Kemp (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 208-9.



It is not just the highly sectionalized form that accounts for this, but the nature of the themes themselves. Two of the themes, "Tempo II" and "Tempo VII", are actual quotes from Act II—the war act—of *King Priam*. These, along with the aggressive, astringent character of Tempi "I" and "III" often give the work a harsh, uncompromising disposition. At other times the tone is playful, even peaceful ("Tempo VI"), dreamy ("Tempo IV"), and majestically ponderous ("Tempo VIII"). Furthermore, two characteristics of Tippett's first piano sonata are conspicuously missing here—the use of counterpoint and the presence of a solid tonal center—and this adds to the starkness of the work. A picturesque description of Sonata No. 2 might compare it to a night sky in the vast desert—lit up in one direction with an electric atmosphere of lightening flashes and whipping winds, and calmly nocturnal in the other, with the peaceful glistening of stars and warm glow of the moon.

The change in style witnessed in *King Priam* and Sonata No. 2 culminates in the work that follows them, the Concerto for Orchestra of 1962-63. Here, as in Sonata No. 2, Tippett utilizes the "mosaic" structure and borrows themes from *King Priam*. As in *Priam*, Tippett breaks the orchestra into small groups, each of which has its own material. The first movement in particular displays Tippett's aesthetic. Nine instrumental groups converse and collide, but unlike Sonata No. 2 they build to a "jam session" where competing musical material is played simultaneously rather than becoming fragmented and condensed. The kaleidoscopic progeny of the Concerto for Orchestra and Piano Sonata No. 2 are obviously from the same womb; however, the application of the same technique to two different genres results in creatures with distinctly different personalities.

The Piano Sonata No. 2 and Concerto for Orchestra are generally considered to be Tippett's most experimental works. In this period, Tippett felt torn between the need to express himself outside the confines of the sonata-allegro archetype and his unwavering faith that his master—Beethoven—simply had it right. He knew that the second piano sonata and Concerto for Orchestra reeked of rebellion, and he desperately wanted justification. Thus he developed an idea that would make it possible to continue writing music as he wished: that of “historical” versus “notional” archetypes. Tippett explained this distinction with a simple example: the “historical” archetype was represented by middle-period Beethoven symphonies, the “notional” archetype was represented by the numerous others who wrote symphonies only in the spirit of this (such as Mahler and Beethoven himself in the Ninth Symphony). Tippett was then able to stray from the traditional formal models of middle-period Beethoven without compromising his compositional “belief system.”

While to some the radical stylistic change heralded by *King Priam* may have seemed self-conscious and forced, in retrospect it seems to fit logically into its place in history. Certainly Tippett was aware of a precedent of this “collage” technique on the European continent: Stravinsky had composed his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in 1920, for instance. More significantly, at a time when much of the world had begun healing from the effects of war, Tippett felt temporarily disengaged from social concerns yet ironically sympathetic towards Soviet artists who were unable to enjoy artistic freedom. In light of this, works such as Sonata No. 2 and Concerto for Orchestra seem to celebrate the very luxury of compositional freedom—

sound for sound's sake and "the act of making music itself."<sup>7</sup> The circular sense of time that they impart seems to suggest that in an age of nuclear armament, one should enjoy the present moment, since the future is not guaranteed.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the underlying philosophy might be, we can be sure it was carefully considered—Tippett's awareness, conscience, and courage guaranteed that everything he did would be part of a much larger picture, as we will see in Sonata No. 3.

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<sup>7</sup>David Matthews, *Michael Tippett: An Introductory Study* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1980), 76.

<sup>8</sup>Kemp, *Tippett*, 330.

## Diagram No. 1: Sonata No. 2—Form and Materials

<u>Material/Large Structural Divisions</u>	<u>No. of measures</u>
<p>Tempo I (<i>Lento</i>)</p> <p>strident call to attention; hands widely-spaced, encompassing whole keyboard; chords made of 2nds and 9ths/clusters; static, majestic, ringing, dissonant</p>	4
<p>Tempo II (<i>Allegro</i>)</p> <p><i>Priam</i> theme—Act II, Scene i; jumping octaves are stepwise theme with octave displacement (like Copland <i>Piano Variations</i>); punctuated with bass figure of Tempo I; feeling of motion; huge gesture which sets the piece in motion</p>	3
<p>Tempo III (<i>molto più mosso</i>)</p> <p>now even faster; aggressive swirling octave figure seemingly gains momentum and power as it climbs from depths of piano to upper range; spans entire keyboard</p>	7
<p>Tempo IV (<i>pochissimo meno mosso</i>)</p> <p>radical change from previous material; motion is now flowing rather than forced, but material is still non-melodic; arpeggiated, magical material of earlier (<i>Piano Concerto/Midsummer Marriage</i>) period; like Tempos I-IV, encompasses much of keyboard and lacks tonal center, but is the most accessible material of the work and the most serene of the Tempi</p>	7
<p>Tempo V (<i>Adagio</i>)</p> <p>scurrying trill figure is stepwise theme; punctuated by march-like figure also made of stepwise theme; much more static than previous material, stays near middle of keyboard; soft, mischievous-sounding trill figure sounds disciplined by militaristic <i>forte</i> gesture</p> <p>-----</p>	8
<p>Tempo IV</p> <p>music transposed up a step from first entrance; begins as previous entrance but is now expanded into new texture—previous “Tempo IV” music becomes accompanimental and octave melody is added on top; music shimmers and melody sounds unending; seems to float in the stratosphere, but then stops midstream; twice as long as first appearance</p>	12
<p>Tempo V</p> <p>down P5 from first entrance, and half as long, perhaps to balance highly-expanded “Tempo IV” (in contrast, it was <u>doubled</u> in second entrance)</p>	4
<p>Tempo IV</p> <p>here music seems to be a continuation of previous “Tempo IV”; consists only of “expanded” texture of octave melody and accompaniment; transposed up M3 from previous entrance; lengthened to 15 measures; drifts higher and higher</p>	15

Tempo II	8
shocking contrast to "Tempo IV"; seems to function as a line of demarcation after 53-measure hiatus; transposed up M3 from first entrance; more complete than first time, as if Tippett is ready to reveal more of it now	
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Tempo VI ( <i>Andante</i> )	67
multi-faceted: begins with bass figure with trill that is kin to that of "Tempo V", then bluesy triplet figure sounds like bird call in treble; stepwise "octave displacement theme of "Tempo II" in single treble notes while bass trills sounds ominous; legato triplet descending chordal figure; crisp ♯ ♯ figure with descending 3rds in right-hand; Poulenc-sounding motoric figure made of alternating 4ths and 5ths is punctuated with 5-note cluster; last figure introduced is static ♯ ♯ ♯ —repeated clusters made of stepwise figure; music is static and somewhat random	
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Tempo III	7
swirling octaves now travel in opposite direction—down keyboard; chromatic with no tonal center as in first appearance; loud and fast	
Tempo IV	5
this presentation like first one—arpeggiated figuration without octave melody	
Tempo III	7
again octaves travel <u>down</u> keyboard, begins m3 higher	
Tempo IV	8
again, arpeggiated figuration only, up M2 from previous entrance	
Tempo V	12
this time the march-like theme is altered and more melodic	
-----	
Tempo VII ( <i>Allegro</i> )	33
rapid repeated note made of stepwise motive from <i>Priam</i> —Act II, Scene ii; huge glissandos up keyboard punctuated by descending, stepwise melody in octaves—rhythm is dotted and sharp; long glissando at end leads into....	
-----	
Tempo IV	18
after 33 measures of new material—"Tempo VII", Tippett strategically gives us the most accessible material of the piece in its most expanded version; its serenity is a welcome change; glimmering octave melody glides but still doesn't land	

Tempo II		8
so utterly distinct; as previously, sounds like both a conclusion and renewal		
Tempo III		7
again, descending; seems to lead into final section of the work, which begins with....		
-----		
Tempo VIII/Lento		9
slight octave bass rumblings marked "pesante" are juxtaposed with treble bluesy chords—depths vs. heights of piano; very subdued, as if underwater; this introduction of new material is much shorter than those of "Tempo VI" and "Tempo VII"		
-----		
Tempo II	inverted	9
Tempo III	ascending, like beginning again	7
Tempo IV		2
Tempo VI		2
Tempo VII	Fragments of	3
Tempo VI	different	2
Tempo VII	"Tempi" are	1
Tempo VI	presented	1
Tempo IV	in new styles/	4
Tempo VII	combinations	2
Tempo VI		2
Tempo VII		2
Tempo VI		2
Tempo III		4
Tempo VIII		2
Tempo VII		4
Tempo III		3
-----		
Tempo I/ II/ IV		16
4 of final 16 measures are complete rests; remaining are mix of "Tempo I" and and "Tempo II" and "Tempo IV" hybrid		

## Interlude II

Michael Tippett was often called “A Man of Our Time”—an obvious play on the title of his early oratorio but one that accurately described a person who was so intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually involved in his era. It is difficult to think of a composer more socially and politically conscientious, or one more sympathetic toward and willing to address the concerns and needs of the society in which he lived. Although his commitment to serving the public through music is most apparent in works such as the third symphony (which many critics have found “preachy”) and *A Child of Our Time*, less overt commentary is also present, such as the hidden anti-Marxist themes of *King Priam*.<sup>1</sup> Even when his music was inspired by personal experience, he always strove to elevate this to a more general level, as in the song cycle *The Heart’s Assurance* (dedicated to his dear friend Francesca Allinson after she committed suicide). He even shared with the public his most intimate associations, such as that between the slow movement of the second string quartet and his passionate love for Wilfred Franks. It was Tippett’s emotional involvement in issues that validated them for him, and these issues frequently inspired his compositional practice. Thus, upon presenting the composer with an honorary doctorate from the university, the

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<sup>1</sup>Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. (London: Eulenburg Books, Ltd., 1984), 326.

Cambridge Orator aptly remarked that Tippett “philosophizes whatever he touches.”<sup>2</sup>

Tippett was the author of several books—*Moving Into Aquarius* (1958), *Music of the Angels* (1980), and *Those Twentieth-Century Blues* (1991)—all of which help paint a richer and more detailed portrait of the composer, his interests, and his philosophy. *Moving Into Aquarius* consists primarily of transcriptions of the radio broadcasts Tippett gave when employed by the BBC in the 1940s and 50s. In this radio series he had discussed everything from Purcell and his relationship to the English tradition to corporal punishment in public schools; from the subject of “pride” as one of the seven deadly sins to “carefully argued essays on the philosophy of music.”<sup>3</sup> *Moving Into Aquarius* (the book based on the radio series), focuses mainly on those talks which explored “the artist as himself and the artist in relation to society”<sup>3</sup> and various other essays on musical subjects by the composer. In the introduction to the second edition Tippett himself explained: “There is little personal anecdote; all, on the surface, is a discussion of general ideas. Yet the book is autobiographical nonetheless. It is safer to appreciate the ideas as dramatizations of processes in me, relating to my work as a composer, rather than to read the book as an introduction to the numerous authors it mentions.”<sup>4</sup> *Music of the Angels* of 1980, which also consists of radio-

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<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Eric Walter White, *Tippett and His Operas* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1979) : 35.

<sup>3</sup>Kemp, *Tippett*, 49.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Tippett, *Moving Into Aquarius*, 2nd edition (London: Paladin Books, St. Albans, 1974) : 10.



broadcast discussions and essays, serves almost as a counterpart to the earlier *Moving Into Aquarius*.

More significant, however, is Tippet's 1991 autobiography, *Those Twentieth-Century Blues*, which includes notes and letters from the dream analysis he had done in 1939. In the preface to this work, Tippet acknowledges his favorite autobiographies—those of Goethe, Yeats, and Michel Tournier—and reveals how they influenced his own:

Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* . . . appealed to me because of the intermingling of Poetry and Truth. While it contained fascinating accounts of historical events, a fantasy element was also there. Yeats's *Autobiographies* I also found intriguing. Yeats deals with brief periods in his life under various poetic headings, such as *The Trembling of the Veil*. . . .

Reading Michel Tournier's intellectual autobiography, *The Wind Spirit*, I came across a quotation from Nietzsche: 'One must have a chaos inside oneself to give birth to a dancing star.' That's me: it's also this maverick book [*Those Twentieth Century Blues*]—an account of my struggles to understand the chaotic inner world of dreams in such a way that I could create music of all kinds. The most crucial section of the book is thus Chapter 6, 'The Dreams Take Over'. . . . As in Goethe, fantasy and actuality interweave to some extent throughout the narrative. . . .<sup>5</sup>

These writings do more than demonstrate Tippet's intellectual prowess and highlight his capacity for personal introspection—they reveal the spirited humanism and candor of a man who eagerly and vibrantly experienced almost an entire century of life.

Apart from the aforementioned BBC productions and these three large publications, Tippet devoted considerable energy to public talks and media appearances. Examples are the 1976 *Doty Lectures* from the University of

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Tippet, *Those Twentieth Century Blues: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), xi.

Texas, *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* and *Desert Island Discs*.<sup>6</sup> Considering these efforts on a purely practical level, one must recognize that much of the public lecturing, story-telling, and philosophizing Tippett did involved monetary compensation. Other benefits that Tippett accrued from these forums and written disclosures include not only the "[promotion of] an understanding of his music . . . in relation to figures and traditions of thought within the post-Enlightenment history of ideas" and the establishment of a rapport with his audience, but also the pleasures of intellectual stimulation that he derived from being forced to articulate the artistic ideas, goals, and processes that drove him as a composer. It has therefore been suggested that the true impetus for a great deal of Tippett's extra-compositional career was simply that it fed his creative life.<sup>7</sup>

As important as the social and practical goals of Tippett's various lectures, talks, broadcasts, writings, and interviews may have been for his audiences and for him personally, they ultimately are secondary here. What is more important to notice is what they reveal about the man's compositional process: an enormous amount of rigorous philosophical thought and a wide range of emotional experience saturated nearly everything he wrote. These thoughts and feelings were the essential seeds and catalyst of most of his musical writing. This idea is clearly

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<sup>6</sup>The Doty Lectures are published as *E. William Doty Lectures in Fine Arts*, 2nd series, 1976, Austin, Texas, 1979. *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* and *Desert Island Discs* are recent British media shows; *Desert Island Discs* is a long-standing BBC series.

<sup>7</sup>David Clarke, "Tippett In and Out of 'Those Twentieth-Century Blues': The Context and Significance of an Autobiography", *Music and Letters* 74, no. 3 (1993) : 400.

exemplified by a simple anecdote written in an article by the British pianist Paul Crossley:

I commissioned the third [piano] sonata from Michael Tippett while he was still writing the [third] symphony: I think he was still engaged on the first movement at the time. Even then, he would sometimes talk about the new sonata—without, of course, having one single note of it in mind—as his “late Beethoven” sonata, and I was very curious to know what that might mean.<sup>8</sup>

The genesis of his third sonata, therefore, would not come from musical themes or ideas, but rather from a metaphor and all that this metaphor implied.

