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**The Operas of Michael Tippett:
The Inner Values of Tippett as Portrayed by Selected
Female Characters**

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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Music**

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*for my dear husband Dimitri
who has whole-heartedly encouraged me
to pursue a lifelong dream*

Abstract

Sir Michael Kemp Tippett (1905-1998) was a British composer who wrote five operas. This dissertation explores the dramatic and musical presentation of five selected female characters, one from each of Tippett's operas: Sosostriis (alto) *The Midsummer Marriage* (1955); Helen (mezzo-soprano) *King Priam* (1962); Denise (dramatic soprano) *The Knot Garden* (1970); Hannah (rich mezzo) *The Ice Break* (1977); Jo Ann (lyric soprano) *New Year* (1989). It is argued that each of the five selected characters portrays Tippett's inner values of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism. The dissertation focuses on certain key moments in each opera with an analysis of a central aria. Due to the writer's interest in the performance aspect of these operas, discussion centres on melody, the timbre of voice-types linked with instrumentation, rhythm, word-setting and the vexed question of Tippett's libretti.

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- The memory of my late father, Dr Harry Jackson.

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Explanatory Notes

- This dissertation has been formatted in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition.
- Note pitches are described using the Helmholtz System where middle C = c¹ and the octave below middle C = c.
- For uniformity, vocal score rehearsal numbers have been used when referring to musical examples from the operas. For example, 165⁺¹ indicates one bar after the rehearsal number 165.
- All citations from the texts of the operas of Sir Michael Tippett refer to the vocal scores. In those sources there are various textual and typographical inconsistencies, some of which have been amended to aid clarity.
- The tables listing the characters in each opera which appear at the start of each of Chapters One to Five have inconsistent headings. These have been copied verbatim from the vocal scores.
- Appendices Six to Ten contain a copy of the music and text for each of the five arias analysed. The arias were reproduced by permission of Hal Leonard Australia Pty Ltd on behalf of Schott Music International.
- Appendix 11 contains selected musical examples from the operas continuously numbered for ease of reference. These examples were reproduced by permission of Hal Leonard Australia Pty Ltd on behalf of Schott Music International.
- The text of the arias in the body of this dissertation was reproduced by kind permission of Schott and Co. Limited, London.
- In the Bibliography the Internet sources have been listed alphabetically according to the first word used in the heading rather than by author.
- The Bibliography includes only the material which has been specifically cited. It does not reflect the wide range of material which has been studied in the course of research.
- Dates of birth (and death) have been included as a matter of historical interest, where relevant.

Abbreviations

Bowen, Meirion, ed. <i>Tippett on Music</i> . Avon: Bookcraft Ltd, 1995.	TOM
Bowen, Meirion. <i>Michael Tippett</i> . 2 nd ed. Ebbw Vale: Creative Print & Design Ltd, 1997.	MB
Clarke, David. <i>The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett: Modern Times and Metaphysics</i> . Cambridge: University Press, 2001.	DC
John, Nicholas, ed. <i>The Operas of Michael Tippett</i> . ENO 29. Southampton: Camelot Press Ltd., 1985.	NJ
Jones, Richard E. <i>The Early Operas of Michael Tippett: A Study of The Midsummer Marriage, King Priam and The Knot Garden</i> . Wiltshire: Antony Rowe Ltd, 1996.	RJ
Kemp, Ian, ed. <i>Michael Tippett: Symposium on his Sixtieth Birthday</i> . Worcester and London: Ebenezer Baylis and Son Limited, The Trinity Press, 1965.	SSB
Kemp, Ian. <i>Tippett the composer and his music</i> . Guildford and King's Lynn: Biddles Ltd, 1984.	IK
Schuttenhelm, Thomas, ed. <i>The Selected Letters of Sir Michael Tippett</i> . London: Faber & Faber, 2005.	TS
Tippett, Michael. <i>Moving into Aquarius</i> . Plymouth: Latimer, Trend & Co., Ltd, 1959.	MIA
Tippett, Michael. <i>Those Twentieth Century Blues</i> . St Ives: Clays Ltd, 1991.	MT
Tippett, Michael. <i>The Midsummer Marriage</i> . An opera in three acts. Transcription for Piano by Michael Tillett. Vocal Score. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1954.	MM VS
Tippett, Michael. <i>King Priam</i> . An opera in three acts. Vocal Score by Michael Tillett. Norfolk: Caligraving Limited, 1962.	KP VS
Tippett, Michael. <i>The Knot Garden</i> . An opera in three acts. Vocal Score by Michael Tillett. Norfolk: Caligraving Limited, 1970.	KG VS

Tippett, Michael. *The Ice Break*. An opera in three acts. Vocal Score by Michael Tillett. German Translation by Ken W. Bartlett. Norfolk: Caligraving Limited, 1977. IB VS

Tippett, Michael. *New Year*. An opera in three acts. Vocal Score by Michael Tillett. Norfolk: Caligraving Limited, 1989. NY VS

White, Eric W. *Tippett and his Operas*. Beccles: William Clowes (Beccles) Limited, 1979. EW

Preface

As 2005 marked the centenary of the birth of Sir Michael Kemp Tippett (1905-1998), it is fitting to take a fresh look at the five operas written by this British composer who was a significant figure in twentieth-century instrumental music, opera and musical theatre. During his lifetime Tippett's contribution to music was recognised with several prestigious awards, some of which include: Commander of the British Empire in 1959, a Knighthood in 1966, Companion of Honour in 1979, Order of Merit in 1983, and an honorary Doctorate of Music awarded by the University of Lancaster in 1977 and the University of Melbourne in 1984.

In the course of research for this dissertation I was fortunate enough to interview three people who were personally acquainted with Tippett over many years: Michael Tillett, a notable musician in his own right, who prepared the vocal scores for Tippett's five operas at the composer's special request; Dame Josephine Barstow, who created the roles of Denise in *The Knot Garden* and Gayle in *The Ice Break* to great acclaim; and Sally Groves, Director, Head of Contemporary Music at Schott & Co. Limited. All three remembered Tippett with affection. Both Tillett and Barstow mentioned the warmth and complexity of Tippett's personality. Groves remarked on Tippett's empathy with "warm, strong women and everyone with a sense of humour." Pleasingly, the observations accorded with my own perception of Tippett. All three interviews are attached in Appendices 12, 13 and 14, respectively.

Throughout his lifetime Tippett's inner values were often incompatible with general societal values and at times he felt very isolated. For instance, his refusal to fight in World War II because of his pacifist convictions resulted in a three-month prison term during 1943. Tippett, nevertheless, retained his values of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism. He believed that these values formed the basis for reconciliation and forgiveness which could lead to universal concord. These heartening values illuminate Tippett's operas and offer hope in an era which has been scarred by warfare, terrorism, religious conflict and political unrest.

This dissertation will explore the dramatic and musical presentation of five selected female characters, one from each of Tippett's operas: Sosostriis (alto), *The Midsummer Marriage* (1955); Helen (mezzo-soprano), *King Priam* (1962); Denise (dramatic soprano), *The Knot Garden* (1970); Hannah (rich mezzo), *The Ice Break* (1977); Jo Ann (lyric soprano), *New Year* (1989). Each character seems to be at the heart of the

opera in which she appears because she embodies Tippett's inner values as delineated above.

This dissertation will focus on certain key moments in each opera with an analysis of a central aria. In Tippett's operas the central aria sung by the five selected female characters tends to be a vocal and emotional zenith which significantly enhances our understanding of the character. The essence of character as revealed in these arias is occasionally modified, or evolves, in dramatic engagement with the other characters in the operas during the course of duets, trios and ensembles. As Leslie East stated, "Hannah's aria [*The Ice Break*] is in the Tippett tradition of crucial, introspective solo scenes for female voices: Sosostriis in *The Midsummer Marriage*, Helen in *King Priam* and Denise in *The Knot Garden* are the obvious precursors."¹ To this list must be added Jo Ann who appears in Tippett's last opera, *New Year*, which was composed after East's article was published.

Like Tippett, the five selected female characters question the values of their society which results in a sense of isolation. During the course of these five operas each character successfully balances the need to uphold her own principles with the need to respond with sensitivity to other people. And, like Tippett, these five characters not only find the strength and courage to live by their convictions in the face of adversity but also retain their humaneness and warmth of spirit. Consequently, each one has the power to effect positive changes for those around her.

In view of Tippett's homosexuality one could ask why the female, rather than the male, characters are at the heart of Tippett's operas. Undoubtedly, there are various reasons but two possibilities come to mind. First, it may have been Tippett's means of subconsciously resolving the difficulties in his relationship with his mother. Second, there was Tippett's genuine liking and respect for women.

Tippett's efforts to resolve his stormy relationship with his mother, who died when Tippett was 64 years old, proved a lifelong challenge. Endowing Sosostriis, Helen, Denise, Hannah and Jo Ann with the emotional warmth he felt was lacking in his own mother may have been Tippett's way of working through his own feelings. Was he, in fact, creating the image of his ideal woman or mother-figure? After all, as librettist and composer, Tippett was responsible for moulding the characters.

¹ John, ed., *Tippett*, 122. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [NJ].

According to Tippett, his mother was a woman with great strength of character who supported various humanitarian causes. For instance, she became a suffragette and worked unstintingly to support the rights of women. Tippett, however, felt that she lacked the motherly warmth and love for which he yearned. Consequently, it was to his loving father that he turned for affection.² Robert Donington (1907-1990) makes a very interesting observation, “The less good mothering we experienced in childhood, the more we tend to cherish retrogressive fantasies of it in later life. The fantasies are not seen as such, but they may show, for example, as an excessive dependence on women, a restless search which is at bottom for the mothering largely missed at the proper time.”³ This was, perhaps, an issue in Tippett’s life.

Tippett’s empathy with women filters through his autobiography and is reflected in his strong, warm and intelligent operatic female characters. It is well-documented that women found him attractive and that Tippett had many women friends with whom he had a close relationship.⁴ Three women, in particular, featured in Tippett’s life: Phyllis Kemp, Tippett’s cousin, who not only shared his political ideals but also loved him; Francesca Allinson (1902-1945), a young musician of German-Jewish heritage; and Evelyn Maude, the wife of the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Health [MT, 185]. Throughout his autobiography, Tippett described Kemp, Maude and Allinson as women of great emotional warmth with whom he shared a loving, if not a sexual, relationship.

Kemp, Tippett’s first cousin, was part of his life from early childhood. Her sister eventually married Tippett’s older brother and it was assumed by their families that Tippett and Kemp would marry. Tippett described Kemp as “clever and lively” but although she declared her love for Tippett in her late teens, he was not able to reciprocate those feelings [MT, 16]. Kemp found this difficult to accept and was ever-hopeful that the situation might change. Consequently, she was extremely jealous of Tippett’s friendships with other women [MT, 17]. Kemp did marry eventually and move to an Eastern European communist country which satisfied her political ideals. There was a period of 20 years during which Tippett and Kemp did not communicate due to a political disagreement. However, they were in touch again shortly before her death.

² Tippett, *Those Twentieth Century Blues*, 2. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [MT].

³ Kemp, ed., *Michael Tippett: A Symposium on his Sixtieth Birthday*, 110. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [SSB].

⁴ Reminiscing on Tippett’s stint as Director of Music and choir conductor at Morley College from 1940-1951, John Amis observed, “A concert at Morley College during the war . . . the twenty-strong choir whose distaff side seemed, to a woman, to be in love with the conductor [Tippett]” [SSB, 73].

Paradoxically, it was through Kemp that Tippett met Allinson, one of two women who would be a fundamental part of his life for the next twenty years. In 1925, as a university student, Kemp rented a room in Allinson's London family home [MT, 17]. Tippett visited Kemp one day and, consequently, met Allinson. At that time Allinson, known affectionately as "Fresca", was traumatised by her father's recent death. In addition, she had "a large goitre on her neck, from which she suffered so badly and for so long" but there seems to have been an instant attraction between her and Tippett [MT, 17].⁵ Allinson was an extremely complicated person which may have been part of her appeal for Tippett. Both Tillett and Barstow commented in their interviews that Tippett liked complicated people as he, himself, was complicated. [See Appendices 12 and 13.]

Tippett explained that during the early days of his relationship with Allinson they "discussed marriage and children" which both he and she wanted. However, it appears that both Tippett and Allinson had their "turbulent homosexual sides" although their "relationship was one of great serenity" [MT, 56]. According to Tippett, he and Allinson discussed artificial insemination but that did not eventuate because his "problems ran deeper" [MT, 56]. It is unclear what those "problems" were but he did acknowledge that he and Allinson were not able to live together as he was unable to support her financially. Perhaps the critical issue, however, was his composing. As he stated, "when she came to stay, she managed a fortnight and then left again – for my obsession with musical composition kept getting in the way" [MT, 184]. Nevertheless, in 1945, when Allinson drowned herself in the River Stour because she was depressed by her continuing ill-health and the horrors of World War II, Tippett was devastated. Her death left a permanent emotional void in Tippett's life. In a letter to David Ayerst, immediately following Allinson's death, Tippett wrote: "I can't adjust to it easily. Her gaiety & gentleness & even her waywardness & her love of pretty things all seem irreplaceable values. I loved her more deeply than I knew when she was there" [MT, 186]. Five years later, Tippett wrote a commemorative work for Allinson.⁶

Tippett met Maude when he was conducting a small choir in Oxted, Surrey. Her husband was an amateur cellist in the Oxted Players and would later become Sir John Maude [MT, 21]. Maude was ten years older than Tippett and it seems she loved him,

⁵ Allinson did have the goitre removed shortly afterwards at a clinic in Switzerland. She was wealthy in her own right and Tippett acknowledged that at times she assisted him financially.

⁶ Tippett dedicated the song cycle, *The Heart's Assurance*, and the *Fantasy-Sonata* (later renamed *Piano Sonata No. 1*) to Allinson's memory. Interestingly enough, in his interview, Tillett commented that he first encountered the name "Michael Tippett" in a review of a recording of the *Fantasy-Sonata*. He instantly purchased the work as he was much taken by it. It was a few years later that he met the composer.

despite the fact that she was married. However, it appears that her relationship with Tippet remained platonic as she was a person of great integrity. Tippet observed that he learned a great deal from Maude because of her “profoundly considered attitudes” [MT, 56]. Tippet described her as a very mature individual with whom he could discuss his problems, as was also the case with Allinson. It was Maude who introduced Tippet to the works of the Swiss Psychiatrist, Carl Jung (1875-1961), who was to have such a profound influence on his life. When Tippet was imprisoned for his pacifist convictions in 1943, he was permitted to write letters to only one person and Maude was his choice.⁷ He may, therefore, have perceived her as a sympathetic mother-figure.

It is tempting to suggest that the five selected female characters of this dissertation are based on Tippet’s mother, Kemp, Allinson and Maude. However that would, perhaps, exceed the bounds of credibility. Nevertheless, there are some links. The characterisation of Denise as a freedom-fighter, in particular, may owe something to the persona of Tippet’s mother who died while he was in the final stages of creating *The Knot Garden*. Moreover, there may be some connection between his characterisation of Helen and Maude’s personality. An interesting point is that the characters of Hannah and Jo Ann, who were created many years after the death of Tippet’s mother, are not quite as complex as Sosostriis, Helen and Denise.

However, Tippet did convey his sense of isolation, as well as his inner values, through these five selected characters. A sense of isolation remained with him throughout his lifetime for several reasons. From an early age, he had been an independent thinker. For instance, as a nine-year old at preparatory school he wrote an essay in which he claimed that God did not exist [MT, 7]. When he was 14 years old his parents moved to Europe, due to financial difficulties, while Tippet and his older brother remained at Fettes boarding school near Edinburgh. Tippet confessed that henceforth he felt like an orphan as he lacked the warmth and security of a family home in England. Subsequently, during the school holidays Tippet travelled with his brother by train across Europe to join his parents in countries as distant as France, Italy and Corsica [MT, 8].

Tippet’s misery was further exacerbated by the rigid discipline, spartan life and bullying at Fettes.⁸ Moreover, homosexuality was rampant and the naïve Tippet, at the age of 14, lost his virginity to a fellow male pupil [MT, 9]. After learning of Tippet’s

⁷ Tippet once wrote to Maude, “You of course are something almost eternal: the closeness is more to be expected. Everyone else is nowhere” [MT, 151].

⁸ Tippet once confessed that “For decades afterwards I had such amnesia about the whole experience that I hardly acknowledged the existence of Fettes in any account of my early life” [MT, 9].

homosexual encounter his shocked parents immediately transferred him to Stamford Grammar School which heralded the beginning of a happier era. However, in Tippet's final year, the principal of Stamford Grammar arranged for him to be billeted in the local village rather than domiciled at the school [MT, 10]. This was due to Tippet's promotion of atheism and his refusal to attend house prayers. Tippet admitted that his atheist convictions, which were contrary to the Christian beliefs held by society generally at that time, produced a sense of isolation.

By the time Tippet left school he had recognised his homosexuality.⁹ Although he felt his homosexuality was "instinctive" and "natural" he had difficulty in accepting that he would be isolated from ordinary family life [MT, 52]. Tippet was troubled by his inability to form a "biological relationship" with a woman in order to procreate. Hence, although he did not quite come to terms with this aspect of his life, Jungian self-analysis from 1938-1939 did make this 'burden' easier to bear.¹⁰ The self-analysis taught him to search for meanings below the surface by analysing his dreams. This was extremely important for Tippet who had been shattered in 1938 by the failure of his love affair with Wilfred Franks (1908-), his first serious homosexual lover [MT, 62]. Tippet was a professed atheist but believed in the transformative power of the spiritual world, albeit in a quasi-religious context based on modern psychology [MT, 63]. Consequently, Jung's theories complemented Tippet's beliefs.

Predominately, although he may not have realised it, Tippet's superior intelligence may have contributed to his feeling of isolation. As Barstow observed in her interview:

He expected other people to know more than they did. Because he was so well-read himself, these things were familiar to him. It wasn't that he was showing off. It was coming out of his head and his experience – but his experience was different from most other people's. That was his dilemma. I don't think he ever really understood that – that was a dividing line between him and others. That's what I felt, that he didn't quite understand that it distanced him slightly from other people. [See Appendix 13]¹¹

This point of view is corroborated by Meirion Bowen who commented on the vitality of Tippet's intelligence and the importance of the intellectual content of his works [MB,

⁹ Tippet admitted: "Then, in my youth, my homosexual side revealed itself. . . . I was never a misogynist, I simply had to go my own way" [MT, 52].

¹⁰ Jung and his theory of archetypal psychology proved an important influence on Tippet's life and works. Tippet was comforted by the knowledge that Jung considered "homosexual relations between men were valuable because they produced a tenderness between them that might not otherwise get expressed" [MT, 63]. Jung developed the theory of archetypes as universal patterns of human behaviour which we all recognise consciously or subconsciously. He used the archetypes chiefly as a method of uncovering meaning within the dreams and visions of the mentally ill.

¹¹ All subsequent references to Barstow will be to her interview which is documented fully in Appendix 13.

245]. Tippett confirmed this aspect: “Looking back, the drive to make musical and theatrical artefacts was always strong, but absorbed into it was an intellectuality which I could never refuse” [MT, 15-16]. Nevertheless, all those elements which may have created Tippett’s sense of isolation added to the uniqueness of his talents and persona.

Over the past four decades, several eminent scholars have examined and evaluated Tippett’s operas. They have constructed a firm foundation on which to base further research. Many of the scholars approach Tippett’s operas from a compositional point of view, analysing his musical syntax. In some instances, the analyses are linked with a study of the social and historical context of his operas, Tippett’s biographical profile and musical characterisation. The main contributors are Suzanne Robinson, Eric Walter White, David Matthews, Arnold Whittall, Richard Elfyn Jones, David Clarke, Ian Kemp, Bowen and Thomas Schuttenhelm.

Robinson is the editor of a book of essays which includes a useful analysis of *King Priam*, including the character of Helen.¹² White offers an interesting chronological study of Tippett’s first four operas, *The Midsummer Marriage*, *King Priam*, *The Knot Garden* and *The Ice Break*.¹³ His book is liberally interspersed with personal letters from Tippett to White and serves as a valuable history of the composer’s *modus operandi*. Matthews, on the other hand, provides an introductory study which includes limited critical and musical analysis of *The Midsummer Marriage*, *King Priam* and *The Knot Garden*.¹⁴ Whittall compares the musical themes and techniques used by Tippett and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976).¹⁵ He offers some technical analysis of *The Midsummer Marriage*, *King Priam*, *The Knot Garden* and *The Ice Break*, in the context of Tippett’s many other works. Conversely, Jones provides a detailed musical analysis of selected characters in *The Midsummer Marriage*, *King Priam* and *The Knot Garden*.¹⁶

Clarke is a leading commentator on the music of Tippett.¹⁷ His multifarious, sophisticated methodology integrates musical and dramatic analysis with a literary and

¹² Harrison in Robinson, ed., “Homeric resonance: *King Priam* and the *Iliad*.” *Michael Tippett: Music and Literature*, 215-234.

¹³ White, *Tippett and his Operas*. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [EW].

¹⁴ Matthews, *Michael Tippett: An introductory study*.

¹⁵ Whittall, *The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques*.

¹⁶ Jones, *The Early Operas of Michael Tippett: A Study of The Midsummer Marriage, King Priam, and The Knot Garden*. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [RJ].

¹⁷ Clarke, ed., *Tippett Studies*.

psychological investigation of all five operas. Moreover, Clarke provides some penetrating insights into Tippett's visionary world.¹⁸

Kemp conducts an erudite investigation of the origins of Tippett's distinctive rhythmic language through musical analysis of Tippett's first four operas.¹⁹ He notes the musical change of direction from the lyricism of *The Midsummer Marriage* to the expressionism of *The Knot Garden*. Furthermore, Kemp explores the influence of Shakespeare, Jung and dreams on the persona of Tippett and his operas, particularly in *The Midsummer Marriage*. At the end of his wide-ranging book, he argues persuasively that Tippett deserves "to stand as the composer who has contributed more to the English tradition than any other since Purcell and, alongside three others of his generation, Carter, Messiaen and Shostakovich, as one of the giants of the century" [IK, 482].

Bowen, who was a performer in his own right as well as Tippett's long-time companion, provides much valuable information on the composer's personal life and the genesis of his operas. Bowen maintains that with each succeeding opera Tippett altered his musico-dramatic style with the express purpose of modernising an art form which he felt was in danger of becoming outmoded [MB, 108].

A new book released in August 2005, edited by Schuttenhelm, features selected letters written by Tippett to various friends and acquaintances.²⁰ The book was timed for Tippett's centenary. It seems, therefore, that there is still interest in Tippett and his work. In his favourable review of this publication in *The Guardian* on 26 August 2005, Michael Berkeley observed that the letters reveal the essence of Tippett's complex and likeable personality.

A quick check via the Internet through the repertoires of opera companies all over the world reveals how very few performances of Tippett's operas have been staged over the years. However in 2005, to celebrate Tippett's centenary, several productions of *The Midsummer Marriage*, *The Knot Garden* and *King Priam* were performed in Europe and The United States of America. Berkeley (*The Guardian*, 26 August 2005) observed, "As the year has worn on . . . high-profile performances of some of Tippett's finest work have been impossible to ignore, and the visceral energy and sheer human warmth of the music

¹⁸ Clarke, *The Music and Thought of Michael Tippett: Modern Times and Metaphysics*, 10. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [DC].

¹⁹ Kemp, *Tippett: the composer and his music*. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [IK].

²⁰ Schuttenhelm, ed., *The Selected Letters of Michael Tippett*. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [TS].

have been garnering considerable affection.” Perhaps this renewed interest will lead to further revivals of all Tippett’s operas.

There is one further aspect which should be mentioned, although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation and could form the basis for further study. Tippett admitted that his last two operas, in particular, were influenced in style and content by the American Musicals, *Guys and Dolls* (1950, New York and 1953, London), *West Side Story* (1957, New York) and *Fame* (1980 movie) [MT, 248-257]. Thus the integration of music, drama and dance owes more, perhaps, to the genre of musical theatre than to opera.

Introduction

Tippett's creative life as a composer seemed to mirror his search for a personal and artistic identity. Those facets of Tippett's creative life which were not dedicated to opera are beyond the scope of this dissertation but perhaps opera was at the core of Tippett's life as a composer. In discussing his personal beliefs and their influence on his music Tippett once observed, "I want to follow my central theme, (the New breaking out of the Old)" [MIA, 35]. A perusal of his five operas shows that each one may embody that theme, particularly through the five characters selected for this dissertation. Each of his operas seems to express the essence of his philosophy as it related to his own journey through his creative and personal life.

Tippett was a man of many parts: composer, librettist, author, pacifist, humanitarian, and homespun philosopher. He composed the music and wrote his own libretti, shaping the text, dramatic structure and scenic requirements for his operas. As he explained in a 1975 interview with Mike Thorne, a contemporary composer/journalist:

The shape of the opera [*The Ice Break*] has been finalised for about three years. It will be the end of a long period of hard work, dealing with it not only in verbal terms but in musical concepts; this is where you find the advantage of your libretto, for you can work with yourself. If materials are invented by you, and are not just a screenplay of some story, then you have time to play with them and reach a libretto which is so related to the operatic intentions that it fits the music like a glove to a finger.²¹

Thorne was much inspired by the 70-year old Tippett who, by that time, was an important figure in British music. Subsequently, Thorne established an illustrious career in his own right both as a composer and as a producer of recordings for high-profile classical and popular music artists. Nevertheless, he was gratified to remain part of Tippett's artistic milieu, which led to Thorne collaborating with Bowen to create the electronic effects for Tippett's last opera, *New Year*. Thorne was devastated by Tippett's death and, in 1999, dedicated his own first compact disc album of compositions, *Sprawl*, to Tippett (and Buxton Orr (1924-1997)).²²

Tippett considered Thorne's talents invaluable as the young musician had a strong background in contemporary popular music, jazz and blues. Tippett was fascinated by the modern technology of popular music, such as amplification and electric guitars, which he incorporated into his later operas. Furthermore, Tippett had a particular interest in the

²¹ Sir Michael Tippett, interview by Mike Thorne, *hi-fi news & record review*, January 1975. http://www.stereosociety.com/body_smtntmt.html (accessed 23 March 2005).

²² Mike Thorne, "Mike Thorne's *Sprawl* CD is dedicated to Michael Tippett and Buxton Orr." http://www.stereosociety.com/body_spdedicat.html (accessed 23 March 2005).

blues, his own version of which he first used in *The Knot Garden*. He believed that the highly emotional element of the blues helped to “renew in a limited degree our sense of the flow of life.”²³ Tippett compared the significance of the blues to twentieth-century music with the significance of the fugue to eighteenth-century music [MT, 275].

Tippett preferred to create the storylines and write his own opera texts rather than to adapt existing plays, novels or poems. The only time Tippett used an existing storyline was in *King Priam*, his second opera, which was based on Homer’s *Iliad*. Tippett’s decision to write his own libretti was based on the advice of the distinguished American poet, T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), whom he met in 1935. From that time Tippett considered Eliot to be his “artistic mentor” and “spiritual father” [MT, 51]. In Tippett’s opinion, the English Theatrical Movement was based on the verse-drama of Eliot, W.H. Auden (1907-1973) and Christopher Fry (1907-2005) [MIA, 49]. Tippett claimed that the verse technique of the three authors was, in itself, operatic; consequently, he attempted to emulate their technique by writing his own libretti based on verse-drama.