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Crossley, “Tippett’s New Sonata,” *The Listener* 89, no. 2304 (24 May 1973): 697.

### Sonata No. 3

With the advance of technology in the 60s and 70s, Tippett had found himself repeatedly making claims to the effect that “the destiny of the creative artist is to compensate for the dehumanizing advance of technology” and associating the advance of technology with the “death of the human spirit.”<sup>1</sup> His thoughts on this issue are most clearly laid out in the essay “Too Many Choices” in *Moving Into Aquarius*. While many artists found the period extremely invigorating and inspirational, Tippett was instead disillusioned by the general artistic and social milieu of the time. Kemp describes his feelings in the following terms:

[Tippett's] determination to continue forging new images of reconciliation and of transcendent love remained firm, but at the same time he doubted whether such images really had any power or relevance. . . . What could the future hold if man's inability to distinguish between aspiration and fact had reached the stage when the pursuit of Utopia through 'flower power', 'personal growth', the occult and so forth existed alongside the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the killings at Kent State University?<sup>2</sup>

Here we see Tippett grappling with his own ideology. Earlier, in *King Priam*, Sonata No. 2, and Concerto for Orchestra he grappled with questions of large-

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<sup>1</sup>Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. (London: Eulenburg Books, Ltd., 1984), 329.

<sup>2</sup>[*ibid.*, 332.

scale musical form and structure. But, by the mid-60s, Tippett clearly felt that society was ignoring if not deliberately snubbing humanist values; his artistic credo was clearly under attack.

Tippett found himself needing to speak out. His moral and ethical belief that human life has value and that his job as composer is to celebrate that value found precedent in other great artists—Shakespeare, Goethe, Beethoven—and he consciously thought of himself as in their lineage. In light of this it is not surprising that, after having rejected (in *King Priam*, Sonata No. 2 and Concerto for Orchestra) what he had previously considered the “archetypal” forms of his master (in particular the traditional “sonata-allegro”), he would now once again look to Beethoven for guidance and inspiration. It is in his third symphony (1970-2) that Tippett most directly addresses the question of man’s capacity for good and bemoans twentieth-century man’s evil (in the work the soprano soloist sings, “And did my brother die of frost-bite in the camp? And was my sister charred to cinders in the oven?”), but it is also in the third symphony that he turns to Beethoven for help in finding an answer. In directly quoting from Beethoven’s ninth symphony and in reexamining Beethoven’s archetypal sonata-allegro forms, Tippett at once challenges and celebrates his master’s work.

After completing *King Priam* Tippett felt that he had exhausted the Beethovenian sonata-allegro form as a means of expression and had subsequently developed the idea of “historical” and “notional” archetypes. While searching for the solution for his own “notional” sonata-allegro form, Tippett heard a performance of Boulez’s Piano Sonata No. 2 (in 1965) and was struck by the apparent motionlessness of the music. This observation finally led him to understand how he was going to interpret his theory of the

"notional archetype" and write a "modern symphony with the dynamic spirit but not the outdated letter of Beethoven."<sup>3</sup> The two dramatic components would not be the "passionate and lyrical" as they had been in his earlier works; he would instead maintain the Beethoven duality by building the sonata-allegro around the opposed forces of "arrest" (as in Boulez's Sonata) and "movement." (In music, Tippett wished for "arrest" to mean "compression" and "movement" to mean "release.") The idea of "arrest" and "movement" is the foundation for Tippett's formal plan in Symphony No. 3, and one that will influence Piano Sonata No. 3 which follows it. But, after defining the parameters of his own "notional" archetype in Symphony No. 3, Tippett nevertheless backtracks to the "historical" archetype in Piano Sonata No. 3. Perhaps in doing so he was polishing his theoretical sculpture, as if to be sure the differences of "historical" and "notional" were refined and, therefore, sufficiently distinct in his mind. While Tippett's third piano sonata does explore the concept of "arrest" vs. "movement" as the basis of sonata-allegro structure, he still clings to the traditional ("historical") forms he previously believed he had exhausted.

In the 60s Tippett found another very influential, albeit less historically-rooted, bond—that with the United States of America. Tippett initially traveled to America in 1965 to serve as "composer in residence" at the Aspen Music Festival; after this followed many other trips to conduct, lecture, and sightsee. In America he felt he had found a sympathetic and productive response to his fundamental humanism.<sup>4</sup> Tippett commented, "Oh, I love America. I'm completely hooked. You see it's a polyglot. It's such

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 439.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 332.

a vast country and there is a kind of ease of existence that you don't find anywhere else."<sup>5</sup> This affinity for America would manifest itself in a number of ways in Symphony No. 3—specifically with its use of Ivesian techniques (which Copland introduced him to in the 60s) and the use of the blues (which he also considered an archetypal form) as the basis for the entire finale. More importantly, America seemed to have unleashed a candidness in Tippett's music. What could be more frank than the closing lines of Symphony No. 3?

What though the dream crack!  
We shall remake it. . .  
We sense a huge compassionate power  
To heal  
To love.

Combined with Tippett's urgent need to drive his message of humanism home, this directness of expression gives the works of this period an expressionist feel. As Kemp comments, "It speaks of a composer whose earlier convictions had been placed under serious threat and who now needed to rethink and reassert them with a maximum forcefulness in order to make himself heard amid the general clamor of dissenting voices."<sup>6</sup> In general Tippett's music became more angular, dissonant, and abrupt. In the case of Piano Sonata No. 3, there is, among other things, a startling aggressiveness about the outer movements.

These are the two elements which forged Tippett's third piano sonata:

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<sup>5</sup>Quoted in newspaper article: Audrey Woods, "Sir Michael Tippett, leading figure in British music, dies," *Houston Chronicle*, January 9, 1998, internet access.

<sup>6</sup>Kemp, *Tippett*, 401.

the archetypal forms and rhetoric of Beethoven (as defined by Symphony No. 3), and the urgency and straightforwardness of his newly adopted expressionist style. Paul Crossley had commissioned the piano sonata before Tippett had even begun the third symphony, but it took the composer almost a year to complete the sonata after having finished the monumental symphony. He experienced a considerable amount of compositional strain in creating his own “late Beethoven sonata,” though the product validates the effort.

### First Movement

The most obvious homage Tippett pays to the “late Beethoven” model in his Sonata No. 3 is in the overall scheme: he joins three movements together as one, continuous whole. However, in many ways the work is very traditionally classical, as can be witnessed in the straightforward sonata-allegro form of the first movement.

The first movement begins with the hands spaced far apart on the keyboard. Tippett commented in the introductory interview (pp. 20-21):

I do get very fascinated with the idea of the hands as distinct objects and yet it's one human being playing. . . . But this is something desperately strong in me, this feeling that I come to the Piano Sonata to use one human being—making music of great power and emotional dimension—using his two hands and though they were both one within himself and. . . at the same time two.

Here we see Tippett's delight not only with the metaphor he uses but also with the visual aspect of the solo sonata. Perhaps for Tippett the technical challenge between the hands mirrors the struggle of man's dual elements (“light” and “shadow”), and here he is able give this struggle a visible face, a



tangible representation.

A prominent characteristic of the first movement sonata form is its lack of a consistent tonal center. In listening to the music we catch only glimpses of tonality; it is as if Tippett is deliberately creating a mirage or trying to delude the listener by hinting at keys, but never fully acknowledging them. An examination of the opening section of the sonata illustrates this point.

Example 8: Sonata No. 3, i, "primary area" material (measures 1-10)

Allegro (♩ = 132, ♩ = 88) MICHAEL TIPPETT

The musical score consists of four systems of staves. Each system begins with a measure rest of 8 measures, indicated by a dashed line and the number '8' above the staff. The music is written in 6/8 time and features a complex, atonal melody in the right hand and a more rhythmic bass line in the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The notation includes various accidentals, ties, and dynamic markings such as 'f' and '>'.

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The sense of tonality is often destroyed by extreme chromatic coloring. For instance, from measures 1-4, the music appears to be centered on B, using a collection of pitches from both B Major and B Minor. However, in measure 5 the pitch C-natural (a note belonging to neither B Major or B Minor) is emphasized with a long trill. Also, in the consequent gesture to the opening idea (measures 5-10), Tippett introduces an E# (measure 7).

Adding to this aural confusion is the rapidity of so much of the music; before the ear can confidently grasp onto a key Tippett has already moved into another realm of sound. An example of this can be heard in the "secondary" area of this sonata-allegro.

Example 9: Sonata No. 3, i, "secondary area" material (measures 39-44)

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At measure 39 the music seems to be in D Major; this sense is aided by the dominant 7th leading into it (measure 38). Actually Tippett is only borrowing notes from the key of D Major but not truly writing “in” the key. As soon as the listener begins to enjoy the semi-stability of this, Tippett dishes out an Ab Major chord (measure 40) which quickly (measure 41) changes to an Ab diminished chord. Here tonality is like shifting sands which are always changing; there are bits of harmonic color, many parts of triads, but there is never a substantial enough piece of any tonality or harmony to truly establish a key.

At other times the music of this first movement is freely atonal. In the “closing” material of this sonata-allegro exposition we see a mixture of accidentals which adhere to no tonal plan or pattern.

Example 10: Sonata No. 3, i, “closing area” material (measures 56-61)



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A general but more accurate observation is that the music is often based on the intervals of 2nds, 4ths, 7ths and 9ths. The musical materials of this movement rather than the key scheme define the sonata-allegro form.

The “primary” material of Sonata No. 3 consists of the widely-spaced hands playing angular, aggressive, two-part counterpoint in rhythmic canon. This linear writing propels the music forward and shows exactly how far we have come from the vertical component of Sonata No. 2. In this initial section the music fluctuates: sometimes the melodic shape requires the left hand to mirror the right, other times it simply imitates. Though the rhythmic canon is strict, the constantly changing meter and loose melodic imitation makes this otherwise rigid music sound chaotic. Tippett creates a reverberative effect by aggressively amassing notes one-by-one from the entire keyboard, not by harmonizing with chords or using the pedal.

The music of the primary area seems to gain momentum until it spins out-of-control like a top. Then suddenly, in a manner reminiscent of Sonata No. 2, a controlling hand grabs the top up and the spinning music abruptly stops midstream. A one-bar silence ushers in the transitory material, which seems in every way to serve in juxtaposition to the primary material with its very regular 4-bar phrasing, “*pp*” dynamic marking, and motionlessness. Here the hands converge peacefully in the middle of the keyboard for a moment of repose and then reach outward, encompassing the whole keyboard, to create a haze of static sound. The wispy, upward arpeggiated figure which follows does not disturb the extremely static and serene nature of this music because it is so light.

Example 11: Sonata No. 3, i, exposition “transitory” material (measures 22-30)

The musical score for Example 11, measures 22-30, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 22-28) is marked *pp* and features a *pesante* tempo. The second system (measures 29-30) is also marked *pp* and includes a *poco* marking. The notation is complex, with many notes and rests, and includes a *Red.* (Reduction) symbol at the end of each system.

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Many of the actual pitches here are linked by step, although Tippett's use of the octave displacement technique obscures this fact. Next, the hands (which are now at the outer extremes of the keyboard) creep inward, mirroring the first gesture, and a downward arpeggiation follows (measure 29). This pattern then repeats itself. The effect is almost one of a dragonfly quietly flitting across a still pond—it's occasional touching down makes only a slight ripple in the water but does not disturb the calm. The primary and transitory areas of this first movement clearly illustrate Tippett's concept of "movement" versus "arrest."

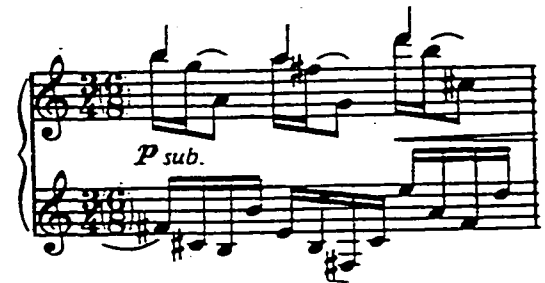
Next, an A<sup>7</sup> chord quietly ushers in the secondary area material (shown in Ex. 9). This “magical,” glimmering, highly fluid music has an ancestry stretching back 30 years to *The Midsummer Marriage*. This type of writing (discussed in connection with Sonata No. 2) is now verified as a mainstay in Tippett’s compositional repertoire. Here it is organically related to the material of the primary area:

Example 12: Sonata No. 3, i (measures 2-3, 39)

a) measures 2-3:



b) measure 39:



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But these gestures, related both rhythmically and intervallically, assume very different personalities when utilized so differently. In the opening contrapuntal material they sound angular and angry; here in the secondary area they sound whimsical and dreamy. Once again Beethoven’s influence on Tippett is apparent, not only because of the organic relation of the musical materials, but also because the composer is able to create such disparate sound worlds out of the same basic material. Like the music of the primary area, these lush and magical sounds stop abruptly (in measure 55).

A silence preceding the presentation of the “closing” material makes it even more of a surprise when a quirky march erupts. Once again we are

reminded of Sonata No. 2 and its virtual lack of transitions or bridge passages; the music simply stops and starts. The march, an atonal dotted figure, is initially presented in a rhythmic canon (like the primary material) but quickly turns into the angular material of the opening. In a very elusive manner Tippett transports the listener into the development section of this sonata-allegro; what at first appeared to be an outgrowth of the closing section becomes a development, although it would be impossible to pinpoint an exact moment when this happens.

At this point it is interesting to draw a comparison between the musical materials of Symphony No. 3 and Sonata No. 3. Tippett described the "Allegro" of Part I of the Symphony as "the pull and thrust of a jet engine" and the "Lento" of Part I as "the music of a wind-less night sky" and "the song of ocean currents." These images could also be used in reference to the materials of Sonata No. 3: certainly the music of the primary and closing sections "pulls and thrusts like jet engines," the transitory material is like "the music of a wind-less night sky," and the subsidiary material could be "the song of ocean currents." Whether this relationship is coincidental or not, it certainly proves how clearly Tippett had distinguished the character of the sonata-allegro components in his own mind, and once again shows the third symphony's influence on the third piano sonata.