Equally, Tippett claimed that his word-setting was based on the technique established by the English composer, Henry Purcell (1659-1695), who followed the rhythm of the English language when setting words to music [TOM, 64]. Tippett considered that Purcell’s word-setting was exemplary in that, for example, he never used a weak vowel on a strong musical beat but let “the weak vowel always fall the other side” [TOM, 61]. Tippett commented that Purcell’s music was not in the curriculum of the Royal College of Music during the time Tippett was a student and that it was Allinson who introduced him to the works of this composer [MT, 115]. Due to space constraints, the impact of Eliot and Purcell on Tippett’s operas will be discussed only briefly in subsequent chapters.

On 20 March 1990, Tippett and Bowen visited New Zealand as guest lecturers at The University of Auckland, New Zealand, where they were well received. Tippett’s lively sense of humour reportedly captivated the audience. He and Bowen presented a three-hour seminar to university music students and staff.²⁴ A recording of that seminar makes for fascinating listening as the topics in Tippett’s session extended well beyond the realm of music. Tippett, who was then 85 years old, discussed Greek and Egyptian

²³ Bowen, ed., *Tippett on Music*, 13. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [TOM].

²⁴ This lecture was recorded by Nuria Ubéda who was a music student at The University of Auckland in 1990. The writer of this dissertation has listened to the lecture but, due to their length, the tapes have not been transcribed. Nor is all the information necessarily relevant to the subject matter of this dissertation.

Theatre, the Renaissance, the masque, Schiller, Goethe, Monteverdi, Puccini, Mozart, Beethoven, Jung, the blues, new technology, world affairs and astrology, to quote some examples. Throughout the lecture two themes prevailed: Tippett's love of theatre with its intrinsic elements of fantasy and magic, and his veneration of William Shakespeare (1564-1616).

Tippett paid special tribute to Shakespeare and acknowledged that the Bard was the "real teacher" who had taught him the art of introducing psychological and philosophical depth into his works. In Tippett's opinion, Shakespeare's late comedies were the finest examples of the interplay of human relationships because they explored every feasible avenue of forgiveness and reconciliation amongst individuals who were in conflict with one another. After acknowledging Shakespeare's literary skills, Tippett defended his own libretti which had been much criticised over the years: "I never said to myself, 'I am writing literature.'"

It is interesting to note that Tippett had a very high level of coherence and word-power in his essays and autobiography but this is not always reflected in his libretti. It is not unusual to find extracts from his essays quoted in the writings of musicians and scholars. For instance, Lawrence Kramer quotes Tippett's comments in regard to the deleterious effect of music on poetry.²⁵ Tippett once observed, "The music of a song destroys the verbal music of a poem utterly. I am inclined to think that a composer responds less to a poem's verbal sound, when he chooses that poem as a vehicle for his musical art, than to the poem's situation lyrical or dramatic" [IK, 212]. Despite his endeavours to explain his rationale, however, the critical debate continues as to the relevance of Tippett's operas beyond the era in which they were written, the literary merit of his libretti and the lack of depth in his characterisation.

Although critics may be despised, they cannot be ignored, as they often show remarkable perspicacity in identifying issues which will emerge. One contemporary reviewer recently observed, "Centenaries are times for celebration, but they are also opportunities for reassessment. When *The Knot Garden* came out in 1970, we found it modern and relevant. . . . It all seems dated and dreary nowadays."²⁶ In reality, the reviewer merely echoed the sentiments of the passing parade of critics who preceded him.

²⁵ Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*, 132.

²⁶ Raymond Monelle, review of *The Knot Garden* by Michael Tippett. Scottish Opera, Theatre Royal, Glasgow. *Opera*, January 2005.

Despite an attempt to present an objective assessment of Tippett's output in *Opera*, January 2005, Andrew Clements concluded:

Twenty years ago in these pages I wrote an 80th-birthday tribute to Michael Tippett . . . it could well be that in the next 20 years Tippett's music might vanish from the repertory altogether. For I have the nagging feeling, which has grown steadily over the last ten years, that posterity may ultimately view Tippett as . . . a composer very much of his time, and one with impeccable . . . social credentials, yet whose music remained so rooted in its era that when taken out of it can only seem hopelessly, squirmingly dated.

Clements' comments may or may not be valid but they reinforce the views of Monelle, quoted above. The statement that the "music remained so rooted in its era" is contentious but Clements has a point. It may be the libretti rather than the music, however, which have remained firmly embedded in their eras as Tippett's last two operas are filled with era-bound allusions or colloquialisms.²⁷

Tippett graduated in 1928 with the degree of B.Mus. from the Royal College of Music but his wide range of interests, fuelled by his intellectual independence, went well beyond music. Many literary and philosophical references are included in his operas but many of the allusions are not obvious to the average opera-goer. For instance, unless one is well-read, one would be unaware that the text for the aria of Sosostriis is based on a poem by Paul Valéry (1871-1945), nor would one necessarily be aware that the aria includes quotations from the Bible [NJ, 23]. Thus, to the uninitiated, the text of the aria can seem somewhat disjointed.

Tippett once proudly confided to White that, as time progressed, he was able to write the words and the music almost simultaneously for each scene of an opera [EW, 48]. This may not have necessarily worked to Tippett's advantage as some of his music, with its awkward intervals and unusual rhythms, does exacerbate the difficulties of a complex libretto. As Barstow commented, "There's no question about it that his texts are difficult and sometimes, possibly, more difficult than they need to be." The difficulties are intensified by Tippett's use of a diverse range of styles from blues and jazz to lyricism. This certainly adds to the challenge of learning the music from a singer's point of view.

However, a recurring theme which seems to emerge in the literature on Tippett, and which is mentioned by Barstow, is the beauty of his music. Tippett also had a fervent interest in the dilemmas of human society and the enduring strength of the human spirit. It is this belief that illuminates all his operas and encourages one to look beyond the technical difficulties. In the face of adversity, Tippett's inner strength seemed to be

²⁷ For example, the phrase, "Burn, baby, burn," in *The Ice Break* was the catch-cry made infamous by the Blacks during the 1965 Los Angeles riots.

extraordinary. Reporting in *The Guardian*, 18 December 2004, Michael Berkeley provided testimony to the tide of feeling against Tippett's views in 1943:

My father, who was working as an orchestral programmer at the BBC at the time, repeatedly scheduled Tippett's *Fantasia on a Theme of Handel*. Three times the work was thrown out, until finally the conductor, Clarence Raybould, made an official complaint about Tippett's "notorious tenets as a conchie". The director of music, Arthur Bliss, ruled that his compositions were to be banned from the air until his release from prison.

Despite such harsh treatment Tippett never indulged in self-pity or recrimination and one can search in vain for vindictive retaliation. It is true that he was outspoken and rebelled against established ideas but a striking feature of Tippett's autobiography is his gracious acceptance of circumstances over which he had no control.

Tippett, by his own admission, did not write the roles in his operas with particular singers in mind. He considered it was the function of directors to cast the roles because they were aware of which singers might be available but Tippett may have done himself a disservice. For instance, if a composer has a particular singer in mind, this typically affects the musical characteristics (and characterisation) of his/her compositions because a singer's voice type, personality and physical appearance will generally have some bearing. Furthermore, that singer is likely to add the role to his or her repertoire and, perhaps, influence various opera houses to perform that opera. By the same token, Tippett welcomed new interpretations of the characters he created and acknowledged that the contribution of the performer was the most significant factor in developing a character [MB, xvii]. As Barstow observed, "Like a lot of composers, he was so thrilled that what he had been struggling with in his head was suddenly in the mouths of people and on instruments and becoming a sonorous reality. He found that incredibly exciting . . . He gave you enormous leeway because of that."

Tippett chose the names for his characters with great care. He felt the name should reflect certain characteristics which would crystallise during the course of the opera. In this, he was influenced by the teachings of Confucius who believed that the choice of name was extremely important as, ideally, the name should reflect the essence of a person or object.²⁸ Therefore, if the name was unbecoming, the value placed on that person or object would be inappropriate, which could lead to conflict. Moreover, the names which Tippett chose for his characters are emblematic of the breadth and depth of Tippett's

²⁸ Tippett, *Moving into Aquarius*, 15. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text as [MIA].

intellectual frames of reference, from Egyptian mythology (Sosostris) to contemporary America (Jo Ann).

Given the apparent influence of the culture of The United States of America on Tippett's operas, it is interesting to note that Tippett did not visit that country until 1965. By that time Tippett had become somewhat disillusioned because his music had not been wholeheartedly embraced by audiences in Europe. As he stated, "America didn't exert much of an appeal upon me until my mid-sixties. But then it became my dream country" [MT, 248]. Tippett, however, had been introduced to the Broadway musical well before that time. In 1949 he attended the first production in London of *Porgy and Bess* by George Gershwin (1898-1937) "and was deeply moved by it" [MT, 249].²⁹ Tippett expounded on his fascination with Gershwin's music, stating that "in an age of experimentation with rhythm, percussive and fragmented musical textures, Gershwin kept song alive" [MT, 249]. This comment is, perhaps, significant as Tippett's first opera *The Midsummer Marriage* was written between 1946 and 1952.

Tippett's operas offer a fascinating exploration of social, psychological, spiritual, political and historical issues. His first three operas seem to have a sexual and psychological bias. *The Midsummer Marriage* explores sexuality and psychology using the mysterious character, Sosostris, as the catalyst.

King Priam relays the ancient story of the siege of Troy, but from the perspective of the Trojans, with an emphasis on the illicit love affair between Helen and Paris. In one scene there is an allusion to the homoerotic attachment between Achilles and Patroclus. Although the scene exists in the *Iliad*, Tippett gives it added impetus in his opera.

The Knot Garden is an examination of the dynamics of contemporary relationships and the suggestion that, perhaps, everyone has the potential to be bisexual. Denise, the freedom fighter, is the central character. Other characters include Mel and Dov, who are initially presented as a homosexual mixed-race couple. However, it transpires that Mel, who is attracted to Denise, may be bisexual. This opera featured the first homosexual onstage kiss in opera.

The final two operas seem to have a social and political bias. *The Ice Break* focuses on racial prejudice and the plight of émigrés and contains a mélange of psychedelic rock and African music. It is the warm-hearted Hannah who is the most unprejudiced. The opera focuses on the conflict between black and white races, East and

²⁹ An in-depth discussion comparing Tippett's music with Gershwin's is beyond the scope of this dissertation but could form the basis for further research.

West and age and youth. The opera was written during the era of the Cold War between The Soviet Union and The United States of America.

Tippett's final opera, *New Year*, was staged when the composer was 84 years old. As Tippett was always young in spirit, with a keen interest in contemporary events, his last offering for the operatic stage included a 'rap' vocal and a spaceship. To an extent *New Year* addresses issues of racial prejudice but, in the main, deals with the hopes and dreams of the main characters, particularly Jo Ann.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, with each chapter devoted to one opera and the selected character. The operas will be discussed in chronological order. Chapter One will focus on *The Midsummer Marriage* and Sosostriis, Chapter Two on *King Priam* and Helen, Chapter Three on *The Knot Garden* and Denise, Chapter Four on *The Ice Break* and Hannah, and Chapter Five on *New Year* and Jo Ann.

Each chapter will commence with an overview of the opera followed by an analysis of the selected character. Each character will be examined in the context of the opera in which she appears in an attempt to show how she embodies Tippett's inner values of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism. Due to the writer's interest in the performance aspect of Tippett's operas, discussion will centre on melody, the timbre of voice types linked with instrumentation, rhythm, word-setting, and the vexed question of Tippett's libretti. Although every attempt will be made to adopt a consistent approach in analysing the selected characters this may prove difficult as Tippett explored different approaches at different times and in different contexts.

Table 1 Overview of the Five Selected Female Characters

<i>Character</i>	Sosostris	Helen	Denise	Hannah	Jo Ann
<i>Role in opera</i>	a clairvoyante hired by King Fisher	wife to Menelaus of Sparta then wife in adultery to Paris	a dedicated freedom-fighter and sister to Thea	a Black-American hospital nurse, girlfriend of Olympion and friend of Gayle	a trainee children's doctor and foster-sister to Donny
<i>Voice type</i>	alto	mezzo-soprano	dramatic soprano	rich mezzo	lyric soprano
<i>Musical compass required for aria</i>	a to f ²	b to ab ²	c ¹ to c ³	b to ab ²	d ¹ to ab ²
<i>Musical compass required for opera</i>	g to f ²	b to ab ²	c ¹ to db ³	a to ab ²	c ¹ to b ²
<i>Other characters with which subject character interacts</i>	the whole cast	the main protagonists	the whole cast	the whole cast except Astron	the whole cast
<i>Scene/s in which character is introduced and first appears</i>	Act I.7: Sosostris is heard as an offstage voice warning King Fisher not to interfere in his daughter's life Act III.4: Sosostris appears in person when she is hired by King Fisher to find Jenifer and Mark	Act I.2: Helen is introduced by the Greek Chorus of wedding guests to the offstage sounds of love-making Act I.3. Helen and Paris appear as he persuades her to abandon her husband and elope to Troy	Act I.7: Flora tells Thea (Denise's sister) that Denise is coming to visit this day after a long absence Act I.13: Denise enters and shocks everyone with her physical disfigurement	Act I.2: Hannah, accompanied by Gayle, is at the airport to meet her boyfriend, Olympion, a famous Black-American athlete	Prelude to Act I: Jo Ann runs through the back door of the house which leads to her room as she is frightened by the street mob violence
<i>Final outcome for character</i>	Sosostris assists in the spiritual transformation of Jenifer and Mark and then disappears	Helen survives the Trojan War and returns to Greece	Denise suffers emotional distress when she finds she is attracted to the bisexual Mel and begins a relationship which could prove problematic	Hannah nurses the injured Yuri and helps Lev to come to terms with Yuri's injuries and Nadia's death	Jo Ann overcomes agoraphobia and ventures out into the world to help the orphans

Chapter 1

Sosostris in *The Midsummer Marriage*

Table 2 *The Midsummer Marriage* Dramatis Personae

Mark	a young man of unknown parentage	tenor
Jenifer	his betrothed, a young girl	soprano
King Fisher	Jenifer's father, a business man	baritone
Bella	King Fisher's secretary	soprano
Jack	Bella's boyfriend, a mechanic	tenor
Sosostris	a clairvoyante	alto
He-Ancient	Priest of the Temple	bass
She-Ancient	Priestess of the Temple	mezzo-soprano
Chorus	friends of Mark and Jenifer	sopranos, altos, tenors, basses
Dancers	attendant on the Ancients	silent
Strephon	the leading dancer, symbolising Mark's Shadow	silent

Source: *The Midsummer Marriage* Vocal Score³⁰

An Overview of *The Midsummer Marriage*

Tippett wrote *The Midsummer Marriage* between 1946 and 1952. The *Midsummer Marriage* is an opera in three acts grouped into 20 scenes with a pre- and post-scene in Act II. It was premiered at Covent Garden, London on 27 January 1955 with an initial run of five performances followed by two performances during the 1956-57 season.

The opera was directed by Christopher West, the house-producer at Covent Garden. Tippett was disappointed with the choice of director as he felt that West did not share his own "intellectual breadth" of vision [MT, 217].³¹ Subsequently, Tippett was convinced that inadequate directing was largely responsible for the mixed response to the opera. However, the well-known critic, Cecil Smith, complimented West on the production but criticised the quality of the libretto and the obscure nature of the storyline:

³⁰ Tippett, *The Midsummer Marriage*, Vocal Score. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text noting the rehearsal number only. Where confusion could arise, the rehearsal number is prefixed with [MM].

³¹ According to Tippett, David Webster, the General Administrator of Covent Garden supported the opera but procrastinated over the choice of a director. Consequently, West was employed at a late stage. In fairness to West, there may have been insufficient time in which to mount the production properly.

“I consider this libretto – Tippett wrote it as well as the music – one of the worst in the 350-year history of opera. And what a pity: for Tippett’s music is often astoundingly beautiful . . .”³² Smith’s remarks were echoed by fellow critics, some of whom commented on the weakness of the characterisation.³³ Moreover, an article in *The Times* contended that there was “too much of everything” because Tippett had over-burdened the libretto with a mélange of symbolism, allegory and myth.³⁴ This is a valid point but perhaps the mélange adds to Tippett’s unique style as a composer. However, Tippett was gratified that criticism was aimed at the libretto, rather than at the music [MT, 219]. This confirmed his belief that the audience had made an effort to connect with the text instead of ignoring it. He stressed, not for the first time, that the libretto should be sung rather than read separately as a literary work. However, the combination of Jungian archetypes, the poetry of Eliot and the opera, *Die Zauberflöte*, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), initially bewildered audiences.

Indubitably, however, the diverse allusions in *The Midsummer Marriage* heighten the intellectual complexity of the libretto. Moreover, sometimes Tippett’s turn of phrase sits uneasily. Fifty years on, Barstow spoke of Tippett with great affection and respect but observed that his very broad terms of reference may have distanced him from others. She explained that her late husband, Ande Anderson (1917-1996), had directed the new production of *The Midsummer Marriage* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in 1968. It was Barstow’s recollection that her husband “spent hours and hours reading the sources that Michael had referred to” so that he could discuss the opera with Tippett, much to the composer’s delight. Barstow also commented that Tippett was “able to talk very analytically about the piece – as if it wasn’t his own, as if he hadn’t written it!” This does highlight the complex nature of Tippett’s thought processes. It is supported by Tippett’s own remarks in a letter to a friend, as quoted by Berkeley in *The Guardian*, 26 August 2005, “I never seem to write 1 letter but I write 3.”

The successful 1968 production was revived for three performances in 1970. It culminated with Colin Davis, the musical director, instigating a recording of the opera.

³² *The Daily Express*, quoted in *A Man Of Our Time*, 76.

³³ Martin Cooper stated: “In Tippett’s libretto the goal is obscure and the means by which it is reached obscurer. Both are veiled in an extraordinary jumble of verbal images and stage mumbo jumbo . . . Tippett’s music cannot, unfortunately, wholly redeem this hotch-potch. . . . The chief musical weakness of the whole opera lies in the absence of strong characterisation.” Quoted in *A Man Of Our Time*, 75.

Scott Goddard observed: “Michael Tippett’s new opera *The Midsummer Marriage* . . . provided an immense amount of splendid music; . . . Also it flattered us by taking for granted that we were intelligent enough to think while we listened. . . . There was warm applause at the end, all of it well deserved.” *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

The recording became a “best-seller” and was awarded the Grand Prix du Disque de l’Académie Charles Cros in 1972 [MT, 220]. However, the turning point came after the opening night of the Welsh National Opera production in 1976. David Cairns reported:

Since its first performance 21 years ago – to an audience divided between shock at what seemed the libretto’s wilful obscurity and half-acknowledgment of an extraordinary richness of musical invention – Tippett’s opera **The Midsummer Marriage** has been slowly growing from a cult object, the enthusiasm of a handful of believers, to a work of conscious mastery and central significance. . . . It is above all a triumph of teamwork: and the result is to make the opera, for the first time in the theatre, an integrated work of art, a coherent dramatic experience, in which music, text, declamation, solo and choral song, lighting, gesture, mime, dance are fused into a composite language of expressive power.³⁵

The 1996 Royal Opera House production, directed by Graham Vick, proved successful. Bowen commented that most of the previous productions had made cuts “sanctioned” by the composer but that the 1996 production was presented “uncut” for the first time with success [MB, 35]. Nevertheless, on 1 November 2005 *The Midsummer Marriage*, directed by Vick, opened at the Royal Opera House to mixed reviews. The staging was a revival of the successful 1996 production, but in 2005 it was not as well-received.

On 2 November 2005, Tom Service in *The Guardian* was one of the few critics who praised the opera. He lauded the high standard of the set and the apposite use of surtitles to clarify the libretto and added, “. . . this is a production that puts Tippett’s music centre stage, revealing the transcendental power of the score.” In praising the music, Service echoed the critics of 1955. Nevertheless, unlike the critics of 1955, Service did not condemn the libretto or the characterisation. However, other reviewers heavily criticised the obscure nature of the libretto, the production values and the duration of the opera – four hours.³⁶ It seems, therefore, that the production may have been at fault. By any measure, four hours is a long time in which to view an opera, or any stage production, particularly in these times of instant gratification.³⁷

³⁵ *The Sunday Times*, *ibid.*, 80.

³⁶ In *The Observer*, 6 November 2006, Anthony Holden reported: “. . . choreographer Ron Howell . . . makes the most memorable contribution, with *The Ritual Dances* . . . The rest is as much of a muddle as the work itself. A chorus of superannuated hippies keeps pouring on and off the stage, . . . while the central characters go through a series of trials all too clearly echoing Mozart’s *Magic Flute*. Mix Eliot and Auden, Yeats and Fry, Shaw and Shakespeare into Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, leaven with a dash of Verdi and Wagner, and allow four hours to stew without ever coming to the boil.”

³⁷ In reviewing the August 2005 Lyric Opera of Chicago production of *The Midsummer Marriage*, Dennis Marks declared, “From the very first bars of *The Midsummer Marriage*, we are drawn into a coruscating musical landscape, by turns entrancing, threatening and ecstatic. . . . And if we still have difficulty with the occasional turn of phrase, we can simply ignore the surtitles and concentrate instead on the stage action and the rich tapestry woven unceasingly in the orchestra. If we do, we will savor the most radiant operatic creation of the last sixty years.” Introducing *The Midsummer Marriage* by Dennis Marks. <http://www.lyricopera.org/midsummer/introducingMidsummerMarriage.asp> (accessed 12 October 2005). It is unclear whether the Chicago production was shorter than four hours.

The Midsummer Marriage consists of largely traditional operatic forms including arias, duets, ensembles, choral episodes and orchestral interludes. In his analysis of *The Midsummer Marriage* Kemp admits that the more one studies Tippett's tonal scheme "the more mysterious it becomes" in that a consistent pattern is difficult to discern [IK, 237]. This is true but the "inconsistency" foreshadowed Tippett's departure from rigid adherence to major and minor tonalities, particularly in his last three operas. Moreover, Tippett placed a new emphasis on the "symbolic power of stage-illusion" by integrating ballet into the main storyline in the form of four Ritual Dances in Acts II and III [MB, 99]. Curiously, the Ritual Dances, which were first performed as a Concert Suite by the Basel Kammerorchester in February 1953, were an immediate success whereas the premiere of the opera received mixed reviews [EW, 23]. This reinforces the notion that it is the libretto, rather than the musical and dance elements, which lacks appeal. The Ritual Dances continue to be performed successfully as a Concert Suite.

Tippett created a balance of voice types with the lower and higher voices ranked equally. The youthful roles were cast with higher voices and the more mature roles with lower voices.³⁸ However, in the roles of Jenifer and Bella on the one hand, and Mark and Jack on the other, there is little differentiation in the tessitura or musical depiction and, consequently, the characterisation.

Sosostris, the clairvoyante, could be any age but her voice type, text and demeanour indicate that she is of mature age. The stage instructions describe Sosostris as "a huge contraption of black veils of roughly human shape, though much more than life size" [355⁺¹]. Although Tippett envisaged a female in the role, the reality is that a female or a male or an inanimate object - with the voice projected through a microphone, for example - could be hidden beneath the costume.

The Midsummer Marriage is an intricate combination of mythical, literary, and spiritual allusions. Tippett's interest in Greek Mythology and Greek Theatre began during his school days and this interest is reflected in the mythical Greek setting of the opera. In the vocal score "Notae" Tippett stated, "At the back of the stage is an architectural group of buildings . . . whose centre appears to be an ancient Greek temple. . . . The time is the present. The costumes are of the present day, except for those of the Ancients and Dancers, which are old Greek."

³⁸ This is in line with the scheme of 18th-century *opera buffa*. Tippett explained, ". . . there is nothing in the marriage part of it, the comedy, which is not to be found in the schemes of *opera buffa*: recitative, aria, ensemble, and some Verdi and Puccini techniques" [MIA, 59].

Tippett explained that the plot for *The Midsummer Marriage* was based on a vision he had had of a loving young man being rejected by a heartless young woman [MIA, 52]. In his mind's eye he envisaged the girl and boy each clothed in a costume which evoked the Greek gods, Athena and Dionysus, respectively. Consequently, the mythic quality and use of dance suggests a classical Greek approach. In ancient Greece, dance was used in the fertility rituals for Dionysus (Bacchus) the god of wine, vegetation, fruitfulness, sexuality and reproduction among other occasions [NJ, 56].

The story of *The Midsummer Marriage* is, essentially, one of courtship and marriage. It begins with the wedding day of Mark and Jenifer who have eloped because King Fisher, Jenifer's father, opposes the marriage. Due to Jenifer's internal conflict, which results in a misunderstanding with Mark, the wedding is postponed for one day until the young couple resolve their problems at a spiritual and emotional level, aided by Sosotris.

The Midsummer Marriage has parallels with the play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600), by Shakespeare.³⁹ The opera does not adhere precisely to Shakespeare's plot but, rather, reflects the psychological depth which characterises the play. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* embraces three different classes of society: the fairy world of Titania, Queen of Fairies, her husband Oberon, King of Fairies, and Puck his assistant; the mortal aristocratic world of two pairs of lovers, Hermia and Lysander, and Helena and Demetrius; and the mortal working-class world of Bottom, Quince, Flute, Snug, Snout and Starveling. *The Midsummer Marriage* has a similar class structure: the mystical world of the He-Ancient, the She-Ancient, Strephon and the dancers; the world of the wealthy, well-born Jenifer and her father, King Fisher; and the working-class world of Mark, Bella and Jack. Sosotris, who plays a crucial role in reconciling Mark and Jenifer, straddles both the mystical and the real world.

As in Shakespeare's play, the title of Tippett's opera alludes to the Festival of Midsummer which is held on the eve of summer solstice.⁴⁰ These celebrations originated in pagan times when midsummer symbolised the uniting of male and female energies. It was a magical time for humans to connect with their spiritual side.

³⁹ Tippett acknowledged that in its mythic and supernatural content and the quest for self-understanding, his opera resembled *Die Zauberflöte* (1791) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). However, discussion of this beguiling parallel is beyond the scope of this dissertation and could form the basis for further research.

⁴⁰ The Summer Solstice. http://www.equinox-and-solstice.com/html/summer_solstice.html (accessed 18 January 2005).

The exploration of ideas and emotions overrides the plot in Tippett's opera, as it does in Shakespeare's play. Like Shakespeare, Tippett used the contrasts of darkness and light which are reflected in the two settings: the real daylight world and the mystical, nocturnal world of dreams. Tippett declared that "... the moral of *The Midsummer Marriage* is enlightenment" [MIA, 60]. He believed that "enlightenment" was possible only when people discovered the truth of their inner selves as promulgated by Jung. Consequently, Jenifer and Mark experience this process as they explore the spiritual side of their psyches, assisted by Sosostriis.

In retrospect, Tippett regretted that he had not included 'the Sun' in the *Dramatis Personae* because sunlight was a crucial element in charting the passing of time on that illusory Midsummer Day [TOM, 270]. Moreover, sunlight is, perhaps, associated with optimism, one of Tippett's notable characteristics.

Each of the three acts in *The Midsummer Marriage* has a title which reflects the different stages of the journey from the shadow to the light. Act I, Morning, introduces the characters and their conflicts in the misty light of early morning. Act II, Afternoon, charts the trials and tribulations of Jenifer and Mark through the Ritual Dances. Act III, Evening, Night and Morning, depicts the final stage of Jenifer and Mark's journey and their reconciliation aided by Sosostriis. The opera closes with a sense of optimism as the sun rises on a new day.