Tippett skillfully combines and melds the materials of the primary, secondary, and closing sections of the exposition to build a development in this first movement sonata-allegro. The closing area's quirky march becomes more and more frantic until, finally, it actually turns into a quote of the primary material (measure 64-65). Soon thereafter this primary material begins to metamorphose into the subsidiary material. Through this

metamorphosis, Tippett illustrates exactly the extent to which his primary and subsidiary themes are related, for the transformation happens with ease. After having firmly settled in the development, there is a complete statement of this subsidiary material, though it is reclothed in new harmonic colors. Next, Tippett retains the fluid accompanimental figuration of the subsidiary material in the middle range of the keyboard and sprinkles, alternately, the lower and upper registers of the keyboard with the closing march-like theme. In a final musical synthesis Tippett takes the dotted rhythm of the march and incorporates it into the running, virtuosic music of the end of the primary-area material:

Example 13: Sonata No. 3, i (measures 87-88)



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This, however, is not the end of the development. After a one-measure silence Tippett introduces some completely new material (measure 95). Here a jazzy effect is created by a single-note syncopated figure bouncing around static chord clusters. The single-note figure is decorated with mordents which give it a whimsical quality, but the overall mood of the music is cool and detached. The music's sense of self-control is short-lived,



however, for as soon Tippett steals away the chord clusters and adds a countertheme, the music becomes frenzied and leads directly into a recapitulation of the angry, aggressive primary material.

In the recapitulation all the materials of the exposition are repeated in order, only now they are decorated: the angular primary theme is embellished with trills and triplet figures which make the music sound even more dissonant; the quiet transitory section is ornamented with an improvisatory play of note-patterns which make it sound anxious rather than serene; and the march-like closing theme imposes trills on its long notes. Although in music this dissonant it is difficult to distinguish pitch levels, it is still important to note that Tippett nods to Classical tonal organization in the recapitulation of this sonata-allegro form: the primary material is presented at exactly the same pitch level as in the exposition, but the transitory and closing materials are raised a step.<sup>7</sup>

A very short coda is built out of some of the developmental material, though one will remember that this material was, in turn, constructed out of the march's dotted rhythm gesture and the primary area's ending material. An abrupt finish to this sonata-allegro movement (the "top spinning out-of-control" of before) leaves the listener both dumbfounded and mesmerized. To be certain, the visual image of a performer's technical power and struggle in a live performance would add to the emotional impact of this music, but even without a visual component this first movement demands attention and commands the listener. The music seems almost completely void of self-control, like emotions running wild through a landscape of defiance, and the rigid formal structure somehow highlights rather than subdues this sense.

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<sup>7</sup>c.f. Prokofiev, Sonata No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 14, i.

Here the boundaries imposed by this sonata-allegro form seem to function as a straitjacket for the manic personality of the music.

### Second Movement

Tippett responds to this first movement with an extremely orderly and calm slow movement, which is a set of variations on “seventeen elaborate chords.”<sup>8</sup> Like the sonata form (and others), Tippett considered variation form an archetype, so it is not surprising that here he chose to write a lengthy set of harmonic variations. Though these chords upon which the variation set is founded are never heard in this blocked form, the procession is as follows:

Example 14: Sonata No. 3, ii, measures 1-16—blocked chords<sup>9</sup>

The musical score for Example 14 consists of two systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system contains measures 1 through 9, and the second system contains measures 10 through 16. Each measure is labeled with a number above the treble staff. The chords are blocked, meaning they are written as vertical groupings of notes on the staves. Dynamics are indicated by 'pp' (pianissimo) in measures 1, 10, 12, and 16, and 'p' (piano) in measures 5 and 15. A 'cresc.' (crescendo) marking is present in measures 7 and 13. Measure 11 features a fermata over the chord. Measure 14 also features a fermata over the chord. Measure 15 features a fermata over the chord. Measure 16 features a fermata over the chord.

<sup>8</sup>Tippett's own words from a program note on "Sonata No. 3" from Schott Publishing.

<sup>9</sup>Kemp, *Tippett*, 460.

In total Tippett presents this chord progression five times and, after the initial statement, transposes each up a minor third; thus, by the fifth presentation the music arrives at the starting pitch level and completes a circular journey.

The music itself is almost indescribably beautiful and sensuous; its warmth and breadth seemingly make time stand still. While much of the color and emotional poignancy of the variations can be solely attributed to Tippett's chords, the imaginative way he decorates and expands them produces a music which reaches to, even haunts, the far depths of one's soul. Through these variations he explores the sonorous capability of the piano and in doing so creates a highly original work of art.

Tippett initially introduces the seventeen harmonies in a quiet, broken, two-part texture, and even here he has begun ornamenting them. The first variation is a slow, pulsating, almost bluesy presentation of the chords. The texture then thickens considerably as he allows each individual chord to blossom and expand into continuous harmonies of four and six parts. In the enigmatic second variation the thematic chords become increasingly difficult to discern. In this four-part texture the hands float back and forth across the keyboard to create a dense fog of sound, and dotted and syncopated rhythms add to the complexity. The third variation has been described as "the still heart of the sonata, a moment of quiet repose,"<sup>10</sup> and after the luxuriant second variation, it does indeed seem to produce an icy feeling of self control. Here Tippett creates a static melodic line by using the top three notes of each of the thematic chords; the remaining bottom half of the chords are used to harmonize and decorate this melody. The final

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<sup>10</sup>Paul Crossley, "Tippett's New Sonata," *The Listener* 89, no. 2304 (24 May 1973): 697.

variation is a celebration of trills that are piled on top of each other to produce an ecstatic moment reminiscent of the final variation of Beethoven's Op. 109 finale. However, Tippett's variations never assume the loftiness or optimism of Op. 109's, and a more accurate comparison could instead be made with Beethoven's Op. 106 "Hammerklavier" sonata, which also contains of a weighty slow movement at its inner core. Tippett's sublime second movement ends quietly and inconclusively; the untamed first movement is now balanced with a highly-contemplative and rational second movement.

### Third Movement

The finale of Tippett's Sonata No. 3 is a raging toccata in a predominantly two-part texture. The formal straitjacket of the first movement now seems to rip at the seams, letting loose an agitated, provoked, and undisciplined musical creature. The form is A B A, "B" being an exact palindrome of "A" and the repeat of "A" being somewhat varied with a coda. Many of the musical materials of this third movement are organically related to those of the first movement. In the openings of both the first and last movements, the gestures are made of intervals of 4ths, 5ths, and 6ths and are treated in rhythmic canon. Compare the following material to that of the first movement primary material (Ex. 8).

Example No. 15: Sonata No. 3, iii (measures 287-291)



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Also, notice that the climaxes of each of these opening phrases consist of the right and left hands mirroring each other in musical figures which span the interval of a 9th.

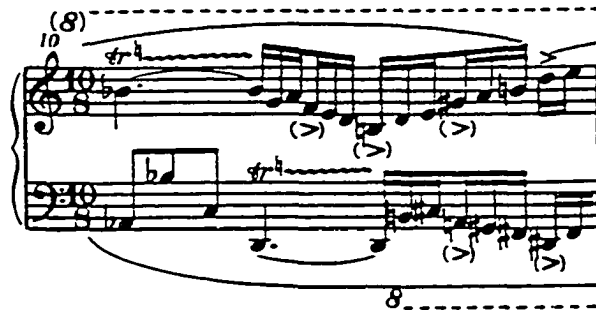
The two movements also share similar gestures and rhythms. An example can be seen in measures 299-300 of the finale, where the writing is certainly reminiscent of measure 10 of the first movement:

Example 16: Sonata No. 3, comparison of measures 299-300, and measure 10

a) mvmt. iii, measures 299-300:



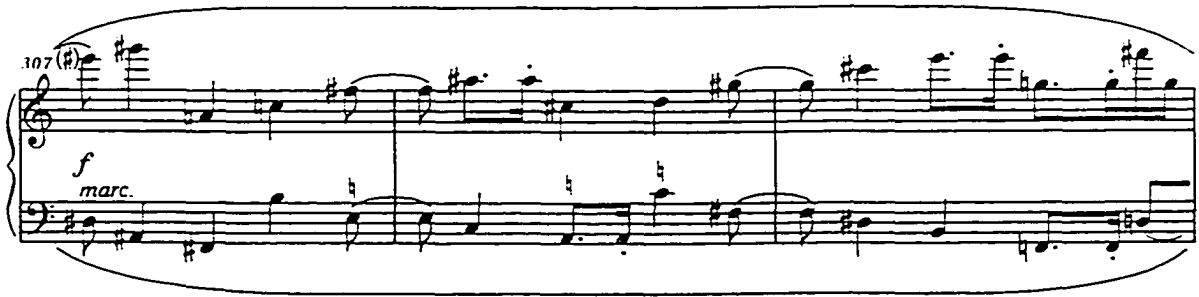
b) mvmt. i, measure 10:



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Finally, in both the first and last movements Tippett utilizes the dotted march-rhythm. Compare the following to the first movement closing material (Ex. 10).

Example 17: Sonata No. 3, iii (measures 307-309)



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Tippett used the palindrome technique in the "Lento" of Symphony No. 3,<sup>11</sup> though here the music is much thornier. Even with complete familiarity it is quite difficult for the listener to aurally comprehend every measure of the music, especially in the "B" section when the music is literally backwards. However, the junctures of this "A B A" are easily spotted both aurally and visually. The following example (Ex. 19) shows the lead into and start of the palindrome "B" section, and also the way back out of it into the restatement of "A":

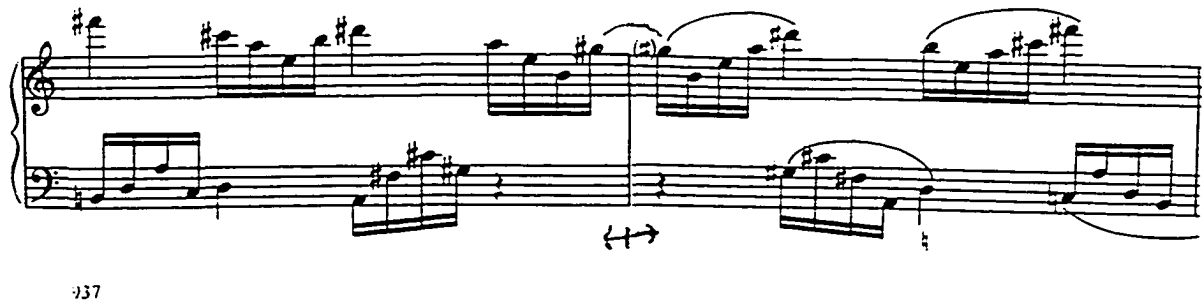
Example No. 18, Sonata No. 3, iii (measures 349-355 and 417-418)

a) measures 349-355

The musical score for measures 349-355 is presented in two systems. The first system, measures 349-351, features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system, measures 352-355, continues the melodic line and includes dynamic markings: *pp* at the start, *cresc. poco* and *a poco* in the middle, and *(p)* at the end. A double bar line with repeat dots is at the end of measure 355.

<sup>11</sup>Tippett first used the palindrome in his *Songs for Achilles* (1961); he also uses the form in String Quartet No. 4 (1977-78).

b) measures 418-419



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Throughout this movement, Tippett uses frantic trills, repeated notes, pounding octaves, and hammered chords to create an angry and tumultuous music. As in the first movement, the music sometimes hints at various tonal centers but never plants roots in one. The nearest thing to traditional harmony that Tippett gives us are recurring erratic, pounding chords at measures 338-9, 365-6, 469-70, and 481-2, and even then they are tainted by the Bb/B-natural dissonance:

Example 19: Sonata No. 3, iii (measures 338-339)



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This movement is a wicked technical challenge for any pianist. A torrent of notes and rapidly changing meters create the kinetic characteristic of much of Tippett's music, and this, rather than the musical sound-product, is the accomplishment of the movement. In a tribute to Tippett on his 75th birthday, Paul Crossley explained this function well:

A colleague once confessed to me that he could never tackle this sonata of Tippett as the last movement was so ugly. But this is to deny its very nature. It is deliberately uningratiating; one feels that the actual pitches of the notes do not matter; it is just the gesture that counts. The fact that it can be played as a palindrome is a veritable indication of this. Actually it would hardly matter if one turned the score upside down and played it that way. It has a take-it-or-leave-it quality, which is a violent and disturbing qualification of the second movement's vision.<sup>12</sup>

It is easy to see why Tippett considered this his "late Beethoven sonata." The organic relationship of so much of the work's materials, the use of trills as an expressive device, the extremes of high and low registers, and the sense that Tippett is trying to expand the piano's sonorous capabilities all support this idea. The continuous structure and shifting of weight to the central movement remind one specifically of Beethoven's "Hammerklavier." But more than this, Sonata No. 3 probes deep into the psyche to explore a wide depth and range of emotion, much as Beethoven did in his last piano sonatas and string quartets.

Tippett's adoption of such a direct and brash "expressionist" style at this time has already been attributed to the sense of urgency he felt in conveying his message of humanism when he saw his ideal slipping away. What

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<sup>12</sup>Paul Crossley, "Tippett's Third Piano Sonata," *Composer* 70 (Summer 1980) : 15-16.

ultimately differentiates his third sonata from Beethoven's late ones is that, despite the composer's intentions, it conveys a sense of despair. Its virtuosic, aggressive quality brings the performer's and thus *man's* physical nature to the fore of consciousness. This somehow inhibits the listener's ability to touch the spiritual. Though the third sonata attempts to reach beyond the grasp of man, it finally cannot transcend human limitations in the way that, for example, Beethoven's Op. 109 does. While Beethoven's late music ultimately looks towards a heavenly spiritual plane, Tippett's—perhaps partly because of his Jungian outlook—seems earth-bound, stifled by the limitations of human nature. After pleading with the public in Symphony No. 3 to strive for a renewal of spirit, Tippett now seems worn by years of futile social consciousness and activism. For this is the stuff Tippett's sonatas are made of: complexity of thought, feeling, and emotion.

### Interlude III

It is both astonishing and inspiring to learn what Tippett, sixty-eight years old at the completion of Piano Sonata No. 3 in 1973, created after that time: included are two operas (*The Ice Break* and *New Year*); two string quartets (his 4th and 5th); a third concerto (the Triple Concerto for violin, viola, and cello); the *Blue Guitar* (for solo guitar); a substantial orchestral work entitled *The Rose Lake; Byzantium* (for soprano and orchestra); his largest-yet concert hall effort, the oratorio *The Mask of Time*; a fourth symphony; and, of course, Piano Sonata No. 4. While it has been suggested<sup>1</sup> that Tippett's four symphonies better reflect his development as a composer, the fourth sonata permits the pianist to truly grasp the composer's complete musical personality. With Sonata No. 4, completed in 1984, we are able to hear intuitively how the ideas and language he had formed many years earlier—as early as 1967 when he publicly defined the idea of the “notional archetype”<sup>2</sup>—play themselves out in his repertoire for piano.