Act III features the lengthy aria of Sosostriis, which reflects her status as the heart of the opera. At first glance it seems the aria describes the spiritual journey of Jenifer and Mark paralleled by the spiritual journey of Sosostriis. However, as the perceptive Peter Heyworth observed:

I suspect that of all the characters in the two operas [*The Midsummer Marriage* and *King Priam*], Sosostriis lies closest to the composer, is in a sense the composer himself: that in her great visionary scene he casts aside the veil (as Sosostriis does) and speaks directly; and that her account of the horrors of prophecy is his account of the torments of creation." [SSB, 35]

Beyond that, however, it may reflect Tippett's own spiritual journey through life, from the shadow to the light, treading his chosen path of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism. Especially revealing is Sosostriis' text, "Truth shall shine through me" [382-382⁺³]. This resonates with Tippett's credo that "Truth is some sort of an absolute. If we begin to tell lies for any cause, however good, we hurt ourselves, whether we know it or not" [MIA, 11].

The Portrayal of Sososttris

Tippett explained that he tried to emulate the style of Eliot in order to create a “stage of depth” where, at designated moments, one sensed another world beyond that depicted on the stage [MIA, 51]. This is particularly evident in the role of Sososttris which was based on a character of the same name and vocation in Eliot’s poem, *The Waste Land* (1922).⁴¹ In turn, Eliot may have ‘borrowed’ and adapted the character from an episode in *Chrome Yellow* (1921), a novel by the English poet and novelist, Aldous Huxley (1894-1963).⁴²

In Huxley’s novel, the character is named Sesosttris, after an Egyptian pharaoh, and is portrayed as a charlatan. As Eliot’s character is named ‘Madame’ Sososttris he may have been parodying Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891), the founder of Theosophy, who dabbled in the occult. In turn this may have had some bearing on Tippett’s Sososttris as in the course of the opera King Fisher refers to her as ‘Madame’ Sososttris. As King Fisher refuses to believe the prophecy of Sososttris, it may be that he uses the term ‘Madame’ to imply she is a charlatan. Tippett’s Sososttris, however, personifies integrity, one of Tippett’s inner values. This is substantiated at certain key points by the text, including the passage quoted previously, “Truth shall shine through me.”

Tippett based Sososttris’ aria on the poem *La Pythie* by Valéry.⁴³ This poem recounts the story of the burdens of the mythical Pythia, the voice of the Oracle of Delphi, noted for true but ambiguously-worded prophecies. However, the prophecy of Sososttris in *The Midsummer Marriage* is veracious and unambiguous. In discussing the link with the Pythia, Kemp observed in his analysis of Sososttris, “Her vision is true because it must be” [IK, 229]. Why? Arguably because Sososttris is the pivotal character symbolising Tippett’s own search for truth. Therefore, Sososttris must be portrayed as honourable and trustworthy.

In a letter to White, written on 31 August 1949, Tippett stated his intention to develop the character of Sososttris to ensure that “her aria will be still more personal,

⁴¹ Eliot was much-influenced by the American poet and critic, Ezra Loomis Pound (1885-1972). Pound played a significant role in editing *The Waste Land*, causing Eliot to dedicate the poem to him. One of Pound’s best-known works is *Cantos*, a series of poems he wrote over the span of his lifetime. This work “recorded the poet’s spiritual quest for transcendence, and intellectual search for worldly wisdom.” As Pound projected his own personality into his characters there is an interesting parallel here with Sososttris and Tippett. <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/epound.htm> (accessed 14 January 2006).

⁴² Notes and Observations on T.S. Eliot’s Early Poems by Patricia Sloane, Ambiguous Gender. <http://web.missouri.edu/~tselist/sloane12.html> (accessed 10 August 2005).

⁴³ The poem relates the sufferings of the oracle, “fated to lose her womanhood yet give painful birth to the inspiration of Apollo,” which eventually “takes over her personality entirely and allows a new and white voice to escape from her tormented body” [NJ, 60].

stressing her peculiar flesh & blood before she vanishes” [EW, 54]. It is questionable, however, whether Tippett entirely succeeded in establishing her as a “flesh & blood” figure but Sosostriis is the pivotal character. Although she appears only once as a physical entity, there are textual and musical indicators signifying her presence throughout the opera. The length of her Act III aria, 15 minutes, confirms the importance of her role.⁴⁴

In the vocal score *Dramatis Personae*, Sosostriis is described as “a clairvoyante, alto.” She is presented as a human being who is endowed with mystical powers but the Pythian allusion further reinforces the supernatural element. Musically, Tippett differentiates her two-fold role as an earthly and a mystical figure. As Jones rightly points out, “the profusion of demisemiquavers apotheosizes the idea that in this opera florid ornamentation expresses the magical other-world. Sosostriis inhabits both worlds, and her music veers from ornamental ambiguity to a simpler, more human personal heroism” [RJ, 72].

Kemp observes that Tippett used flutes, celesta and muted horns “in numerous and varied permutations” to “evoke the world of the imagination” or the mystical world [IK, 240].⁴⁵ The mystical music, played by celesta and two flutes supported by tremolo violas, is heard initially in Act I.1 when the wedding guests first glimpse the temple which is inhabited by the mysterious Ancients [Ex. 1].⁴⁶ Although the guests are unaware of the existence of the Ancients, they experience a sense of eeriness which is evoked by the music. The Ancients’ music is in the tonality of Eb Major and is linked musically with Sosostriis’ warning to King Fisher [65a] by the proliferation of demisemiquavers and the use of Eb.⁴⁷ The lush texture of the multi-chordal structure in Sosostriis’ passage provides an earthly balance and strength to the “magical demisemiquavers” whereas the music of the Ancients is sparser in chordal structure.

Sosostriis is introduced initially in Act I as a disembodied offstage voice from behind the temple gates: “Take care King Fisher a well-wisher says: beware!” [Ex. 2]. The line is sung *fortissimo* in a very slow tempo, *Adagio*, with a strong 4/4 rhythm which evokes power and dignity. The warning voice has a startling ring of authority as a solo

⁴⁴ Even famous long arias such as Lucia’s Mad Scene in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), by Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848), and Tatyana’s Letter Song in *Eygeny Onegin* (1879), by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), are approximately 12 minutes in length.

⁴⁵ Kemp points out that the instruments are almost identical to those Mozart used in *Die Zauberflöte*. He observes, however, that the use of those instruments to represent “magic” pre-dates Mozart.

⁴⁶ See Appendix 11 which lists the selected musical examples for all five operas.

⁴⁷ There is a link here with the semi-divine Helen in *King Priam* whose signature note is Eb.

horn changes to a 'stopped' note [65a⁺¹].⁴⁸ Judging by the startled reactions of the onstage characters, no one recognises the voice of Sososttris.⁴⁹

The offstage voice reiterates its initial warning, but a semitone higher, which generates a more penetrating sound, "Take great care proud King Fisher a true well wisher says again: Beware" [68a-69].⁵⁰ The addition of the words "great", "proud", "true" and "again" sung on demisemiquavers, adds strength to the pronouncement. In the first passage, demisemiquavers appear only in the accompaniment. In the second passage, therefore, the added ornamentation tends to elevate the voice of Sososttris into a supernatural/mystical realm. It seems that the warning voice has some supernatural force which over-rides the power of King Fisher, substantiated by the fact that Jack is unable to unlock the gates although commanded by King Fisher. It might seem that Sososttris' warning voice is antagonistic towards King Fisher, who arguably has a right to express concern for his daughter. Yet, Sososttris refers to herself as a "well-wisher" with no suggestion of hostility or deceit. It appears that her voice is attempting to guide King Fisher along the pathway of truth and enlightenment.

Act II features the Ritual Dances which symbolise the spiritual journey of Jenifer and Mark although neither Sososttris nor Jenifer and Mark appear in this act. Nevertheless, in Act II.2 [152-152⁺³] there are musical links, akin to a leitmotif, to both Sososttris [65a⁻¹-66] and the Ancients in Act I [12]. This highlights not only the supernatural element but also the importance of the role of Sososttris [Ex.3].

In Act III.4 Tippett incorporated a touch of comedy by introducing an ersatz Sososttris, in the form of Jack disguised as a woman, prior to the entrance of the real character [339]. Tippett justified the inclusion of this scene in a letter to White in November 1950: "Have I gone too far into the farcical element of the chorus bringing in the false Sososttris, 'The Sphinx & the Sibyl rolled in one'? Certainly in general opera benefits by sharp contrasts & less mixtures. A farcical pseudo-Sososttris to throw into

⁴⁸ In a letter dated 28 January to the writer of this dissertation, Tillett commented, "Marvellous effect."

⁴⁹ During the course of research I was puzzled that neither Bella, who is King Fisher's personal assistant, nor King Fisher himself recognised the voice of Sososttris. Tillett, however, cleared up this point in a letter dated 28 January 2006: "My handwritten Vocal Score Act I has no mention of Sososttris by name, merely "a Voice behind the gates" which in the 1955 performances was sung by Monica Sinclair who also sang the Act 3 Sososttris at the 5th performance (replacing Dominguez). The 'Voice' became Sososttris when the V.S. was actually printed. K.F. wouldn't recognise her voice because (says Bella) 'he deals with everyone through me' – so, fortune-telling could have been done by correspondence – not an actual meeting!"

⁵⁰ [MM 68a] foreshadows the music in the first bar of Helen's aria in *King Priam* [KP 376].

relief the real thing” [EW, 67]. This scene is, perhaps, not an entirely successful attempt at comedy but it may be that Tippett had other reasons for its inclusion.⁵¹

After Jack’s hoax is discovered, Sosostriis is introduced by an 18-bar orchestral interlude as she stands motionless at centre-stage in the form of “a huge contraption of black veils of roughly human shape, though much more than life size” [354-356⁺³]. Such a grand entrance is normally reserved for the *prima donna*, which underlines the importance Tippett attached to the role of Sosostriis. The stage instructions state that the face of Sosostriis should never be revealed, which adds to her mystique.⁵²

In Act III.5, King Fisher respectfully asks Sosostriis to find his daughter [357-364]. The awestruck chorus, intrigued by the robe and veils of Sosostriis, query whether there is a woman hidden beneath the attire or whether it is the voice of a God that will ensue [364⁺²-365]. Indeed, there is some ambiguity which is enhanced by the use of the alto voice, the lowest-pitched of female voices, in its powerful chest register for the first six bars of Sosostriis’ aria [367-368]. This ambiguity is reinforced by the fact that the ersatz Sosostriis is a man disguised as a woman.

Fig. 1 Sosostriis’ Aria

Section 1⁵³

SOSOSTRIS: Who hopes to conjure with the world of dreams,
Waking to life my visionary powers
He draws inexorably out from the vast lottery a dream to dream himself.
The illusion that you practise power is delusion.

Section 2

I alone cannot consult myself.
I alone draw out no dream to dream myself awake.
I dream the shadows that you cast
I am a medium not an End.
O my forgotten and forbidden womanhood!
Must I breathe again the perfume that dissolves you?
O bitterness, O bitterness of a Pythia’s fate.
O body swollen to a monstrous birth.

⁵¹ In a letter dated 28 January 2006, Tillett stated: “Michael once told me that the Jack-as-Sosostriis episode was there so that with a lot of people on stage in front of the banners – stage hands (invisible to audience) could get the ‘Sosostriis contraption’ in place! At one time the orchestra was going to play the theme from Dukas’ ‘Sorcerer’s Apprentice’ but that got removed!”

⁵² In the DVD recording of the 1989 Thames Television production for Channel 4, produced by Michael Waterhouse and directed by Elijah Moshinsky, Sosostriis is given an added human dimension. The on-screen role is acted by the mature-age Janet Suzman whose face is fully visible throughout most of the aria except at strategic points when she covers her face with a black veil, for instance at [MM VS 378] and at the conclusion of the aria. However, the role is sung offstage by Alfreda Hodgson. As Hodgson sings, Suzman deals a pack of tarot cards, gazes into a crystal bowl and superbly acts out the role. The combination of Hodgson and Suzman is stunning. This, of course, must have been the director’s idea, giving rise to the notion that production values are extremely important.

⁵³ For ease of reference, the separate sections of Sosostriis’ aria have been marked as “Section 1,” “Section 2,” “Section 3” and “Section 4.”

O horror, horror of transcendent sight.
O tongue taught by a god to cry:
'I am what has been, is and shall be, no mortal ever lifted my garment.'

Section 3

You who consult me should never, never doubt me.
Clean let the heart be of each seeker.
Truth shall shine through me once more endue me.
Humble yourselves now - I speak as a seer.
Acolyte, Acolyte,
Lift up the bowl that I may look.

Section 4

I see a meadow, fragrant with flowers,
and someone walking there – a girl.

KING FISHER: Jenifer.

SOSOSTRIS: Fragrant as a flower herself,
she opens her body to the sun.

KING FISHER: My child, alone and safe.

SOSOSTRIS: Oh! but now a lion (a winged and royal lion)
Enters the flowered field.
Moving with majesty towards the girl.

KING FISHER: Then there's danger.
We must warn her.
This is fearful, to be so near and far.

SOSOSTRIS: The lion has reached the osier bed,
Where she has gone to lie at length.

KING FISHER: O horrible!

SOSOSTRIS: As the beast rears rampant,
Now I see the face is human, and the wings are arms,
Strong sheltering arms of a manly youth –

KING FISHER: Ah Mark!

SOSOSTRIS: The glorious lion of love, with symbol erect he –

KING FISHER: No! It's all a hoax, a sham,
a cheat fetched out to frighten me.
Your bowl's a useless and disgusting trick.
See then what happens to a lie!

[Act III.4]

Source: Vocal Score. Text reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Limited, London.

Sososttris straddles both the real world and the mystic world. Tippett conveyed this in his characterisation which is effectively crafted into the aria, the only occasion Sososttris appears onstage. The extended aria is divided into four clear-cut sections and charts the development of the character. As stated earlier, it may be that the aria reflects also Tippett's development both in his artistic and spiritual life. The vocal range required for

the role of Sosostris is g to f^2 and Tippett makes effective use of the full range of the voice as is exemplified in the aria. The role could be sung by a mezzo-soprano but the mellow timbre of the alto voice, provided it has the required vocal agility and assurance in the upper register, adds a warm and thrilling quality.