Piano Sonata No. 4 is a complex manifestation of Tippett's ever-active philosophical mind and musical ear. Its poignant and direct expression is the

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<sup>1</sup>See Andrew Ball, “Tippett's Piano Sonatas: A Pianist's Reactions,” *Music and Musicians* (January 1985): 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Kemp, *Michael Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. (London: Eulenburg Books, Ltd., 1984), 351.

result of a lifetime of rigorous, carefully considered, *complex* artistic and personal exploration on the part of the composer. In this sonata certain stylistic characteristics and philosophical ideas loom large, though now Tippett seems to relinquish his role as the public's moral messenger (as seen in Symphony No. 3) and instead retreats to a more self-absorbed psychological realm. The sonata is both a powerful display of expression and a defiant one, as if Tippett, at the age of seventy-nine, is saying, "I can no longer try to save the world, but I *can* state what is true and important to me." While Tippett scholar Meirion Bowen speaks of a distillation of invention in the composer's late works,<sup>3</sup> Sonata No. 4 represents a distillation of *feeling*; there is a strong sense that Tippett knows exactly what he wants to say without regard for who will or will not listen. It would be wrong to focus only on the fact that the last of Tippett's piano sonatas was written so late in his life, since those who knew him continually spoke of his youthful attitude and ever-sharp mind, but it is a joy to sense that the man finally seemed to find peace solely in his musical message instead of burdening himself with the task of healing the world's wounded psyche through music. While Tippett found the composing of Sonata No. 3 extremely taxing and difficult, he has indicated that with Sonata No. 4 the music flowed forth effortlessly.<sup>4</sup> One senses that, although others may not recognize the "light and shadow" within themselves (the prescription he had begun offering society as early as *A Child of Our Time*),

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<sup>3</sup>Meirion Bowen, *Michael Tippett* from The Contemporary Composers Series, ed. by Nicholas Snowman (2nd edition, London: Robson Books, Ltd., 1997), 205.

<sup>4</sup>From Paul Crossley, "Tippett's Fourth Piano Sonata" in a program book from the Britten/Tippett Festival of the London Sinfonietta. London Festival: September-December, 1986, p. 58.

he himself has truly achieved self-knowledge from a lifetime of Jungian exploration. This is evident in the language of the sonata—it is self-assured and autonomous, and it “flows forth” with a maturity and self-confidence impervious to the deafness and cynicism of the world.

This change in attitude can be detected first in his fourth symphony (1977) and is validated in subsequent works: String Quartet No. 4 (1987), the Triple Concerto (1979), and *The Mask of Time* (1982). The continuous structures and similar “birth motifs” of each of these works point in the direction of the fourth piano sonata and signal an important change in aesthetic for Tippett. The composer had a lifelong preoccupation with musical archetypes; his wrestling with sonata structure and subsequent development of “historical” vs. “notional” archetypes was discussed in connection with Sonata No. 3. Throughout his life Tippett ascribed archetypal status to *many* musical forms, including variation form, simple song forms, the fugue, ground-bass forms such as the passacaglia, and even the blues (which he used in this third opera, *The Knot Garden*, and in his third symphony). In his late works, a formal trend surfaces which begs to be labeled “cyclic archetype,” a fusion of the sonata forms and the fantasy-like forms (the “historical” and “notional”) Tippett had experimented with and nourished all of his life.<sup>5</sup> This structural synthesis sometimes means, as in Symphony No. 4, that the music literally comes full-circle to end as it began; other times it means, as in Sonata No. 4, that the music imparts a feeling of comprehensiveness and expansiveness. Tippett’s late music does not imply resignation, but rather it speaks with the voice of experience and wisdom, reminding us that life is a process and not a game—fulfillment comes in self-

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<sup>5</sup>Kemp, *Tippett*, 478.

knowledge rather than in winning. In Tippett's last works, this metaphor is consistently realized by either the use of one-movement structures or the marriage of self-contained movements into a covenant of unbroken sound.

Alongside the structural kinship of Tippett's late works is a motivic one: the "birth motif" which opens Tippett's fourth symphony appears also in *The Mask of Time* and the fourth piano sonata. In fact, in Piano Sonata No. 4 this gesture surfaces at the structural heart of the work—movement three of a five-movement structure—and is, in Tippett's words, "the final echo from the orchestral sound that opens my Symphony No. 4." He continues, "The series of works which seem to have sprung from the same musical source is now over."<sup>6</sup> The "birth motif" is indicated in both its symphonic and pianistic forms in Example 20.

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<sup>6</sup>Michael Tippett, program note obtained from Schott Publishers's Promotion Department, "Piano Sonata No. 4."

Example 20: "Birth-motif" from Symphony No. 4, and Piano Sonata No. 4

a) Symphony No. 4 (measures 1-5):

Handwritten musical score for the first five measures of the "Birth-motif" from Tippet's Symphony No. 4. The score is written on 24 staves, grouped by instrument: Flutes (1-2), Clarinets (3-4), Bassoons (5-6), Oboes (7-8), Horns (9-12), Trumpets (13-14), Trombones (15-16), Tuba (17), Piano (18-19), Violins (20-21), Violas (22), Cellos (23), and Basses (24). The tempo is marked "slow crotchet pulse (♩ = c. 100)". The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Handwritten annotations include "dolce" above the flute staff, "dolce" above the clarinet staff, "dolce" above the bassoon staff, "dolce" above the oboe staff, "dolce" above the horn staff, "dolce" above the trumpet staff, "dolce" above the trombone staff, "dolce" above the tuba staff, "dolce" above the piano staff, "dolce" above the violin staff, "dolce" above the viola staff, "dolce" above the cello staff, and "dolce" above the bass staff. There are also handwritten notes like "(like prolonged sharp intake of breath.)" at the bottom right.

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b) Piano Sonata No. 4, movement iii (measures 1-13):

**III**

slow pulse

8

loco

mf

p

ff sonorous

p

(mp) = (mf) = f = p

5

(8)

loco

8

loco

8

mf

p

ff

p

(mp) = (mf) = f = p

9

(8)

loco

ff

(f)

(mf) = (mp) = p

8

loco

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Tippett conceived this musical image as a representation of an experience he had had in the 1920s at the Pitt-Rivers anthropological Museum in Dorset. There he saw an accelerated film of a fetus growing inside the womb of a rabbit in which a single cell split to become two, and then four cells. Tippett filed this striking image away in the depths of his psyche, allowing it to germinate for around fifty years before giving it an audible, meaningful voice. The composer described Symphony No. 4 as a “birth to death piece” and this subtext, along with the “birth motif” and “amplified breathing” which open and close the work makes not only a heavy symbolic statement but relates the piece to the genre of symphonic poem (especially with its one-movement structure). When Tippett reuses the “birth-motif” in the fourth piano sonata and *The Mask of Time* it comes laden with a programmatic image of the cycle of life. The motif becomes almost a stylistic trait or trademark of late Tippett, unifying his works and serving as a continuum for his musical expression. (He opens String Quartet No. 4 and the Triple Concerto with gestures akin to it.) Tippett utilizes continuous, cyclic structures and boldly expressive “birth-motifs” to give his late works a powerful sense of expansiveness and acceptance.

### Sonata No. 4

After considering Tippett's fourth piano sonata in light of his lifetime of rich, collective experience, we must also remember that an equally significant aspect of the work is its structural logic. In an article which attributes Tippett's reason and sensibility to an "intense and truly classicizing impulse," writer Geraint Lewis discusses the classic genesis of Tippett's late, continuous, synthesized forms. He writes:

[String Quartet No. 4] is a paradigm of the metaphorical richness which is so much a part of these late instrumental works. Their conception as 'birth-to-death' pieces is aurally signposted when the amplified human breathing reverberates in the slow introduction to the Fourth Symphony. It then becomes a recurrent cyclic image requiring no explanation. The true breath of life and experience in these works, however, is the formal mastery which allows both fluid flexibility and stringent structuring to co-exist. . . . It is this creative classicism in his handling of form and structure that so distinguishes Tippett from his greatest contemporaries.<sup>1</sup>

This comment reminds us that, despite its tremendous variety and almost "stream-of-consciousness" feel, Piano Sonata No. 4 is emotionally whole and intellectually satisfying. Its fluidity and spaciousness mask a solid structural integrity, and one experiences the entire sonata as a total spiritual journey more than as a collection of individual, goal-oriented events.

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<sup>1</sup>Geraint Lewis, "Tippett: The Breath of Life" *Musical Times* 126 (January 1985) : 20.

Tippett himself has commented, "The music of the whole sonata is chiefly lyrical: a continuous flow of sound which sweeps up the constructional procedures into itself."<sup>2</sup>

The composer creates this "continuous flow of sound" by utilizing a five-movement scheme in which the music is "generally slow, and in musical consequence the movements on either side [of the middle], numbers ii and iv, are faster."<sup>3</sup> Tippett originally intended the music which we now know as the fourth sonata to be a set of bagatelles modeled on Beethoven's Op. 126, though when it came time to compose he found it spontaneously took on the character of a piano sonata instead. Though the initial conception of "bagatelles" remained a stylistic influence, pianist Paul Crossley—a close friend of Tippett's and a champion of his music—has revealed the more important elements which influenced Tippett when writing this piece. The two men, at Tippett's request, spent a day together at the piano, playing and discussing its literature. Crossley writes,

Technically, we discussed the way composers and, in their turn, pianists had learned how to exploit the increasingly enhanced resonant qualities of the concert-grand piano; how, with a virtuoso pedal technique, it was possible to harness these potentialities to produce the effect of not only two hands, but three, or even four at one keyboard.

He continues,

Michael was especially keen to learn of 20th century models for suites of pieces; I had just completed a recording of all the piano music of Ravel and, knowing Michael's long-standing affection for this composer, was eager to share some of my discoveries with him, particularly my theory that *Miroirs* is not simply a collection of individual pieces but a carefully integrated five-movement structure, controlled motivically, and very

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Tippett, program note obtained from Schott Publishers's Promotion Department, "Piano Sonata No. 4."

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

precisely balanced emotionally and dramatically. In my opinion, this set of pieces presents the closest structural comparison with Sonata 4. . . . The other piece that intrigued him was, in fact, by me! . . . [On Haydn's 250th birthday] I'd produced one of those pieces on the name of Haydn. . . but using only the pitches given by the equivalent musical notes of the name and their inversion—that is, 5 pitches in all.<sup>4</sup>

Crossley's account verifies that the two most significant features of Tippett's Fourth Piano Sonata are his use of the number 5 and his experimentation with the piano's sonorous capabilities. The five-movement scheme—a plan which found precedence in the genre of string quartet rather than that of piano sonata—is the primary indication that the number 5 will occupy a central role in the work. However, it is Tippett's use of a five-note cell which proves to be the most important organizing factor. This cell—Bb, C, A, C#, D—plays a central role throughout the work and binds the movements together in a discreet but essential way. This aspect will be discussed in more detail below. The other distinctive aspect of this sonata—its special devotion to displaying the piano's sonorous capabilities—has been directly addressed by Tippett,

A new element (for me) in Sonata No. 4—generally absent from the three previous ones—is some exploration of piano resonance. Paul Crossley helped me in this by teaching me in some degree how technically these resonances, which I have known and loved in the piano music of earlier masters, are to be produced; especially, perhaps, the nature of the third pedal, or more accurately, the functions of all three pedals.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Crossley, "Tippett's Fourth Piano Sonata" in a program book from the Britten/Tippett Festival of the London Sinfonietta. London Festival: September-December, 1986, p. 58.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Tippett, program note obtained from Schott Publishers's Promotion Department, "Piano Sonata No. 4."

Therefore, the guidelines which Tippett set for himself when composing the fourth sonata address fundamental matters: careful, large-scale organization and raw, unfettered sound.

### First Movement

The first movement serves as a prelude to the work as a whole, highlighting significant aspects of music yet to come. It both introduces the pitches of the 5-note organizational cell (Bb, C, A, C#, D) and displays Tippett's intention to exploit the grand piano's resonant qualities. The opening section of the movement (see Ex. 21) consists of three similar gestures which, in turn, majestically introduce the first three pitches of the 5-note cell.

Initially, a resounding Bb octave in the bass is answered by the highest pitch of the opening phrase—a gentle Ab in the treble—signaling the expansiveness of the sonata about to unfold. The first four measures are built primarily on a whole-tone collection, though in measures 4 and 5 Tippett introduces the pitches F-natural (marked *forte*) and Eb which bend the music towards Bb Major. Despite this, the inclusion of the “blue-note” Db in the second half of measure 5 disguises a true sense of diatonicism. A reassertion of the low Bb in measure 6 opens a second phrase; measures 6 to 10 are an expansion of the first five measures, this time moving to a D Major collection of pitches and flowering into a jazzy-then-dramatic play of triplets which tumble down the keyboard and land forcefully on a surprising Eb/ Ab dyad. This sweeping gesture sets up the introduction of C, the second pitch of the 5-note cell.

Example 21: Sonata No. 4, i, opening page (measures 1-16)

I

pulse medium slow; pulse medium fast

p

pp

f

m.d. b̄

f resonant

6

p

pp

poco

p resonant

10

crisp, light

f

p

p loco

pp

poco

f resonant

14

crisp, light

f

p

8

più f resonant

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A sonorous gesture built on the pitch C parallels the opening idea on Bb, and here (in keeping with the transposition) the low, *forte* octave-C's are answered by an even higher Bb. By the time the third pitch of the 5-note cell (A) resounds in the bass—now answered not by a treble G (the note a literal transposition would imply) but an even farther away C—Tippett has cast a musical spell using an elixir of polarities. These polarities include contrasts of high sounds/low sounds, *forte* dynamics/*piano* dynamics, prolonged sonorities (“arrest”)/propulsive sonorities (“movement”), and most importantly, atonal/tonal harmonic implications. Here, on the first page of Piano Sonata No. 4, we capture the essence of Tippett’s musical language—a mixture of harmonic color which is created by combining tonal and atonal procedures, chromatic inflection, and especially “blue” notes into a cauldron of sound.

In the initial gesture Tippett utilizes a whole tone collection, but quickly paints over this color with a diatonic Bb collection. In the second phrase, measures 6-10, the music turns to a sharp-side D Major collection which is colored by a flattened 5th “blue note” (Ab enharmonically spelled G#) in measure 8. Beginning in measure 9, however, Tippett twists the D Major pitches to spell a G<sup>7</sup> which could be interpreted as an extended dominant pull to the bass C of measure 11. To complicate matters further, the sense of either harmony—D Major or G<sup>7</sup>—in measures 9 and 10 is violently interrupted by the Eb/Ab dyad which ends the phrase and merges with the pitch C in measure 11 to produce an Ab Major chord. Through this detailed look at measures 1-11, we see how Tippett uses traditional diatonicism and functional harmony in unique ways.