The first two sections commence in the low chest register but each succeeding section is pitched higher than the preceding one, heightening the sense of urgency and passion as the aria progresses. The rising pitch suggests that Sosostris is perhaps attempting to connect with her feminine side, or *anima*, as female voices are generally higher-pitched than those of males. Furthermore, as higher-pitched voices are generally associated with youth, perhaps Sosostris revisits that period of her life as she remembers her “forbidden womanhood.”

The opening of Sosostris’ first section, commencing in Bb Minor, has a majestic quality enhanced by the slow tempo and low tessitura [367-368]. Tippett has marked the opening section *più lento*. The *pianissimo* increases to *mezzo forte*, as Sosostris sings, “Who hopes to conjure with the world of dreams” with a shift to the chord of D Major on “dreams”, creating a brief moment of optimism that the dreams may materialise [368]. “Dreams” is underpinned by a double-octave rising D Major scale of demisemiquavers which introduces the mystical element and creates a sense of anticipation. However, the dynamics differ for voice and orchestra. Tippett has marked the vocal line *crescendo* and the orchestral line *pianissimo* to ensure that the voice dominates. This pattern is repeated on the word “dream” with the key modulating to A Major [370] which gives a sense of added strength and optimism.

After her contemplative introduction, Sosostris’ next passage “The illusion that you practise power is delusion,” can be interpreted on several levels: first, she may be querying her own supernatural powers; second, she may be questioning King Fisher’s power; third, it may be Tippett vindicating his own creative powers. This commanding text is matched by the music, a declamatory C octave scale with a C Major top chord [370⁺²-371⁺⁴]. On “delusion”, however, the vocal line slides downwards from bb^1 - bb with a *portamento*. Sosostris, thus, regresses to the note on which she commenced the aria, suggesting nothing has been resolved.

In the second section, Sosostris’ human qualities emerge as she explores her emotions and desires. This is enhanced musically by a diatonic lucidity with less ornamentation. Tippett has marked the section *poco più mosso* and “with gradually rising passion” [372]. Although the section conveys the anguish suffered by Sosostris in her

quest to reconcile her mystical powers as a clairvoyante with her earthly desires as a woman, possibly it reflects also facets of Tippett's life. The life of the creative artist can be in conflict with his private life, as Tippett admitted.

Sosostris' opening passage, "I alone, alone, I alone cannot consult myself. I, alone, alone, I alone draw out no dream to dream myself awake" emphasises her human desires and dilemma and highlights her feeling of isolation [372¹-374]. The wide-ranging tessitura, from c#¹-eb², and the tonal quality conveys soaring human passion, with the repetition of the word "alone" and the increasing complexity of the music adding to the emotion.⁵⁴ The "passion" is manifest in the bass figures with the soaring effect reflected in the treble line. As the word "alone" is one which resonated throughout Tippett's personal life, this is a deeply-moving moment. A feeling of frustration, too, is evident as Sosostris emphasises that she is "a medium not an End" [374⁺¹- 374⁺⁶]. It is interesting that Tippett has emphasised the word "End" by writing it in upper case rather than in lower.

The next passage is extremely complicated and raises the question whether Tippett carefully devised it or whether it was an emotional outburst [375-379]. In his interview, Tillett explained that "Sir Michael had very definite ideas musically, but had long discussions with a variety of friends about the dramatic structure and text of the operas before a note of music was written down." Presumably, therefore, Tippett meticulously planned this section. The passage, "O my forgotten, my forgotten and forbidden womanhood!" is accompanied by declamatory Eb octaves which recall the C octaves in the first section [375-375⁺³]. The dynamics reverse with *diminuendo* following *fortissimo*. The syncopation in the orchestra, which displaces the normal accent of a bar, adds a feeling of strength. The next passage, which is marked *risoluto crescendo*, "Must I breathe again the perfume that dissolves you?" is sung *pianissimo*, but with conviction, while the orchestra commences with a *crescendo* and reverses with *diminuendo*. Thus, initially the orchestra dominates.

There is a feeling of further turmoil as Sosostris sings, "O bitterness, O bitterness of a Pythia's fate!" as the word "bitterness", sung *pianissimo* on a major seventh, vividly reflects emotional pain with its poignant intensity[376-377¹]. A new rhythmic pattern of instability is created with two bars of 8/8 followed by one bar of 3/4, two bars of 6/8, one bar of 3/4, two bars of 6/8 and three bars of 3/4. Here, John Lloyd Davies suggests there is a link between Sosostris and Jenifer [NJ, 60]. As Sosostris is the reconciler in the opera,

⁵⁴ The repetition of simple, easily-understood words is a Purcellian technique which Tippett emulated.

this connection is an important one. Davies points out in textual note 47 to *The Midsummer Marriage*, “Myth of the Pythia: fated to lose her womanhood and yet to give painful birth to the inspiration of Apollo. (Since Apollo is identified with Athene, the wisdom connection leads back to Jenifer in Act One; Sosostriis is the counter-active spiritual force to the Dionysiac tendency in the Chorus at the start of this act)” [NJ, 60].⁵⁵ The zenith is reached with Sosostriis’ statement, “I am what has been, is and shall be, no mortal ever lifted my garment” [378-379]. Davies observes that this line was taken from a Schiller essay. It is interesting to conjecture whether Tippett was referring to himself at this point.⁵⁶ As an independent thinker he seemed to expect others to accept him on his own terms and, figuratively speaking, “no mortal ever lifted my garment” could mean that no human had ever tapped Tippett’s innermost soul despite his deep love for both Franks and Allinson.

Tippett uses a crotchet rest, preceded by a *fortissimo* discord in the orchestra, to give added impact and relevance to the text which follows and, consequently, the word “I” is sung on the second beat of the bar. As Jones explains, there is “a new rhythmic idea” with the rising chromatic demisemiquavers less in evidence [RJ, 88]. However, from a singer’s point of view, pitching c#¹ after an orchestral discord which features d#¹ is no easy task. It could be regarded as a superhuman effort, which is in keeping with the characterisation of Sosostriis.

Section three is a lyrical one, composed in a simple strophic pattern, and is the most melodious of the four. The clear-sounding tonality of E Major adds to the effect of calm authority. Moreover, the song recalls Purcell’s technique in that each note of the melody is supported by a chord. The first eight bars are in the lower register of the voice, a-b¹, which creates a melismatic lyricism assisted by the harmonic and rhythmic ‘naturalness’ of the music. The words, “You who consult me should never, never doubt me. Clean let the heart be of each seeker,” imply, perhaps, that Sosostriis has reconciled her inner conflict [380-381]. The passage, “Truth shall shine through me, Once more endue me,” suggests she is Tippett’s emissary not only in the opera but, perhaps, for the world at large [382-383].

⁵⁵ There is a link here also with *King Priam* in that Athene, goddess of wisdom, is associated with Hecuba, Paris’ mother and Helen’s mother-in-law.

⁵⁶ The passage was kept by Beethoven on his desk and, given Tippett’s veneration of Beethoven, this is an interesting link, particularly as Tippett’s use of this phrase was coincidental. Furthermore, as Davies points out, “. . . the first line also has biblical precedents: God says to the Israelites ‘I am what I am.’ It is the idea of the eternal, unchanging oracle but Davies concedes he is unsure of Tippett’s meaning [NJ, 60].

As Sosostriis instructs Jack, “Acolyte, Acolyte, Lift up the bowl that I may look,” there is a dramatic change as if the moment of truth is at hand [384-385¹]. For the first time in the aria, Sosostriis sings the relatively high note f². As this is sung *pianissimo* at the upper end of the alto voice range it can be difficult for the singer, which highlights Sosostriis’ extraordinary powers. The stage instructions state “in an altered voice” which suggests that Sosostriis is in a trance. “Lift up the bowl” uses contrasting lower register and harmonic diatonicism followed by five bars of low, soft chromatic harmonies for divided strings [385-385⁴]. The stark contrast between f² and the bass harmonies enhances the supernatural or mystical atmosphere. Jones notes that as the harmonies “begin the ascent towards the high string melismas,” they recall “the mood of 309¹” when King Fisher instructs the chorus to “Go down and meet Madame Sosostriis” [RJ, 89]. As the music reaches its peak, it foreshadows the tranquil quality of Sosostriis’ fourth and final section.

Section four is Sosostriis’ revelation as she discloses the location of Jenifer and Mark [387]. The song is notable for the peaceful stability of its lines, composed of rippling triplets, harmony and a secure vocal line which creates a sense of optimism. Sosostriis discloses that Jenifer and Mark are connecting, both spiritually and sexually. King Fisher is horrified and disrupts Sosostriis’ divination by smashing the bowl, which ends Act.III.5. From this point Sosostriis is silent and motionless but far from impotent as is sensed by the wedding guests.

In Act III.6, the female guests acknowledge the prescience of Sosostriis, “She saw what happens in the soul” [396-396¹]. Donington speculates that this scene represents “the union of masculine and feminine elements in any one of us. . . . Unless something of this kind has happened in our inner development, we are not capable of very mature human mating” [SSB, 104]. This is true. It is a process which Tippett took seriously in his own life, assisted by Jungian self-analysis.

In Act III.7, King Fisher attempts to remove the veils of Sosostriis after Jack, who is now conscious of the presence of a supernatural power, has refused to do so. Yet, King Fisher is mesmerised as Sosostriis begins a process of transformation, symbolised by her veils which start to glow. A crucial passage from section two of Sosostriis’ aria [378] is reiterated by the Ancients and wedding guests, “I am what has been, is and shall be, no mortal ever lifted my garment” [433-434]. When the veils finally drop, Sosostriis has

vanished: in her place are Jenifer and Mark transfigured in “reds and golds” in a “pose . . . of mutual contemplation” [436].⁵⁷ Sosostriis has been vindicated.

King Fisher is devastated by the image of Jenifer and Mark but still refuses to acknowledge the veracity of Sosostriis’ predictions. The music for King Fisher’s line, “Oh, Oh, I’m blinded by the sight,” [436] recalls the Ritual Dances in Act II. As King Fisher’s passage is preceded by the reiteration of a section of Sosostriis’ aria, it provides a mystical link and a sense of impending doom. Jenifer and Mark face King Fisher who, by this time, has acquired a gun with which he intends to shoot Mark. However, as a glowing Jenifer and Mark gaze intently at King Fisher, he “clutches at his heart, crumples up and sinks to the ground” and dies [439]. The music at this point recalls Sosostriis’ “Acolyte” [384]. On the one hand, this gives credence to her mystic powers but, on the other hand, it emphasises that King Fisher’s untimely death could be due to his unwillingness to pursue the pathway of integrity, humanitarianism and compassion as promulgated by Sosostriis. Because Tippett regarded King Fisher’s death as emblematic of the “new” being born out of the “old” if the human race is not to stagnate, this scene symbolises the rebirth of the soul and age surrendering to youth [MIA, 35].

In keeping with Sosostriis’ role as the reconciler, her veils are used as the shroud for King Fisher’s body. Although she is not visible, her presence is immanent and it is evident that Jenifer, Mark, Bella, Jack and the wedding guests have evolved through being forced to confront their inner selves. Ultimately, Sosostriis can be regarded as the symbol of reconciliation, both spiritually and physically.

Sosostriis is an extremely complex character, as was Tippett. Of the five selected female characters, Sosostriis proved the most difficult to analyse. However, if one believes that Sosostriis’ ‘journey’ represents Tippett’s own search for personal and artistic identity, a glance at the period preceding the creation of *The Midsummer Marriage* is enlightening.

The years from 1936-1945 were possibly the most tumultuous in Tippett’s personal life. They embraced the fiery disintegration of his close relationship with his cousin, Kemp; the desertion by his homosexual lover, Franks, who married a woman; the death of Tippett’s father; and the suicide of his beloved Allinson. It seems he was forsaken by all those whom he held most dear. As he once said, “Although I accepted that as a composer I would be a loner, and some degree of isolation would always be necessary for

⁵⁷ Tippett has chosen an image taken from Hindu mythology, that of Shiva and Parvati in hieratic union.

me to work, I did not want a loveless existence. With Wilf long departed and Fresca recently dead, I felt at times very lonely” [MT, 226].

In addition, Tippett struggled for recognition as a composer. The turning point was in 1938 when he met Willy Strecker, head of the German publishing house of B. Schott Söhne, Mainz [MT, 114]. As Strecker was interested in Tippett’s work, the *Concerto for Double String Orchestra* was eventually published through Schott’s London Office. This was the beginning of Tippett’s lifelong association with Schott’s.⁵⁸ Due to the disruption caused by World War II, it was not until 21 April 1940 that the *Concerto for Double String Orchestra* was premiered at Morley College as part of a benefit concert. The orchestra consisted of unemployed musicians who had lost their jobs because of the war and it was typical of Tippett’s generosity that proceeds from the first performance of this work benefited those less fortunate than he.

Consequently, there does seem to be a parallel between Sosostri’s tortuous ‘journey’ and Tippett’s own life. That is not to say that Tippett saw himself as having mystical powers but he did have deeply spiritual values which influenced his lifestyle. Sosostri is a very unusual character. Intriguingly, while she is portrayed as a human being with the powers of a seer, the supernatural element tends to overshadow the human. Thus, there is some commonality with the semi-divine Helen in *King Priam*.

⁵⁸ Many publishers, including the BBC, Boosey & Hawkes, the Oxford University Press and the International Society for Contemporary Music had rejected Tippett’s works [MT, 114].

Chapter 2

Helen in *King Priam*

Table 3 *King Priam* Characters in the Scenes

Priam	King of Troy	bass baritone
Hecuba	his wife	dramatic soprano
Hector	their eldest son	baritone
Andromache	Hector's wife	lyric dramatic soprano
Paris	Priam's second son	boy soprano/tenor
Helen	wife to Menelaus of Sparta then wife in adultery to Paris	mezzo-soprano
Achilles	a Greek hero	heroic tenor
Patroclus	his friend	light baritone

Source: *King Priam* Vocal Score⁵⁹

Table 4 *King Priam* Characters and Chorus in the Scenes and Interludes

Nurse	doubling as Greek chorus	mezzo-soprano
Old Man	doubling as Greek chorus	bass
Young Guard	doubling as Greek chorus	lyric tenor
Hermes	messenger of the gods	high light tenor
Chorus	hunters, wedding guests, serving women, etc.	