Non-traditional aspects can also be seen in these measures. In this first

“expansion of resonance” all twelve chromatic pitches are present except one: C-natural—the second pitch of the 5-note cell which is to be grandly presented in measure 11. It is as if Tippett is putting together a musical puzzle and wants us to crave the conspicuously missing piece. When he finally places the last piece of the chromatic puzzle in place in measure 11 it is both an answer and a question—or literally a beginning and an ending—for it both releases the tension of the first gesture and lays the foundation for the next one. This second gesture—the one built on C—verifies Tippett’s deliberateness in this pitch-organization; from measures 11-15 one can find every chromatic pitch except A (the next pitch of the 5-note cell to be exploited) and B-natural. The missing B-natural was also strategically planned by Tippett. A comparison of these opening measures to their return at the end of the movement proves Tippett’s intention: the return or recapitulation of measures 11-15 presents the material not only in a more embellished, resonant form but also punctuated by a resounding B-natural octave in the treble (see Ex. 22, measure 87). This time Tippett makes the listener wait not ten measures (as he had in the initial gesture), but seventy-two before completing his aural puzzle. If indeed Tippett is indulging in extremely loose experimentation with dodecaphonic principles here, an analysis of this sort might explain why he begins the second gesture as a literal transposition of the first and then turns primarily to the dissonant tritone sonority in measures 14-15. Regardless, the way in which Tippett mixes together traditional and non-traditional elements in his music creates not idiosyncratic chaos but abundantly imaginative sound.



Example 22: Sonata No. 4, mvmt. i (measures 85-87)



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This rather detailed look at the first page of Sonata No. 4 serves as an illustration of the complex, sometimes contradictory processes behind Tippett's composition. One will remember that in Sonata No. 3 Tippett employed a wide harmonic vocabulary—including highly chromatic colorings, hints at bitonality and free-atonality, and rapidly changing tonal centers. All of these techniques, along with new ones, are present in Sonata No. 4. Part of Tippett's gift is the ease with which he glides in and out of consonance and dissonance, standard harmony and atonality, chromatic saturation and simple diatonicism without bastardizing the music or creating an artificial idiom. It is almost as if he is a linguistic magician, able to string together phrases of different languages in a comprehensible, stylistically coherent way. This characteristic pervades each of his works and is a hallmark of his style. In a review of Ian Kemp's biography on Tippett, theorist and Tippett scholar Arnold Whittall addresses the issue of "the presence or absence of tonality in Tippett's later work" since "the whole issue

of tonality's survival—or disappearance—and even whether a such a thing as atonality is actually possible, remains at the heart of current concerns in British musicology.”<sup>6</sup> Whittall refutes Kemp's claim that Tippett is “essentially a tonal composer” and states that “there can now. . . be an absolutely fundamental polarity of procedures between beginning and end, without chaos. . . . It is, in Tippett, a polarity between vestiges of tonality and adumbrations of atonality.”

In the opening gestures of this movement Tippett's experimentation with the piano's sonorous capabilities goes hand-in-hand with his complex choice of notes to create a panoramic aural landscape. By the time the third pitch of the 5-note cell—A—resounds in the bass, the music has achieved a static quality which needs to be pushed into action. Tippett appropriately responds to this with new music which sails quickly but dreamily down the upper half of the keyboard. Though brief, its two-part texture made of broken parallel 4ths in the right hand and C, then E-based figuration in the left hand reminds one of the “magic” music of Tippett's earlier period, found in *The Midsummer Marriage*, the Piano Concerto, and Sonata No. 2 (see Interlude I and Sonata No. 2). This “magic” music of measures 18-20 quickly turns angry and travels to the bass register of the piano, stylistically bridging the music of the first and the second sections.

In forming his theory of the “notional vs. historical” archetypes Tippett decided the two opposing forces in the “notional” sonata form archetype should be “arrest” and “movement”. Here, in the second section of

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<sup>6</sup>Arnold Whittall, Book review of Stephen Banfield's *Sensibility of English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century* (Cambridge: 1985) and Ian Kemp's *Tippett: The Composer and His Music* (London: Eulenberg, 1984), *Music Analysis* 4 (October 1985) : 312.

movement i (measure 21) Tippett writes highly aggressive music (marked “hammered”) which seems deliberately to release the tension built up by a compressed opening. An acciatura G# repeatedly embellishes the pitch A, and then leaps to a *fortissimo* C# (measure 22) like a pole-vaulter gaining speed before the jump. A pianistic display based on this C# sonority resounds through four octaves of the keyboard, marking it as the fourth pitch of the 5-note cell. Tippett creates subsequent phrases of unequal lengths by embellishing and expanding this gesture until finally the rhythmic engine abruptly runs out of steam. The last measure of the section (measure 21) sputters only C#’s and a single A-natural. Overall, this second section accomplishes three things: 1) It introduces the pitch C# (the fourth of the 5-note organizational cell) 2) It releases the tension of the first, “arrested” music; 3) It serves as a transition to the third section of music, which is centered around the final pitch of the 5-note cell—D. It is the third of these accomplishments that requires further explanation, which shall be done now.

One of the most predominant features of the music from measures 21 to 29 is its kinetic rhythmic drive. This quality makes the music sound like a transitory passage rather than a thematic area. As the music passes rapidly by, our primary aural impression is of A leaping to C#, followed by an erratic improvisation. However, as the rising gesture built on C# falls back down, twice it lands on A#/G# then A-natural/G#, leaving a trace of A<sup>7</sup> behind—especially since the notes which lead quickly into it spell an dominant 7th on A (see Ex. 23).

Example 23: Sonata No. 4, i (measures 24-25)



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This small hint of an A<sup>7</sup>, combined with the forthright presentation of pitches A and C# throughout the section refer subtly to an A triad. At the point where only C#'s and a single A are sounded at the last measure of the section (measure 21), Tippett has prepared us to hear this second section, in retrospect, as a kind of dominant preparation for the third section of music based on D. In the foreground, then, this second section clearly exploits the pitch C#, but in the background it serves as a structural transition and dominant preparation for the third section of music (beginning at measure 30) centered on D.

The third section of music (measures 30-41) heralded by a change in texture and mood. Each phrase begins with a D<sup>9</sup> chord (whose root is the fifth pitch of the 5-note cell) which contains both a major and minor third, giving it a bluesy flavor. This chord becomes a referential sonority as four and five-part harmony moves homophonically through a chromatically saturated

pool of color, eventually returning to the stability of the D chord. The extremely dense texture and rhapsodic nature of this third section enhance its intense lyricism. Hints of “blues” harmonies and even a jazz “lick” (measure 32) surface to juxtapose more convoluted sonorities, and as the phrases wax and wane in the middle register of the keyboard—eventually resting on the D chord—there is a real sense of stability about this music.

Example 24: Sonata No. 4, i (measures 30-34)



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As this section winds down the listener is left with a true sense of closure. A fermata placed over the final D<sup>9</sup> chord and then over a bar of rest marks a significant structural break, indicating that together these first three sections of music make a larger “A” section.

Having finished its elaborate presentation of the 5 pitches, movement i now pursues different goals. What initially seems to be a completely new beginning in measure 42 proves instead to be a lengthy development in which the original 5-note cell is transposed and condensed. A distinct change

in meter, texture, and register sets the stage for the entrance of the cell. Here a “delicately” textured, mechanical dance appears in the upper half of the keyboard, but as it chirps along misplaced accents, irregular phrasing, and clashing major-2nds give it an absurd, grotesque quality. At measure 48 a thicker texture creates a haze of dissonance which sets in relief a bold, octave entrance of the 5-note cell in the bass. The 5-note cell is transposed down a 3rd now, beginning on G instead of Bb, though the transposition is not exact. (In the original cell Bb moves a whole step to C-natural; here G moves only a half step to Ab.) Metrically speaking, the effect Tippett creates from measures 48-52 is very disorientating. The upper register’s dance displaces the 6/4 downbeat, making two gestures of nine beats followed by twenty-one beats, while the 5-note cell resounds underneath in 4 1/2 beat increments (see Ex. 25). By manipulating the beat pattern in such a bizarre way Tippett highlights each note of the transposed cell, giving the listener a point of reference in this dense forest of pitches.

Example 25: Sonata No. 4, i (measures 48-52)

48 *f* *resonant*

51 (8) *p*

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The material of measures 42-52 is repeated twice in measures 53-74.  
The material is varied only slightly at its second and third entrances, but in  
important ways. The non-literal transpositions of the 5-note cell  
which appear in these three musical periods use the following sets:

1st entrance:	G	Ab	F	A	Bb
2nd entrance:	D#	E	C#	F	F#
3rd entrance:	B	C	A	C#	D

During these three entrances, Tippett simultaneously develops the 5-note cell and presents all twelve chromatic pitches. His intention is clear when he chooses a B-natural instead of Bb at the third entrance, for a Bb would have perfectly mirrored the original cell; a B-natural instead provides a “missing” pitch of the chromatic scale. As in the opening page of music, Tippett is exploring 12-tone principles, though this passage differs from the opening in that there is a total lack of pitch hierarchy. The detached, cold tone of this lengthy developmental section is intensified by this underlying twelve-tone procedure and stands firmly in opposition to the very rounded, passionate tone of the first large section of the movement.

At measure 75 a return of the distinctive music which opened the work brands this movement as a ternary form. Measure 75 to the end of the movement is simply the return of the “A” section, though now the three smaller sections are elaborated upon, expanded, and embellished, piling resonance-upon-resonance. The movement closes simply on the same D<sup>9</sup> chord that concluded the opening section. What becomes apparent during the return of “A” is that just as Tippett combines traditional and non-traditional harmonic techniques to create a hybrid musical language, so does he combine traditional and non-traditional formal procedures. This first movement is, in essence, a hybrid of ternary and sonata-allegro forms. For instance, though “A” functions to present the pitches of the 5-note cell systematically, its subsections have the rhythmic and thematic character of primary area, transition, and secondary area. Furthermore, although the return of “A” doesn’t resolve diatonic key-area conflict like a traditional sonata-allegro form, it does resolve organizational conflicts such as the missing B-natural. Finally, while the large “B” section does not develop



themes or motifs from the “A” section, it does “develop” the 5-note cell in the most comprehensive way—by exploiting all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale. Overall, the first movement of Sonata No. 4 is a fascinating mixture of musical ideas and principles. In this way it foreshadows the movements which follow it.

### Second Movement

As he did in the first movement, Tippett reinterprets an archetypal form in the second—this time the fugue—to suit his taste and aesthetic. However, here he adheres to a stricter, more traditional set of rules than in the first movement. The most radical aspect of the movement is the “antithetical” fugal subject, a set of two-note phrases in which the first note is sharply attacked and the second is quietly caressed. No pitch classes are repeated in the subject, and this, along with shifts of register, gives it gestural rather than thematic prominence (see Ex. 26).

#### Example 26: Sonata No. 4, ii, fugue subject (measures 1-4)

The musical score shows the first four measures of the fugue subject. The treble staff begins with a sharp attack (f) on a B-flat, followed by a quiet caress (p) on a C. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords and single notes. Pedal markings indicate a non-legato pedal in the first measure and an 8-measure pedal in the second measure. The key signature is one flat (B-flat).

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As the fugue progresses, an interesting play of dynamic contrasts unfolds, and a *forte* vs. *piano* battle permeates the entire movement. The forceful, aggressive parts often highlight clashing 2nds and 7ths (this is foreshadowed in the opening note and its accented grace note), though generally the music seems diatonically centered. More specifically, throughout the movement vertically applied *forte* dynamics, *sforzandos*, and accent (>) marks disclose dissonant harmonies, even though the horizontally moving voices utilize mainly diatonic collections.

Diagram no. 2 illustrates the structure of this fugue. The movement begins in the traditional way with the subject initially appearing alone (starting pitch G), and then answered a 5th below (starting pitch C). The countersubject, which accompanies the answer, displays a wide tessitura as it dances “crisply” above the second entrance of the subject. As the countersubject skips along it outlines both triads and quartal harmonies, and in measures 10 and 11 treats the broken triad sequentially to lead into the third entrance of the subject. When the subject enters a third time—now a 5th below the second entrance on the starting pitch F—it is in the middle of a three-voice texture. The subject’s two-note phrases are hard to discern among the musical activity above and below it. Frenetic trills in both the upper and lower voices are prominent, eventually forging the path to the first episode.

The two voices of episode I (measures 16-25) utilize many different ideas, both old and new. Initially, the trills of measures 12-15 form a new gesture which is treated canonically at intervals a 3rd and 4th apart. At measure 16, it sounds as if the two voices take turns casting their nets before each catches a wave of ecstatic trills in measure 18 and rides safely into measure 19. At measure 19 a familiar dance made from the countersubject

Diagram 2: Sonata No. 4, ii

m. 1	m. 6	m. 12	m. 16	m. 26	m. 34	m. 55	m. 67	m. 85
fugal subject begins on G	fugal subject begins on C (lower voice)	fugal subject begins on F (middle voice)	episode I	fugal subject reappears on G (upper voice)	episode II	fugal subject reappears on C (middle voice)	episode III	fugal subject reappears on F (lower voice)
1 voice	+ dancing countersubject; 2 voice	3 voice	2 voice, related to "dancing" c.s.	2 voice	2 voice, two-part invention	3 voice, theme harmo- nised below; upper voice related to episode II + III	2 voice, first evolves from previous section; then evolves into episode I— (down 2nd)	3 voice, sustaining pedal; "dancing" material of c.s.

material skips randomly along, interjecting small clusters of sound (marked “*fsf*”) at the beginning of each measure. A short bridge-like passage appears at measure 23 and here a slower harmonic and rhythmic motion along with a more deliberate (“ringing, hammered”) style, gives the music a much-needed stability. However, this stability is short-lived and soon the rhythm regains speed and propels the listener into a restatement of the fugue subject on G (its original pitch level) in measure 26.

The restatement appears an octave higher than the first statement, and here it is accompanied by a thinly textured sequence of notes which travel down, then back up the keyboard. Each two-note phrase of the subject is punctuated at the end with a “bell-like” ping in the other voice, and we hear the results of Tippett’s new-found devotion to pianistic resonance. What follows is not another entry of the subject but a second episode, very different in character from the first (see Ex. 27).

Example No. 27: Sonata No. 4, ii (measures 34-44)

34 *p to pp singing, tender* *poco f* *tr*

39 *p* *poco f* *p suh.* *tr*

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This episode (measures 34-54), a poignant two-part invention, is a moment of quiet repose. Its simple and direct expression are a welcome surprise after the rather haphazard nature of the first episode. The music is richly colorful despite its thin texture, an effect Tippett creates by sliding in and out of diatonic collections and by sprinkling chromatic notes throughout the section. For instance, in Example 28 the episode begins with C as the referential pitch, though both G Major and F Major diatonic collections are utilized simultaneously. As episode II continues, the music is like a kaleidoscope which tranquilly changes colors at every turn. This tender, almost melancholy music is rudely interrupted at measure 47, with a wild interjection which reminds us of the fine line between sanity and insanity, and of the fragility of life. Structurally, measures 47-48 serve as a contrast to this otherwise peaceful, entrancing music; they signify another round in the battle of opposing dynamics.

When the fugue subject reappears on C—this time rhythmically augmented—in the middle voice at measure 55, it is harmonized below with a dissonant voice that moves parallel to it. Above this, Tippett builds a stylistic bridge and transforms the material of episode II into the soprano-voice countertheme (see Ex. 28).

Example No. 28, Sonata No. 4, ii (measures 55-63)

The musical score for Example No. 28, Sonata No. 4, ii (measures 55-63) is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 55-58, and the second system covers measures 59-63. The score is written for piano, with dynamics ranging from *piano* (p) to *forte* (f). The melody is primarily in the right hand, featuring slurs and triplets. The left hand provides accompaniment, often with sustained notes and dynamic contrasts. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

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Even more remarkable is the way in which the composer then uses this countertheme material to foreshadow what will follow. Episode III (measures 67-84) contrasts in dialogue “hard”, *forte* gestures and “delicate,” *piano* gestures, both of which spring from the countertheme of measures 55-66. Example 28 shows that throughout the soprano countertheme there are several triplet figures and two-note slurs. These gestures are then utilized to create the third episode (see Ex. 29):

Example 29: Sonata No. 4, ii (measures 67-70)



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Here, each gesture is related to either the triplet figuration or the two-note slurs of measures 55-66. The two-note slurs appear not only in their original eighth notes, but also in sixteenth notes, creating the detached *forte* gestures of measures 69 and 73-74. The remaining material found in measures 67-74 is simply the triplet figure redressed. Tippett displays his craftsmanship in the way that he stylistically unifies episode II and the countertheme of measures 55-66 and then, in turn, uses the gestures of the countertheme to build the beginning of episode III. As the third episode unfolds, the detached, *forte* gestures create a climax which leads to a restatement of the material of episode I, only now the music is transposed down a step.

The material at the end of the third episode functions exactly as it did in episode I, except that here it propels the music into a restatement of the fugue subject on F instead of G (measure 85). At this final entrance Tippett calls for the sostenuto pedal for the first time in any of his piano sonatas. Here the fugue subject resounds in the depths of the piano, and each of the two-note phrases is expanded and celebrated in the following way: each *forte*

note is embellished by a triplet tremolo (another gesture foreshadowed in measures 55-66) and enhanced by a furious, virtuosic display in the upper voices; each *piano* note is initially sounded alone and is then held with the sostenuto pedal as the countersubject dances its final dance above in opposition. At the end of the fugue the conflict of dynamic contrasts is at its height, and Tippett skillfully manipulates the three-voice texture to create a highly intense yet unpretentious ending.

Diagram no. 2 visually illustrates the structural art of this fugue. The placement of the fugue subject within the texture at each of its entrances, the relationship of the episodic material to the countersubject and counterthemes that come before and after it, the addition of a new voice at each reappearance of the subject, and the 5th relations between the subject's entrances all verify a well-planned, masterfully crafted composition. It is of interest to note that here Tippett temporarily turned away from his preoccupation with the number 5. Although his formal organization—like his musical language—is always logical, it never conforms to a rigorous set of rules to the detriment of musical sound, psychological effect, or emotional impact. As Peter Donohoe commented,

I feel much closer to the ideas of Tippett that he states, and one of the main ones is that he's not an intellectual composer. . . . It seems very obvious to me that when Tippett writes something down he doesn't calculate anything mathematically, at least not in any complex way. He just feels it and it comes out and that's it. . . .

If Tippett had intended to place strict boundaries on this fugal composition—to “calculate mathematically” this work of art—certainly he would have used the 5-note cell in creating the fugue subject or would have somehow



applied the number 5 to the movement's structural plan. As it stands, he chose drama (a drama of dynamic contrasts) over math, leaving us with a satisfying counterpart to the rigorous prelude.

### Third Movement

It is in the third movement that Tippett reproduces the "birth-motif" from his fourth symphony. The impetus behind this is addressed in a program note about Sonata No. 4. Tippett wrote:

In general the five-movement shape tends to force the necessarily central (third) movement into prominence—either of display or intensity. In this Sonata, it is the latter.<sup>7</sup>

Even devoid of programmatic associations, the "birth-motif" is an emotionally powerful musical gesture which is perfectly capable of responding to the call of "intensity." The challenge Tippett creates for himself with the 5-movement plan is resolved through both musical and structural means: besides utilizing the weighty "birth-motif," Tippett makes the third movement a formal mirror of the entire sonata which reflects not only the 5-part structure but also the emotional content of the work. In technical terms, the third movement's form is "A B C B A," but other, less-tangible features of the entire sonata are honored equally—especially the expansive gestures, highly expressive language, and determined spirit.

The movement opens with—significantly—five phrases built on the "birth-motif." While these opening gestures derive from the opening gestures of Symphony No. 4, this music is not an exact quote of the

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<sup>7</sup>Michael Tippett, program note obtained from Schott Publishers's Promotion Department, "Piano Sonata No. 4."

symphony's music, but rather a rewritten, new version of preexisting material. In this music the "birth" gestures are rewritten to highlight the piano's strengths. The richly resounding bass, the natural rather than forced decay of sound, and the chiming treble sonorities produce a haunting pianistic version of this dramatic symphonic music (see Ex. 20). The broad, expansive opening gestures draw the listener in and capture his attention with profound force. As in the first movement, the initial phrases of this central movement are built on specific pitches which resound heartily in the bass. The five phrases germinate in the following pitches: A, C, Bb, B-natural, D. (Again, we recognize Tippett's dismissal of serialist rigor; it would have been easy enough to make the B-natural a C# so that it would replicate the organizational cell.) These five statements comprise the "A" section.

To speak of harmony in this "A" section is difficult. The most prominent interval is the tritone, and this, along with the presence of both major and minor 3rds, gives the music a bluesy yet unstable feel. After the strong, sonorous, *fortissimo* figures (the "birth-motifs") launch each of the five phrases, the rhythmic motion rather than melodic or harmonic drive perpetuates musical interest. This rhythmic motion is similar in each phrase: an initial explosion of rhythmic energy dissipates rather quickly, then slowly harnesses its resources and regains momentum, climaxing in a final, pulsating heartbeat. Here, without a downbeat or rigorous meter, time seems suspended, and this rhythmic sensation is heightened by the physical aspect of playing it on the piano. Whether stretching to the outer extremes of the keyboard, reaching towards the next expressive gesture, or simply enjoying the play between the hands, the rhythms of the music and of the body work

simultaneously to create an effect greater than the sum of its parts. This effect is what truly seasons the music with intensity. Tippett takes his own "birth-motif" and through pianistic means brings it new life; the composer's attempt to make this third movement the center of "intensity" is successful because of this.

After the last of the five statements which comprise the "A" section is complete, the music becomes a three-part song. This "B" section is comprised of two unequal phrases (measures 27-32 and 33-45). Here a middle voice languorously sings the blues while a bass line and countermelody flow freely around it. The rhythmic complexity and long, seamless lines give the music an improvisatory feel. Throughout this blues-inspired section the voices seem deliberately to avoid establishing any pitch hierarchy, and this enhances that wandering quality characteristic of jazz and blues. Despite Tippett's rejection of pitch-centers and functional harmony in both "B" sections, one small exception occurs just at the outset: the first phrase repeatedly refers to B-natural until measure 32 where a dominant-functioning A-natural appears. This small hint at a tonal axis and traditionally functioning harmony is so fleeting it is hardly recognizable to the ear.

The music of this "B" section seems as if it could linger on forever, so when a rhythmical play of octaves suddenly erupts in the bass it sounds rather forced and out of place. In this middle "C" section, from measures 46-82, Tippett writes five nearly identical phrases to decorate individually the pitches of the 5-note organizing cell from the first movement (Bb-C-A-C#-D). Each phrase begins in the lower register of the keyboard with a strict march built on Bb where the hands ricochet off the keyboard like drumsticks on a drum. This drumming is a call to attention before the grand entrance of one

of the 5-note cell pitches. Each presentation of a cell pitch—a double octave struck forcefully in the bass—sounds like the firing of a cannon. The “shot” is held with the sustaining pedal for over four measures while a trumpet fanfare rings above it, eventually dispersing into Messiaen-like clusters of musical debris. Compared to the improvisatory tone of the “B” section, the militaristic precision of these five statements seems stringent and cold. As the apex of not only this third movement but also of the entire sonata, this “C” section is saddled with a mission, and its almost contrived determination reflects this. Clearly, Tippett wishes to aggrandize the 5-note cell, and here he strategically and purposefully pursues this mission.

The three sections of this movement—A, B, and C—could be characterized (in order) as harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic. Tippett has always felt that stark contrast is the most important element of dramatic construction, whether it be the passionate vs. lyrical or arrest vs. movement. In this movement, however, the contrasts seem to focus on texture and style. Through this rollercoaster ride of textures and styles the listener gains experience and knowledge, so when “B” and then “A” return, they have new meaning. Against the backdrop of a tightly wound and militaristic “C” section, “B” seems somewhat apathetic and luxuriant. If these two (“C” and “B”) together represent extremes of destruction—the evils of warfare vs. the evils of indifference, perhaps—“A” is now a plea for conscientiousness. The “birth-motif” symbolizes life; its appearance at the end of the movement is a powerful reminder that above all human life should be valued and honored. Though the seeds of this emotional content were planted in the earlier movements, here they seem vigorously to take root. The movement ends in

exactly the same way it began, and its final chord hangs in the air with great anticipation.

#### Fourth Movement

Movement iv is reminiscent of the finale of Sonata No. 3, where an aggressive, violent scherzo is suddenly unleashed upon the listener. Another similar feature is the treatment of material: the reader will recall that movement iii of Sonata No. 3 is a palindrome, and this fourth movement of Sonata No. 4 is based primarily on invertible counterpoint, “mirror” techniques, and canon. Its form—A B A C A B A—lends itself well to these compositional tools. Paul Crossley also stated,

The ‘scherzo’ material was, again, suggested by something the composer had seen on television, Glenn Gould (I think) playing some Bach and imitating what would have been done originally on a two-manual harpsichord, so that the two hands, with independent figurations, seemed to start at opposite ends of the keyboard, come together in the middle, and then *cross over*, still maintaining their own material. This notion is achieved here in Sonata 4 by having the one hand take over the other’s material at the half-way mark, but aurally the effect remains.

Diagram 3 attempts to map out the thematic and harmonic relationships between the movement’s musical periods. Here Tippett stretches his resources to create a substantial movement out of limited materials. It is the repetition and return of materials along with pitch relationships which holds the music together. Throughout the movement pitches serve as axes or “referential pitches” around which the music develops. For example, while Tippett often begins a period of music as an exact inversion of one that came before (compare measures 46-51 and 84-89), he subsequently breaks away in

Diagram 3: Sonata No. 4, iv

	measure:	musical material:	referential pitches:
A	1	r.h. chords/l.h. figuration	c# g# d#
	7	l.h. chords/r.h. figuration	eb bb f
	13	l.h. chords/r.h. figuration	f# b e
B	19	X	
	23	X <sup>2</sup> , up 2nd	
	27	X <sup>3</sup> , down 3rd...extended	
	34	Y	bb c eb
	39	Y <sup>2</sup>	bb d ab
	44	Y codetta	
A	46	l.h. chords/r.h. figuration	g# c# f#
	52	r.h. chords/l.h. figuration	f bb eb
	58	r.h. chords/l.h. figuration	a e b
C	64	CANON	
A	84	r.h. chords/l.h. figuration	f# c# g#
	90	l.h. chords/r.h. figuration	ab eb bb
	96	l.h. chords/r.h. figuration	b e a
B	102	XX	
	106	XX <sup>2</sup>	
	110	XX <sup>3</sup>	
	117	Y	bb c eb
	122	Y <sup>2</sup>	bb d ab
	127	Y codetta	
A	129	l.h. chords/r.h. figuration	c# f# b
	135	r.h. chords/l.h. figuration	bb eb ab
	141	r.h. chords/l.h. figuration	d a e

order to establish or maintain other large scale relationships (in this case the relationship between measure 52 and measure 7, and between measure 90 and measure 135). In other words, Tippett chooses pitch axes over the similar but more precise palindrome in order to organize this lengthy movement “tonally.”

To pianists, however, the main interest of the movement lies in its technical difficulty. Tippett has always been fascinated with the virtuosic aspect of playing the piano, and this movement is primarily concerned with “speed and breath-taking feats.”<sup>8</sup> For the first time in the sonata, Tippett does not write within a consistent time signature but instead composes a kinetic music that barrels along in uneven periods. Among scholars, this kineticism is recognized as a trademark of Tippett’s style, and it was characteristic of the first and third piano sonatas. This movement, however, is the most thoroughly representative example of this stylistic trait found in Tippett’s sonatas.

Roughly, one can characterize the music of this movement as follows: The music of the “A” sections consists of twisted, darting figuration, accented, jazzy riffs, and punched chords. The music of the “B” sections is initially lighter and more playful, and the hands tend to mirror one another (“X” in the diagram). Then “B” turns into an incredibly difficult double-note passage for the right hand while the left supports it with lush harmonies in the bass (“Y” in the diagram). The canon in the middle of the movement (“C”) is a slower but extremely florid, highly-ornamented fantasy in which the left hand imitates the right for twenty measures. (See Ex. 30.)

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<sup>8</sup>Crossley, “Tippett’s Fourth Piano Sonata” : 58.

Example 30: Sonata No. 4, iv, materials

a) "A" material, measures 1-6

8

*f strong*

3 (8)

5 (8) *loco*



b) "B (X)" material, measures 19-22

19

*p light, delicate*

*crisp*

This musical system covers measures 19 to 22. It features a treble and bass staff. Measure 19 begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is marked *p light, delicate*. A slur covers measures 19 and 20. Measure 21 is marked *crisp*. The system ends with measure 22.

21

*mf*

*f non troppo*

*(mf)*

*(mp)*

*ease*

This musical system covers measures 21 to 22. It features a treble and bass staff. Measure 21 is marked *mf*. A slur covers measures 21 and 22. Measure 22 is marked *f non troppo*. The system ends with measure 22.

c) "B (Y)" material, measures 34-37

34

*p*

*Ped.*

*Ped. sim.*

This musical system covers measures 34 to 37. It features a treble and bass staff. Measure 34 is marked *p*. A slur covers measures 34 and 35. Measure 36 is marked *Ped.*. A slur covers measures 36 and 37. Measure 37 is marked *Ped. sim.*. The system ends with measure 37.

36

*f non troppo*

*p*

This musical system covers measures 36 to 37. It features a treble and bass staff. Measure 36 is marked *f non troppo*. A slur covers measures 36 and 37. Measure 37 is marked *p*. The system ends with measure 37.

d) Canonic material, measures 64-67

64 slower

p singing

mf

ring

66

tr (#)

p

mf

f

loco

ring

mf

p

mf

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Even though Tippett utilizes only these four ideas in the movement, they are almost never repeated verbatim, so the pianist must technically master many different passages of music. Overall, this movement calls for incredible stamina. By the finish of this fourth movement, this ravishing music has stripped the listener and left him emotionally numb. It is the duty of the Fourth Sonata's finale to restore his senses and perspective.