Source: *King Priam* Vocal Score

An Overview of *King Priam*

Tippett wrote *King Priam* between 1958 and 1961. *King Priam* is an opera in three acts grouped into a prelude, nine scenes and seven interludes. Notably, it is the only tragic opera which Tippett composed. The opera was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation and was premiered at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, on 29 May 1962. *King Priam* was presented as part of a special festival to celebrate the opening of the new Coventry Cathedral and was directed by Sam Wanamaker [MB, 38]. This performance was followed immediately by a short season at Covent Garden.

⁵⁹ Tippett, *King Priam*, Vocal Score. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text noting the rehearsal number only. Where confusion could arise, the rehearsal number is prefixed with [KP VS].

Overall, Tippett's second opera was received warmly.⁶⁰ There was general agreement that both music and libretto were intelligible and, consequently, much more appealing to audiences than *The Midsummer Marriage*. Among the enthusiasts was Cooper, who had harshly criticised *The Midsummer Marriage*:

Michael Tippett's new opera, "King Priam", enjoyed a great and well-deserved success at its first performance by the Covent Garden Opera Company in the Coventry Theatre here this evening. . . . both Tippett's libretto and music reveal a new certainty of aim *and* unity of purpose, as well as a new mastery of musical language.⁶¹

These comments are not surprising because *King Priam* does have a clear structure and a familiar story.⁶²

Although the Koussevitzky Foundation had originally requested a choral and orchestral piece, Tippett persuaded them to accept an opera [EW, 81]. Because of the mixed response to *The Midsummer Marriage*, Peter Brook, a contemporary director, encouraged Tippett to write an opera based on material which was familiar to audiences [MIA, 65]. After much soul-searching, Tippett chose Homer's *Iliad*, a famous Classical myth of epic proportions.

Tippett had requested a theatre director, as opposed to an opera director, to direct *King Priam* [TOM, 218]. He was, therefore, delighted that Wanamaker was available and reported that he and Wanamaker had many amicable discussions in an effort to determine the most effective way to produce the opera. They decided it was essential that the music should dictate the "speed not only of stage action, but of the characters' emotions" [TOM, 218]. Accordingly, a recording of the music with all the words spoken at their correct tempo was used during rehearsals. Wanamaker felt that the rhythm of the words,

⁶⁰ *The Daily Telegraph*, quoted in *A Man Of Our Time*, 82.

Adam Bell in *The Evening Standard* reported: "Michael Tippett's opera *King Priam* had its world premiere at the Coventry Theatre last night and in doing so struck a reverberating blow for the glory and genius of English opera." *Ibid.*, 84.

However, Andrew Porter in *The Financial Times* claimed: "*King Priam*, in dramatic form, is far better disciplined than was *A [sic] Midsummer Marriage*. The acts are shapely and provide a theatrical progress which the producer, Sam Wanamaker, has most strikingly and effectively presented. . . . But – I have delayed this as long as possible – stimulating as it is to the imagination, fertile in and productive of ideas – I still have some unresolved doubts on whether, quite simply as an opera, *King Priam* is completely effective." *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ *The Daily Telegraph*. *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶² It is interesting to compare the reviews of yesteryear with contemporary ones. However, it has proved difficult to find a review of the Royal Northern College of Music production of *King Priam* staged in December 2005. Nevertheless, a concert version of *King Priam* at the Royal Albert Hall, London on 20 July 2003 received a favourable review. Richard Whitehouse reported, "A performance to savour, then, and one which powerfully reaffirmed *King Priam* as an opera whose relevance – musical and conceptual – seems evermore pertinent today. Sir Michael would have been provoked, even concerned, but no doubt wryly amused at the thought." Quoted in *Classical Music :: The Classical Source :: Prom 3 – King Priam :: Classical Music*. http://www.classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id (accessed 26 February 2006).

articulated at the correct speed when singing, was crucial for a realistic portrayal. During the rehearsal period he asked the singers to speak the words of their roles to determine whether the natural intonation of the spoken words coincided with the inflection of the music. Tippett was thrilled when the singers confirmed that the words and music matched [TOM, 218].⁶³ Surprisingly, in a tribute to Tippett some years later, Wanamaker confessed:

Michael was the most articulately inarticulate man I'd ever met. In reading his libretto for *King Priam* I was unable at first to discover in the shape of it what, in fact, he wished to reveal about the human condition. . . . Michael would launch into a brilliant peroration, full of breathtakingly expressed concepts, both poetic and intellectual, leaving me more confused than before! . . . And yet, by isolating an image here, an idea there, a brilliantly refracted, diamond-cut concept pieced together from all of it, I suddenly saw – understood – knew." [SSB, 32]

One can sympathise with Wanamaker. Nevertheless this element of "articulate" inarticulateness certainly adds a unique flavour to Tippett's operas and highlights his broad terms of reference.

In *King Priam*, Tippett explored a new musical idiom. A mosaic-like sequence of fixed structures, recalling the later music of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), replaces more conventional melodic development. This mosaic-like structure foreshadows the music of *The Knot Garden*, where it is further developed. In *King Priam*, arias and ensembles abound with the Nurse, Old Man, Young Guard and Hermes doubling as a Greek Chorus. Duets and choral episodes are few but an unusual feature is a trio each for the male, and the female, protagonists. There are no dance sequences.

In general, Tippett uses strings to accompany the female protagonists while woodwind, brass and percussion accompany the males. Each protagonist is musically linked with specific orchestral instruments, for example, Paris is linked with the oboe. Because Helen is semi-divine, Tippett differentiates between her human qualities (flute) and her divine nature (harp). There is a correlation here with Hermes, the messenger of the gods, and Achilles, the warrior of semi-divine birth, both of whom are similarly linked with these instruments. Tippett justified his approach:

Clearly to make a viable opera out of such rich material, I had to pare away everything but the scenes which mattered to my point of view. . . . quite as clearly, the music had to be spare, taut, heroic, and unsentimental. So that I had to set aside the earlier lyricism of *The Midsummer Marriage*, where the voices ride on a river of glowing sound, for a much more

⁶³ To ensure that the words were clearly understood by the audience, Tippett included detailed instructions for singers and directors. As an advocate of Purcell's word-setting, Tippett wrote in the "Note" that "a distinction should be made between those parts of the opera which are narrational . . . and those parts . . . where singing is paramount" [KP VS].

hard-hitting rhetoric, where the voices are often accompanied by a single, but essentially characteristic instrument. I found this style change immensely stimulating and exciting. [TOM, 219]

Porter, the well-known theatre critic, disagreed with Tippett's orchestration, arguing that because so many vocal passages were accompanied only by a single line in the orchestra it undermined the clarity of the diction.⁶⁴ He pointed out that the piercing quality of a single instrument, such as a violin, could be more overwhelming than a full string orchestra. Porter further observed that when singers are accompanied by a single string instrument they are virtually unaided and can struggle to sing the notes on the correct pitch, to the detriment of the dramatic interpretation. Helen's aria is a case in point because there are times when the vocal line is accompanied by one instrument and, at times, there is no accompaniment.

In *King Priam*, Tippett maintains a reasonable balance of voice types but the higher voice types dominate slightly. However, the imbalance is redressed to some extent because the leading role of Priam is cast as a baritone and in the minor roles the lower voice types are well-represented with the mezzo-soprano role of Helen sometimes exploiting the powerful lower register.

Tippett acknowledged that the works of several writers influenced his decision to write a tragedy: Jean Baptiste Racine (1639-1699), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Paul Claudel (1868-1955). After reading *Le Dieu caché* by Lucien Goldmann (1913-1970), which analysed the concept of Greek tragedy in Racine's work, Tippett concluded that Racine "was one of the masters of theatrical tragedy" [TOM 210]. In Racine's works, the tragic protagonist followed the dictates of fate, willingly or unwillingly, to his or her certain death and Tippett was inspired by this notion.

From Brecht and Claudel Tippett learned the technique of extracting relevant scenes from epic material to form a cohesive story [TOM 209]. In particular, Claudel's concept of an integrated form of theatre with music, text, gesture and scenery accorded with Tippett's own ideas. In 1956, Tippett had viewed a London production of Brecht's plays by the Berliner Ensemble as well as the opera, *Christophe Colombe*, with a libretto by Claudel and music by Darius Milhard (1892-1974) [TOM, 209]. The nexus between *Christophe Colombe* and *King Priam* is clear. Central to *Christophe Columbus* is the spoken role of a narrator, who links the 27 scenes in the opera with a commentary,

⁶⁴ *The Financial Times*, quoted in *A Man Of Our Time*, 86.

supported by a declamatory Greek Chorus.⁶⁵ The leading role of Columbus requires a baritone; Priam is a bass-baritone role.

Tippett presents the story of *King Priam* in nine scenes connected by seven interludes which are narrated by a Greek Chorus commenting on the action. There is no spoken dialogue but the emphasis is on a declamatory style of singing. As *King Priam* traverses several countries and extends over a period of many years, Tippett felt that this was the most effective way of presenting the opera. Tippett neatly tailored the original story by focusing on the royal family of Troy, and its downfall, hence the title *King Priam*.

The question does arise why Tippett, the pacifist, would base an opera on a story with a war theme. The answer may lie in the comments he made many years after composing *King Priam* when he finally visited the site of historical Troy. Tippett observed that he could not recollect when he had “first moved over from the Greek ships and tents, where I had always seemed to belong, through the walls of Troy and into the city” [TOM, 217]. It seems, however, that the story of Troy appealed because of the interplay of human relationships in the family of Priam, an element which Tippett perceived as lacking in the Greek faction. In justifying his decision to focus on the Trojan perspective of the *Iliad* Tippett explained, “This is the true seed-bed for all drama: namely, our efforts to re-find parents, children, siblings” [TOM, 217]. Tippett was probably speaking from the heart as during his childhood he had yearned for a loving, close-knit family relationship.⁶⁶

Tippett pointed out that the spirit of *King Priam* is found in the text of *The Midsummer Marriage* in Act III.6 “when the Ancients sing: Fate and Freedom propound a paradox. Choose your fate but still the god speaks through whatever acts ensue” [TOM 217]. Tippett maintained that those lines were always in his mind while he was composing *King Priam* and, consequently, they were the genesis for the overall theme for the opera: “the mysterious nature of human choice” [TOM, 217].

The various choices made by the characters in Act I give rise to the tragedy. The fact that they are required to choose between personal desire and public duty causes conflict with both their inner values and their loved ones. For the noblest of reasons connected with public duty, Priam and Hecuba decide their baby, Paris, should be killed.

⁶⁵ Opera Insights, *Milhaud's Stylized Exploration of Christopher Columbus* by John J. Church. <http://www.operaworld.com/special/columbus.shtml> (accessed 11 November 2005).

⁶⁶ Tippett stated that in 1951 he purchased a house in Sussex with financial help from his mother who moved in with Tippett and Karl Hawker, his lover. The household duties were performed “by the extended cockney family of the young conscientious objector” Tippett had assisted some years earlier. The family consisted of “John and Thelma and three little boys.” The three children attended the local primary school and each morning before they boarded the school bus Tippett “was enchanted to see them all line up to be embraced by their parents” as he had never experienced such affection in his own childhood [MT, 229].

For personal, humanitarian reasons, the Young Guard chooses to disobey his instructions and, consequently, saves the baby. In turn, for personal, humanitarian reasons, Priam and Hector decide to bring the boy, Paris, back to the palace at Troy. Finally, for personal reasons, arising out of love and desire, Paris chooses to elope with Helen the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. Although war between Greece and Troy was inevitable, the elopement of Paris and Helen acted as the catalyst. Helen, therefore, is a central figure in the opera, although her role is not the largest one. Significantly, Helen survives although the male protagonists die and the fate of Hecuba, Andromache and her children is uncertain.

Although Paris places personal desire above his public duty, Tippett does not pass judgement on the behaviour of Paris. Rather, he points out that the rejection of Paris at birth by his parents must have been soul-destroying for the boy when he was old enough to learn of this [TOM, 213]. Paris' mother, Hecuba, who places public duty before the needs of an innocent child, is depicted as proud and heroic but lacking in emotional warmth. There is, perhaps, a parallel here with Tippett's relationship with his own mother. He commented that in his adulthood, when he lived in London, he occasionally visited his parents but "never stayed very long, so as not to get up against my mother" [MT, 161].

Like Paris, Tippett was the younger son. When his father died in 1944, Tippett arranged the funeral and escorted his father's body for cremation at Plymouth as his mother declined to undertake any of the duties. This led to an inevitable argument: "My mother and I meanwhile had an almighty row. She accused me of never behaving properly towards her and I replied by saying exactly the same about her behaviour towards me" [MT, 162]. It is not clear why Tippett's mother refused to undertake the funeral arrangements but it was Tippett's perception that his mother was always heavily pre-occupied with her social obligations.

Tippett loved his kindly father and, significantly, portrays Priam as an affectionate, sympathetic character. At the commencement of the opera, it is Priam who is reluctant to kill the baby, Paris, and it is Priam who subsequently expresses pleasure that Paris is still alive. Nevertheless, Hector is the favourite son of both Priam and Hecuba. Tippett portrays Paris as besotted with the beautiful Helen because he believes she loves him as he loves her. This is an extremely important factor. Unlike the *Iliad*, where Helen is depicted as eventually tiring of Paris, in *King Priam* the two remain faithful to each other until Paris is killed.

Tippett explained that because *King Priam* addressed “moral issues,” rather than the emotions of love, there is neither a romantic aria for Paris nor a love-duet for Paris and Helen [TOM, 211]. Instead, Paris’ monologue focuses on fate and the meaning of life. However, in the passage preceding his monologue, after Paris and Helen have made love, there are several wide-ranging intervallic leaps in the music which suggest romance and passion. For instance, on the phrase, “Will you come . . .,” there is a leap of a minor ninth from g^1 - ab^2 [175^{+1-2}]. The same pattern is repeated on “desired” [178^{+3}]. Intriguingly, in Act I when Paris is unsure whether he should persuade Helen to elope with him, he prays to the god, Zeus, Helen’s father, for guidance. It seems, therefore, that Paris’ destiny is Helen.