### Fifth Movement

The fifth movement of Sonata No. 4 is not only the conclusion to a tremendous piece of music, but it was the last time Tippett wrote for piano solo. In this final effort the composer seems to pour his heart and soul into the music as if to bid the genre of piano sonata farewell. It is one of the most

moving moments in all of Tippett's piano sonatas. Up to this point, the lengthy fourth sonata has taken the listener on a draining and challenging emotional ride, and though the fifth movement continues to demand active involvement from the listener, it does not leave him robbed or deprived, but rather replenished. For this movement, the longest of the five (eleven minutes), Tippett composes a theme and variations reminiscent of the finale of Beethoven's Op. 109. All told, the theme is presented six times, but because (also like Beethoven's Op. 109) the last statement replicates the first, there are, significantly, *five* different statements of the theme. Throughout the movement the variations continually expand and become more convoluted until the original theme returns to restore order to this increasingly complex music.

Two diagrams will facilitate a discussion of the movement: Diagram 4 is a musical reduction which visually outlines the prominent aspects of the 17-measure theme; Diagram 5 provides a detailed account of each phrase of the whole movement.

In essence, the theme is an exploration of blues and modal harmonies which are centered on certain chords, labeled in Diagram no. 4 with Roman numerals.<sup>9</sup> Although the variations are harmonic, the theme consists of a soulful melody cooing above the fundamental chords. This heartfelt singing initiates these variations into the world of blues, although wide melodic skips and a non-traditional chord progressions give the theme a contemporary flavor.

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<sup>9</sup>Roman numerals are used strictly for the sake of discussion to trace their relationships through the variations, and are not meant to imply any traditional harmonic function.

Diagram 4: Sonata No. 4, v, melodic/harmonic reduction of theme

The musical score is divided into three systems, each containing a treble and bass staff. The notation includes melodic lines with slurs and ties, and harmonic accompaniment with chords and scale degrees.

**System 1 (Measures 1-5):**

- Measure 1: Treble staff has a half note  $\flat 5$  with an accent (^). Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{BM I}$ .
- Measure 2: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{BM I}$ .
- Measure 3: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{AM } \flat \text{VII}$ . Above the staff, the word "anticipation" is written with a bracket over measures 3 and 4.
- Measure 4: Treble staff has a half note  $\flat 5$  with an accent (^). Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{gm7 } \flat \text{vi7}$ .
- Measure 5: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{BM I}$ .

**System 2 (Measures 6-11):**

- Measure 6: Treble staff has a half note  $\flat 6$  with an accent (^). Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{BM I}$ .
- Measure 7: Treble staff has a half note  $\flat 5$  with an accent (^). Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{A7 } \flat \text{VII7}$ .
- Measure 8: Treble staff has a half note  $\flat 3$  with an accent (^). Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{BM I}$ .
- Measure 9: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{BM I}$ . Above the staff, the word "transition" is written with a bracket over measures 9 and 10.
- Measure 10: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{C Phrygian}$ .
- Measure 11: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{C Phrygian}$ .

**System 3 (Measures 12-17):**

- Measure 12: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{gm } \flat \text{vi}$ .
- Measure 13: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{B new direction I}$ .
- Measure 14: Treble staff has a half note  $\flat 5$  with an accent (^). Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{B centered}$ .
- Measure 15: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{B centered}$ .
- Measure 16: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{B centered}$ .
- Measure 17: Treble staff has a half note. Bass staff has a half note chord  $\text{bI}$ .

Diagram 5: Sonata No. 4, v

	Phrase 1	Phrase 2	Phrase 3	Phrase 4
<b>THEME:</b> (17 measures)	MEASURES 1-3 CHORDS: BM, AM, gm (I, $bVII$ , $b_{vi}^7$ ) PITCHES: 5/b5 of I (F/F#)	MEASURES 4-9 (m. 9 is transitional) CHORDS: AM <sup>7</sup> , BM ( $bVII$ , I) PITCHES: b6, b5, 4 of B; b3 of A	MEASURES 10-13 (mm. 12-13 are transitional) PITCHES: melody and counter-melody use C phrygian; transition uses gm ( $b_{vi}$ )	MEASURES 14-17 CHORDS/PITCHES: centered on B but moves to Bb, ends with #5
<b>VARIATION I:</b> (20 measures)	MEASURES 18-20 CHORDS: GM, eb <sup>7</sup> (I, $b_{vi}^7$ ) PITCHES: 5/b5 of I (Db/D)	MEASURES 21-27 1/2 (transition m. 26-27 1/2) CHORDS: GM, F <sup>+</sup> (I, $bVII^+$ ) PITCHES: b6, b5, 4, 1 of G emphasis on 5/b5 of G	MEASURES 27 1/2-30 (transition m. 29-30) PITCHES: melody and counter-melody use G# phrygian; transition uses $b_{vi}$	MEASURES 31-36 CHORDS/PITCHES: centered on G; moves to F#7 (Gb) with #5
<b>VARIATION II:</b> (20 measures)	MEASURES 37-39 CHORDS: AM (I) PITCHES: 5/b5 (E/D#) of I	MEASURES 40-45 (transition m.45) CHORDS: G <sup>+</sup> , F# ( $bVII^+$ , vi) PITCHES: emphasis on 5/b5 of AM (I)	MEASURES 46-49 (transition m. 48-49) PITCHES: r.h. melody and l.h. accompaniment use Bb phrygian; transition uses VI	MEASURES 50-57 1/2 CHORDS/PITCHES: centered on A; moves to Ab with #5
<b>VARIATION III:</b> (21 measures)	PHRASES 1 AND 2 COMBINED: MEASURES 57 1/2-67 (measures 57 1/2-58 and 67 are transitional) CHORDS: D <sup>7</sup> (I), A# <sup>7</sup> (enharmonic spelling of Bb <sup>7</sup> ; $b_{vi}^7$ ) PITCHES: Ab chord m. 57 embodies 5/b5; prominent descending melodic line from A-D in m. 63-64, 65-66		MEASURES 68-72 1/2 (transition m. 72) PITCHES: very chromatic r.h. accompanies l.h. melody that uses G phrygian	MEASURES 72 1/2-79 CHORDS/PITCHES: centered on D; moves to C# with b5, b7 (enharmonically Db)
<b>VARIATION IV:</b> (17 measures)	MEASURES 80-82 PITCH CENTERS: F, Eb (I, $bVII$ ) PITCHES: m. 80 clashing E/F sound like 5/b5 of others	MEASURES 83-88 (transition m. 88) CENTERS: F, Bb, Ab, Eb PITCHES: prominence of E over F	MEASURES 89-92 (transition m. 92) PITCHES: uses B phrygian	MEASURES 93-97 CENTERS: F, Bb, C#; ends on pitches C#, D#, E#.

Each variation has a referential triad upon which it is based. In the theme this triad is B-major (labeled "I"). It is outlined in the bass of the first two measures in broken form, highlighting the bluesy clash between the 5th (F# in the bass chord) and flattened-5th (F in the melody) on the opening downbeat. In measure 3 two more important chords appear: the bVII (A Major) and bvi7 (G Minor7). Though the soprano line of measure 3 sings a stepwise melody of A-G-F (embellished with displaced 2nds), these notes are also used to form harmonies: the accented "A" which is anticipated in measure 2 and then re-sounded in measure 3 combines with the bass pitches E and C# to give an A Major sonority; also, the accented F at the end of measure 3 combines with the G, Bb, and D of the bass to color the music distinctively with a gm7. These the three chords (I, bVII, and bvi7), along with the bruising clash of 5ths (F-natural/F#) at the opening, are the most significant aspects of this first phrase, for they will appear in later variations.

At measure 4 the tied, accented F from measure 3 ushers in a second phrase which extends through measure 9. Though this phrase begins like the first, the appearance of an accented G# in measure 5 anticipates the unexpected A Major interjection which resounds in the bass. Throughout the second phrase the harmony switches between A7 (bVII7) and B-Major (I) while the melody projects a flattened-5th against the B Major sonority and a flattened-3rd against the A Major sonority. The languorous melody here elaborates on this underlying alternation of two blues chords—A7 with flattened 3rds and and B with flattened 5ths.

The end of this second phrase, measure 9, is a simple transition to the third phrase. Here the pitches descend in parallel motion to a quaint, poignant two-part invention which is reminiscent of Episode II of the second

movement fugue. Each of the two voices utilizes a phrygian collection on C (C, Db, Eb, F, G, Ab, Bb), which gives the music a haunting, melancholy tone. The use of 4ths adds to the starkness of the passage. Another transition in measures 12-13 smoothly transports the music via a G-minor (bvi) chord to a fourth and final phrase, which begins similarly to the first and second ones. Here the music initially sounds parallel to phrases 1 and 2 because it is based on B. It does not, however, outline B Major as strongly as the opening; instead the melody soulfully winds down to end on a colorful and rich Bb chord. Part of what distinguishes this closing sonority is its inclusion of the F/ F# clash which opened the theme; this dissonance binds together the B-Major starting point and Bb-Major finishing point. The theme's large-scale movement from B (I) to Bb (bI) is replicated in the variations that follow; the significance of this becomes clear at the end of the movement.

Although the four phrases which comprise the theme are fairly straightforward, their varied lengths and (unnotated) meter changes make the music sound free-flowing. The theme's eliding periods and slowly-unfolding events invoke a stream-of-consciousness feel which overshadows its logical, balanced phrasing. Through a variety of styles and characters, the harmonic variations which follow reflect the original theme subtly, and as they progress their obvious relationships to the theme grow fainter. Diagram no. 5 illustrates the harmonic and melodic relationships between the variations and the theme.

Variation I (measures 18-36) is based on a G-Major sonority. Throughout this variation, rapid, ecstatic-sounding gestures clothe the theme, and the musical events mirror very closely those of the original statement of the theme. The variation begins with a florid embellishment of

the 5th/ flattened 5th dissonance, the right hand beginning on Db, the left on D-natural. Soon thereafter the referential G Major sonority becomes a pure resting place. In measures 19-20 accented notes which are decorated with the Db/D dissonance spell out an eb<sup>7</sup> chord (bvi<sup>7</sup>) chord (thus maintaining the theme's harmonic relationships). Phrase 3 (measures 27 1/2-30) is also a two-part invention as in the original theme. The motoric fourth phrase (measures 32-36) initially accelerates, then resolves to an F# chord containing both C# and D (which is enharmonically the 5/b5 dissonance of the beginning of the variation).

Variation II (measures 37-57) initially focuses completely on the 5th/ flattened 5th blues dissonance which opens both the theme and Variation I. Here wildly interjecting octave D#'s and E's fight for dominance in the treble before a rich A Major chord sounds repercussively in the bass. Then, in the aftermath of this argument, an eerie "bird call" echoes in the distance (measure 39). In the second, parallel phrase (measures 40-45), the other two chords frequently found in the variations—vi and bVII—are powerfully combined to answer this battle between D# and E. Phrase 3's modal melody is a transposed reproduction of the original theme, though now very different in character; in contrast to the Theme and Variation I's reserved two-part inventions, it cries above a babbling brook of left-hand figuration in an intense and desperate manner (measures 46-49). The variation ends with extended "bird calls" which are supported by resonant chords. The last of these chords is an Ab Major chord which, again, is a half-step below the opening harmony of the variation. However, the function of this Ab sonority is twofold: it not only ends Variation II but also begins Variation III, smoothly eliding these two sections.



Variations I and II are both intense and almost rash in nature, so the soothing, tranquil Variation III provides a necessary contrast. The obvious start of a new variation on D (measure 59) marks the “resonant” Ab chord of measures 57-58 as the precedented exploitation of  $\flat 5$ . Still, hypnotic chords marked “like a Marimba” provide a haze of color above the initial  $\flat 5$  (Ab) sonority, setting in relief the singing soprano melody and sweeping low-bass accompaniment which clothe the theme at measure 59.

Although the music of Variation III is relatively calm and accessible, its relation to the theme and Variations I and II is more difficult to discern, especially at the beginning. Here Tippett not only combines phrases 1 and 2 into one, but the chromatic harmonies only vaguely suggest an A $\sharp 7$  ( $\flat v i 7$ ) chord in measures 64 and 66. However, in measures 63-64 and 65-66, a descending, chromatic melody from A-natural to D-natural confirms a D-centeredness to the passage.

Although the chromaticism of Variation III represents a move towards more experimental treatment of the theme, the smooth, easy-flowing melodicism prominent throughout the section emulates the singing quality of the theme. Tippett cleverly cradles this more tonally complex music in the familiar arms of the opening song. As the variation progresses, this continuous, fluid sound dominates. Phrase 3’s modal melody (in the bass) is accompanied by a highly-chromatic, colorful line of two-part harmony which seems to float down the keyboard like a falling leaf. As is expected, the fourth phrase (measure 72 1/2) begins like the first—the Ab chord which represents  $\flat 5$  of D opens the section—and ends with a C $\sharp$  ( $\flat I$  of the opening D) sonority.

The mellifluous and more abstract tonal relationships of Variation III set the stage for the fourth and final variation before the da capo. Here the

pianists' two hands are positioned at the outer extremes of the keyboard as they play slow, continually flowing sixteenth notes in two-part counterpoint. The position of the hands is a metaphor for this variation's relationship to the theme—Tippett reaches to the outer limits of the theme's capability to create a tonally ambiguous, convoluted variation. (Diagram no. 5 outlines the structural points of the variation.) The haze of sound which results from this chromatically saturated, non-metric music is mesmerizing. The harmonic relationships seen in the other variations are now reduced to simple pitch relationships which create a colorful wash of sound. Although there are more notes in Variation IV than in any of the other variations, the theme is actually stripped down to its essence here; like a Schenkarian analysis, only the most prominent aspects remain. The listener becomes transfixed by this haunting, imaginative music. The variation's build-up of resonant sound clears at the end, leaving only three stepwise pitches: C#, D#, and E#.

Tippett concludes the movement with a return to the original theme. Just as in Beethoven's Op. 109 variations, this return proves to be emotionally powerful. As the finale of this huge sonata, movement v is aurally exhausting, so this peaceful, bare ending is truly a moment of serenity. After having traveled so far away from home, this restatement is like a balm which soothes the soul and reclaims innocence. Each variation's journey through foreign (non-functional) harmonies and eventual return to a place close to home seems to mirror life: Experience always leaves one changed. The harmonically far but "physically" close relationship of each variation's opening sonority (I) to its ending one (bI) represents the radical change humans make inside a physical exterior after a spiritual voyage.

The final sonority of the fifth movement is a B-flat, so after nearly 40 minutes of music, Tippett has returned to the opening pitch of the whole sonata. The circular journey is complete; the farewell has been bid. Interestingly, it now becomes apparent that each of the movements of the sonata ends on one of the pitches of the 5-note cell: movement i on D, movement ii on C, movement iii on A, movement iv on C#, and movement v on Bb. This cell, which plays such a prominent role in movements i and iii, is used to organize on the macrocosmic as well as microcosmic level.

Curiously, Tippett's first sonata begins with a set of variations, and his fourth sonata ends with them. Also, both works pay homage to the vernacular, for Sonata No. 1's theme was folk-like and Sonata No. 4's is blues-like. Thus we see that composing in the genre of piano sonata has been a circular journey for Tippett: in both 1938 and 1984 this archetypal form is a pinnacle of expression for this spiritually rich composer. Tippett's journey through his compositional life began with the first piano sonata and with the fourth sonata's finale he seems to indicate that the journey is coming to a close.

In its entirety, Tippett's fourth sonata proves to be an enormous work—both technically and emotionally. Through its five movements Tippett explores an encyclopedic range of textures, forms, rhythms, speeds, and harmonies to create sounds of exquisite beauty and deliberate ugliness, terrifying anger and celebratory joy, awe-inspiring grandeur and delicate simplicity, kinetic drive and timeless expansion, aggressive radiance and passive longing, harsh indifference and warm embracing. Overall, the work is intellectually taxing, with its numerous and varied themes and gestures, so it is best absorbed void of rigid formal notions or expectations. Rather, it is

music to enjoy viscerally by taking in each moment as it happens. It is certainly the grandest, most powerful of Tippett's piano sonatas, yet it seems to carry the others close to its heart, strengthened by honoring and cherishing its ancestry.

## Postlude

Tippett's art is an eclectic one, drawing upon a wide range of personal experience and compositional techniques to produce music which is both indebted to others and uniquely his own. As a composer from England, his geographical position seems to reflect where he stands stylistically: between the domineering musical tradition of the European continent and the candid, pioneering spirit of America. His effort to "renew the language he inherited"<sup>1</sup> is parallel to his artistic credo that the creative artist is responsible for the "enrichment [and] renewal of our spiritual life."<sup>2</sup> These elements—a hybrid of traditional and non-traditional processes, and an intense desire to fulfill a humanitarian role—come together in his music to form a diverse and complex style.

The derivative aspects of Tippett's music are most apparent in his formal procedures, which he borrows from both his predecessors and contemporaries. His sonata forms (found in Sonatas 1 and 3), variation forms (found in Sonatas 1, 3, and 4), fugues (found in Sonata No. 4), and ternary forms (found in Sonatas 1 and 4) stand firmly in the path of their European predecessors. From his contemporary Stravinsky, Tippett borrows the

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<sup>1</sup>Irene Ruth Bowling, "British Piano Music Since 1945" (D.M.A. diss., University of Washington, 1989), 8.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Tippett, "A Composer's Point of View" in *Tippett on Music*, ed. Meirion Bowen. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 5.

collage, mosaic form in Sonata No. 2; the palindrome in Sonata No. 3 (iii) and symmetrical structures in Sonata No. 4 (iv) remind one of Berg and Bartók (and Bach); and Sonata No. 4's modified 12-tone procedures (i) and use of retrograde and inversion (iv) are indebted to Schoenberg and the Second Viennese school. While the forms of his late, "birth-to-death," cyclic works are unique in the particular way they combine various components of preexisting structures,<sup>3</sup> certainly the concept of cyclical forms dates back to the 19th century, and Tippett has freely admitted that the idea for this came when he "heard Colin Mason discuss Sibelius's Seventh Symphony as a 'birth-to-death' piece."<sup>4</sup>

Regarding his treatment of music in time, Tippett adopted many twentieth-century procedures and ideas. The circular sense of time imparted by Sonata No. 2, the structural components of "movement" and "arrest" in Sonata No. 3 (i), and the stream-of-consciousness feel of Sonata No. 4 point to Stravinsky, Boulez, Messiaen, and even James Joyce. Also, his music is full of the mixed meters and asymmetrical meters so characteristic of Stravinsky.

Tippett found an original voice, however, in his invention of kinetic rhythms. As early as Sonata No. 1 he developed a style of buoyancy in his music which derived from English madrigal music, American jazz, and his experimentation with additive rhythms. These "sprung rhythms" (as scholars have called them) became a Tippett trademark and remained with him throughout his life. The "magic music" present in Sonata No. 2 and the

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<sup>3</sup>The subsections of Symphony No. 4 are: "Introduction and Exposition, Development 1, Slow Movement, Development 2, Scherzo and Trios, Development 3, Recapitulation." Interspersed with these main sections are subsidiary episodes.

<sup>4</sup>Tippett, "Archetypes of Concert Music" in *Tippett On Music*, 100.

torrential rhythmic propulsion of Sonatas No. 3 (iii) and 4 (iv) are manifestations of it.

Tippett also makes an original mark in his harmonic language. Though he was essentially a tonal composer—the early Sonata No. 1 is the highly traditional soil in which his harmonic language took root—his harmony evolved into a complex web of different techniques. Sonata No. 2 and the Piano Concerto introduce quartal harmony into his vocabulary, and the materials of Sonata No. 3 (i) are often based on 2nds (and clusters of seconds), 7ths and 9ths. Sonata No. 2 uses a 3-note cell to produce many harmonies, and Sonata No. 4 experiments loosely with 12-tone principles. These techniques combine with extreme chromaticism, bitonality, free atonality, triadic harmony, blues/jazz harmonies, and fleeting key centers to produce an infinite variety of color. Often the harmony is simply the byproduct of knotty counterpoint (Sonata No. 3, i), though at other times it is used non-functionally to create exquisite sonority (Sonata No. 3, ii). Part of Tippett's gift is the ease with which he glides in and out of consonance and dissonance, standard harmony and atonality, chromatic saturation and simple diatonicism without creating an artificial idiom. It is almost as if he is a linguistic magician, able to string together phrases of different languages in a comprehensible, stylistically coherent way. Each of the last three sonatas sound neither completely tonal or atonal, yet they force the listener to question if they are either.

To grasp the essence of Tippett's original style fully, one must take into account that his two most celebrated influences were Jung and Beethoven. Despite their differences of intention, these two men shared a belief in the

power of opposites. For Jung the philosopher, this power came in knowing one's "light and shadow," a concept that remained almost a manifesto for Tippett from the time he first pronounced it in the oratorio *A Child of Our Time* in 1939. For Beethoven, the master craftsman, this power came through the juxtaposition and synthesis of disparate formal elements, a technique which continually inspired Tippett's compositional practice (and eventually led him to develop the idea of "historical" and "notional" archetypes). At the heart of Tippett's philosophical ideas and musical style, lies a belief in the power of opposites which must have, in part, sprung from his faith in the ideas of Jung and Beethoven, respectively.

Tippett's piano sonatas exemplify his use of the power of opposites as the basis of musical forms. In his early music he was preoccupied with sonata form and defined it as a battle of the "passionate and lyrical"—this is realized in the third movement of Sonata No. 1. In the radical, mosaic Sonata No. 2 Tippett was concerned with contrasts of timbre, speed, and function. "Music can appear to flow; or to arrest itself especially through the device of ostinato; or temporarily stop in a silence."<sup>5</sup> The first movement of Sonata No. 3 highlights Tippett's newfound theory that the dramatic contrasts of sonata form should not be the "passionate and lyrical" but the opposing forces of "arrest and movement." Also, the fugue of the fourth sonata is built on an "antithetical" subject—a set of two-note phrases where the first note is sharply attacked and the second is quietly caressed. The entire fugue is a

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<sup>5</sup>Tippett, program note obtained from Schott Publisher's Promotion Department, "Piano Sonata No. 2".



battle of forte vs. piano passages. "Singing, tender" music is contrasted with "ringing, hammered" music, and "hard" gestures are contrasted with "delicate" ones. Moreover, the piano sonatas are exemplary in their powerful use of opposites from a more general musical standpoint. Tippett's sharp and radically diverse treatment of meter, speed, texture, color, dynamics, and function, culminates in the grand Sonata No. 4.

Tippett also explores pianistic techniques in terms of opposites. From the opening gesture of Sonata No. 2 to the portentous "birth motif" of Sonata No. 4, there is a distinct dichotomy of the hands. Especially in the third sonata the metaphor of opposites is purposefully realized in physical terms. Tippett's comments on Sonata No. 3 exemplify this: "I am stimulated by the duality of the hands and their possible perceptible independence in one compositional direction and aural unity in another."<sup>6</sup> "[This] is something desperately strong in me, this feeling that I come to the piano sonata to use one human being—making music of great power and emotional dimension—using his two hands as though they were both one within himself and now at the same time two."<sup>7</sup>

In Tippett's approach to composition we see the battle between the opposing sides of his aesthetic. Rigorous methodology permeates the structure of Sonata No. 4, yet often Tippett sacrifices structural perfection in favor of what he finds more musically suitable. An example of this can be found in the third movement, where Tippett builds five similar gestures

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<sup>6</sup>Tippett, program note obtained from Schott Publisher's Promotion Department, "Piano Sonata No. 3".

<sup>7</sup>Introductory Interview, p. 21

(from measures 1-24) on the pitches of the work's 5-note organizational cell but replaces one—C#—with a more musically effective B-natural. Generally he favors both sides, but when they conflict, he chooses his own musical intuition over rigid consistency. Perhaps for Tippett, rigorous compositional structuring (such as 12-tone music) represents all that is wrong with society, for in his essay "A Composer's Point of View," he states, "The creative artist, who must transmute the everyday for the sake of poetry, is unfitted, by his imaginative gift, for work requiring constant attention to mechanical precision."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most meaningful "opposite" in Tippett's music is the fusion of "high" and "low" art: In *A Child of Our Time* Tippett uses negro spirituals to demonstrate "the universal relevance of a supposedly foreign style and culture," and in Symphony No. 3 he uses blues to "express a basic human predicament and. . . Beethoven's music [for] archetypal gestures."<sup>9</sup> His use of folk-song in Sonata No. 1, and the blues harmonies of Sonata No. 4 are but two minor examples of this mixing of influences. Indeed, even his unique rhythmic style is a cross between madragalian and jazz rhythms. Tippett's integration of the classical and vernacular represents more than an eclectic style—it portrays his belief that man should know his "light" and "shadow," and celebrates inclusiveness. A fundamental humanism is at the core of Tippett's being and proves that in music as in life (as Beethoven and Jung would testify), unity can be achieved with seemingly disparate elements.

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<sup>8</sup>In *Tippett On Music*, 5.

<sup>9</sup>Stanley Sadie, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London : Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), s.v. "Michael Tippett" by Ian Kemp.

Michael Tippett was called "A Man of Our Time" because he was so intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually involved in his era. Throughout his growth as a composer he maintained an unwavering faith in the value of human life, and unfailingly believed in music's power to heal, writing,

A wide-ranging humanism, whether secular or religious, will always seek to extend to more and more people, through education and opportunity, the enrichment of the personality which music gives. . . .We are morally and emotionally enfeebled if we live our lives without artistic nourishment. Our sense of life is diminished. In music we sense most directly the inner flow which sustains the psyche, or the soul.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Tippett, "Towards the Condition of Music" in *Tippett On Music*, 15.

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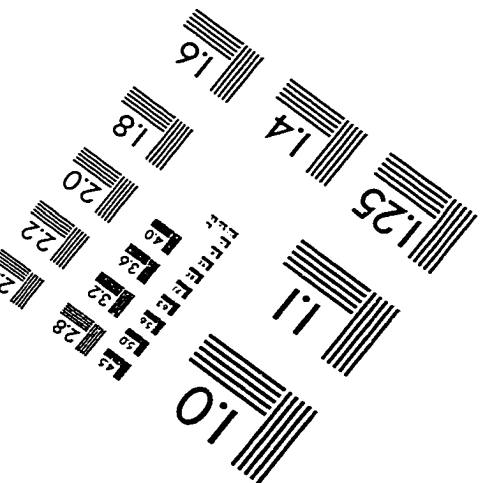
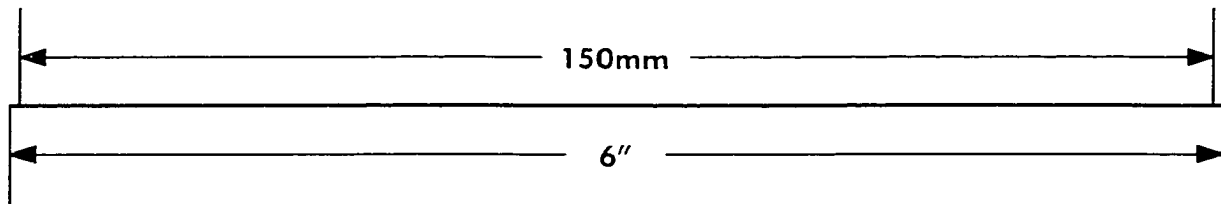
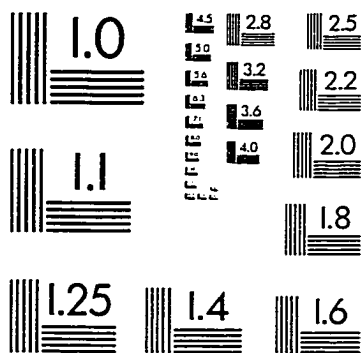
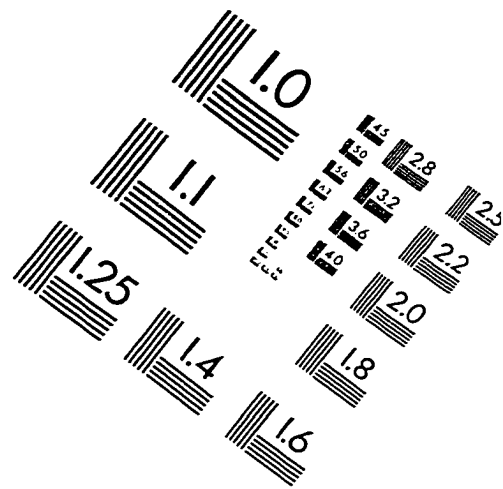
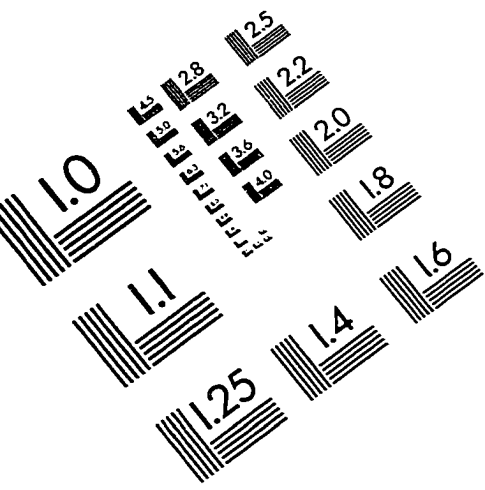
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