The Portrayal of Helen

The name “Helen”, which is of Greek origin, means “bright one” or “torchlight” according to literary sources.⁶⁷ The Greeks chose names for their children with great care as they believed one’s name influenced one’s pathway in life. Therefore, the parents of Helen would have chosen her name as an auspicious omen.

In the List of Characters, Tippett refers to Helen as “wife to Menelaus of Sparta, then wife in adultery to Paris” [KP VS]. Evidently, Tippett wishes to emphasise the dual role of Helen as wife and adulterer. After Helen is introduced as the wife of Menelaus in Act I.2, there immediately follows an extensive lovemaking scene with Paris and Helen which confirms her adulterous behaviour.

Tippett’s characterisation of Helen is sympathetic and idealistic. Although Homer’s characterisation is not unsympathetic, it differs. As Rowena Harrison points out, Helen in the *Iliad* is disapproving of Paris, resents being manipulated by the gods, elopes with Paris because Aphrodite intimidates her and remains penitent.⁶⁸ However, in *King Priam*, Helen is fully aware of her duty to her husband and the consequences of eloping but leaves her fate in the hands of Paris, “If you fetch me, I will come” [177^{+2+3}]. It could be argued, therefore, that Helen is abnegating responsibility but Tippett commented that he did not want Helen in *King Priam* to be held responsible for her actions [TOM, 215]. As he observed, “She alone, perhaps, of all the characters in the opera has a true acceptance of herself. As she says, in answer to questions, with ultimate simplicity, ‘I am

⁶⁷ Meaning of the Name Helen. <http://baby-names.adoption.com/search/Helen> (accessed 10 November 2005).

⁶⁸ Harrison in Robinson, ed. “Homeric resonance: *King Priam* and the *Iliad*.” *Michael Tippett: Music and Literature*, 226.

Helen” [TOM, 215]. It is unclear why Tippett portrayed Helen so idealistically. Perhaps there was a subconscious connection with his relationship with Maude. Helen’s constancy of purpose or, perhaps, self-centredness is reflected by the fact that Tippett represented Helen throughout the opera by the note of Eb.⁶⁹

Tippett claimed that Helen remains true to her identity because she wishes for “desire that has no obligations” [TOM, 217]. However, is there such a thing as “desire” with “no obligations”? Perhaps desire, in itself, becomes an obligation as it is such a powerful force. This is reflected to an extent in Act I.3 which commences with Paris and Helen singing rapturous melismata on “Ah” as they make love [163]. Helen’s opening note, eb², is prolonged for five bars. Paris’ vocal line is marked *appassionato* and echoes the opening bars of the Prelude which commences with his birth [1⁺³]. Helen’s motif is introduced with a pair of flutes, symbolising her sensual, human self, underscored by the oboe, which is the signature instrument of Paris [64]. Brass instruments also feature and clearly depict the powerful sexual nature of the encounter.⁷⁰ As Clarke observes, “emphatic brass interjections corroborate the association between bodily love and power” [164, 166, 171] [DC 81]. Paris acknowledges this connection in his subsequent monologue, “Gods, why give us bodies with such power of love, if love’s a crime? Is there a choice at all?” [187-189⁺³]. Helen is clearly associated with love and power: Paris’ passage “Is there a choice . . .” is sung on Helen’s signature note of eb², highlighting his love for her and her power over him.

It may be that Helen’s semi-divine birth places her outside the conventions which apply to mortals. That is not to say she does not experience the same emotions as mortals but, merely, that her perspective differs. For Helen, perhaps public duty and personal desire linked with love, are one and the same which means her personal desire becomes a public duty. Tippett seems to have portrayed Helen as accepting of all things because of the great all-encompassing love between her and Paris, a fate from which there was no escaping.

For Tippett perhaps this was an extension of his own feelings. He made no secret of the fact that his deep love for Franks, whom he met in 1932, was a life-changing experience. As Tippett admitted, “Meeting with Wilf was the deepest, most shattering experience of falling in love: and I am quite certain that it was a major factor underlying

⁶⁹ Generally, “Helen’s note” will be notated as Eb. In Helen’s vocal line it is sung on either eb¹ or eb².

⁷⁰ This clearly resonates with the opening scene of *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), by Richard Strauss (1864-1949), where the thrusting horns of the orchestra depict the lovemaking of the Marschallin and Octavian.

the discovery of my own individual musical ‘voice’ – something that couldn’t be analysed purely in technical terms” [MT, 58]. The tempestuous relationship lasted six years until Franks, without warning, told Tippett that he had decided to marry a young woman. Tippett was devastated and immediately extirpated Franks from his life.

Despite this distressing experience, however, Tippett did not turn his back on love, as is evidenced by his subsequent emotional involvement with other people. Perhaps it was Tippett’s great capacity to love and be loved which formed the foundation for his inner values of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism. There is a parallel here with Helen who is able to arouse great love in both Paris and Menelaus and, perhaps, Priam. There is no question that Helen loves Paris but it is apparent in her first scene that she is torn between her love for him and for her husband. According to the *Iliad*, after the downfall of Troy, Helen’s husband welcomes her return because of his great love for her. Although Helen of Troy is best-known as “the face that launched a thousand ships,” which suggests great physical beauty, it was possibly enhanced by a beauty of spirit.

Helen’s voice type is mezzo-soprano which, traditionally, can convey a mother-image as much as a sensual image. No doubt that is why Tippett cast Helen as a mezzo-soprano rather than as a dramatic soprano. Helen’s vocal range is less than two octaves, from b to ab² and neither the top nor the bottom note is at the extreme of the conventional mezzo-soprano range. She is the only character of the five selected female roles whose musical compass is the same for both her aria and throughout the opera, which may reflect her constancy. Helen’s tessitura, however, tends to centre on eb²-gb² which is not the most comfortable area for a mezzo-soprano voice. Perhaps this symbolises on the one hand that life is not easy for Helen but, on the other hand, that she is able to overcome such difficulties due to her semi-divinity.

Paris, although smitten with Helen, is aware of the dire consequences of an elopement and prays to Zeus for guidance. When Hermes, the divine messenger of Zeus appears, he directs Paris to bestow an apple on one of the three Graces. Tippett cleverly arranged for the three singers who play the roles of Hecuba, Andromache and Helen to double as Athene, goddess of wisdom; Hera, queen of the gods; and Aphrodite, goddess of love, respectively. Both Athene/Hecuba and Hera/Andromache state their cases strongly in the hope that Paris will choose them. Aphrodite/Helen sings only one word, “Paris”, on eb¹ which is Helen’s signature note [Ex. 4]. Paris bestows the apple on Aphrodite/Helen and takes her back to Troy, sealing their fates.

Although Helen does not appear in Act II, she is mentioned in Act II.1 as Hector and Paris walk along the wall of Troy after the Greeks have attacked. Hector is dressed in armour but Paris refuses to participate in the battle as he feels it is his prerogative as a very handsome man to be admired and loved. That is his perception of his role in life. Hector accuses Paris of cowardice due to his refusal to fight Menelaus, Helen's husband. When Paris acknowledges his cowardice and confesses that "Helen is angry" with him for not confronting Menelaus Hector sneeringly asks if Paris will fight if Helen taunts him [230⁺²]. As he then calls Paris a "woman-struck seducer" Hector may be implying that not only is Paris dominated by Helen but also that it is Paris who has seduced Helen, rather than the reverse. Of course, as Helen was a beautiful woman by all accounts, Hector may be subconsciously enamoured of her.

In Act III, Helen's entrance is heralded by a Bb/E tritone, on a viola chord with a harp flourish, depicting Helen's supernatural beauty [Ex. 5]. This may indicate also that Helen is an instrument of fate as the Bb/E chord has been linked with Paris when it appears in the oboe line and presages Paris' role as an instrument of fate [93⁻²-93⁺¹].⁷¹ As Helen stands and waits, Andromache and Hecuba discuss her adulterous behaviour. Thus, Helen's aria finally gives her the opportunity to state her case. As Kemp points out, "Helen's aria in Act III.1 is her credo" [IK, 367].

Fig. 2 Helen's Aria

HELEN: Let her rave.
 I, Helen, am untouched.
 She cannot know me, what I am.
 Once, as I came along the walls,
 the old men spoke of me, for so I heard:
 'No wonder Greeks and Trojans go to war for such a woman.'
 And they spoke well.
 For I am Zeus' daughter, conceived when the great wings beat above Leda.
 Women like you,
 Wives and mothers, cannot know what men may feel with me.
 You talk of lust and whoring;
 Your words glance off such truth of love,
 Whose tempest carried Ganymede into the sky.
 What can it be, that throbs in every nerve, beats in the blood and bone,
 down through the feet into the earth, then echoed by the stars.
 Intolerable desire, burning ecstasy.
 All prices paid, all honour lost in this bewilderment.
 Immortal, incommensurable.

⁷¹ The tritone is a musical interval which spans six semitones. Because it is one of the two strong dissonances in the diatonic scale, it is known as the devil's interval and was banned in the music of the early Christian Church. As Tippett's portrayal of Helen is sympathetic, the tritone may not necessarily imply that Helen is the "devil in disguise." Rather, that she is an instrument of fate.

Love such as this stretches up to heaven, for it reaches down to hell.

[Act III.1]

Source: *Vocal Score*. Text reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Limited, London.

Because of the importance of Helen's role in this opera, her aria is the longest one assigned to a female character in *King Priam*. Tillett pointed out that "the only instruments used in the whole length of Helen's aria are harp, piano and violas – a very remarkable feat of instrumental imagination."⁷² This tends to substantiate Tippett's declared interest in experimenting with different types of sound. After Andromache's vitriolic attack on her morals, Helen's aria commences with an isolated vocal line, "Let her rave" [376]. The music recalls Sosostri's warning voice in *The Midsummer Marriage* [MM VS 68a]. As in *The Midsummer Marriage*, the use of ornamentation in the form of demisemiquavers represents the divine or mystical. However, while the vocal line of Sosostri is well-supported by the orchestra and sung in 3/4 time, Helen's unsupported line stresses her isolation and, perhaps, her strength and authority, as it is sung in 4/4 time. Although her vocal line is unsupported through the first section of the aria it is punctuated by a repeated harp/viola chord *sonoroso* but *pianissimo*, "I, Helen, am untouched. She cannot know me, what I am" [376⁺¹-377⁺³]. The punctuating chords seem to draw attention to particular words, and provide an interesting timbral effect on the word "rave", for example. The pair of flutes is absent, emphasising the divine qualities rather than the sensual.

Pitching the unaccompanied vocal line can create problems for the singer. The opening bar commences on eb², with the phrase concluding on b in the second bar but the third bar commences on c¹ with no assistance from the accompaniment. This is a similar pattern to [377⁻¹] where the word "untouched" is sung on ab¹ followed by [377] sung on db². However, perhaps Tippett was implying that because Helen is semi-divine she does not need earthly assistance.

In the next section of the aria, Helen stresses her beauty and attraction for men, "Once, as I came along the walls, the old men spoke of me, for so I heard: 'No wonder Greeks and Trojans go to war for such a woman'" [378]. However, the vocal line is in 2/4 rhythm while the accompaniment is in 6/8. Although the time signatures "match" musically and create a smooth, swinging feel, they differentiate Helen, emphasising that she is a foreigner. The section commences *pianissimo* on g¹ and remains in the lower

⁷² Letter dated 7 February 2006 to the writer of this dissertation. Tillett stated, "In early stage performances the very high passages for violas ("When the great wings beat above Leda") were transferred to violins . . ." It is unclear whether that was instigated by Tippett or whether it was the decision of the musical director. Violins, of course, have a higher-pitched, more ethereal sound than violas.

middle register until the words “to war” when Helen sings ff^2 *mezzo-forte*. Helen accepts that she is able to inspire men to “go to war” and seems to enjoy and celebrate her uniqueness. Does she, in fact, enjoy “pushing the boundaries”? Equally, did Tippett enjoy “pushing the boundaries”?

In the next passage, “And they spoke well” the accrual of fifths for piano which accompany the words highlight Helen’s strength of character [380]. Jones explained that, according to Tippett, the accompanying piano chords were prompted by recalling a movement from Stravinsky’s *Les Noces* [RJ, 138]. Helen proudly reminds Hecuba and Andromache of her divine birth, as the product of a coupling between Zeus and Leda. At this point the high demisemiquavers played by the viola gain prominence, underpinned by harp and piano, again emphasising Helen’s semi-divine qualities [381⁻¹-382⁺²]. Here, Tippett has created some graceful interweaving between voice and accompaniment. Moreover, the vocal line has some repetitive patterns which gradually lift the voice to a higher pitch, accentuating Helen’s semi-divinity. To add to the dramatic effect, there is an increasingly chromatic ornamentation in the accompanying violas and an intensifying pitch dynamic. There is a discord between Helen’s prolonged eb^2 and the accompanying E^1 in the bass of the piano which suggests, perhaps, that there is conflict within Helen herself which needs to be resolved.

After the elation of the previous section, there is a change of pace and texture as Helen asserts, “Women like you, Wives and mothers, cannot know what men may feel with me” [383-384⁻¹]. On the one hand the “barren” fifths in the music reflect Helen’s strength of character and, on the other hand, they suggest that Andromache and Hera lead dull lives. Helen, it seems, feels compassion for the dull lives of Hecuba and Andromache as there is no sense of gloating or malice. She has merely told her story.

Finally, Helen’s motif is re-introduced by piano and harp [383⁺⁷]. The music acquires a precise rhythm with added vibrancy as the aria progresses and the orchestration gathers strength. Unlike earlier sections of the aria the accompaniment rhythmically doubles with the vocal line except for two bars which are musically identical with their 6/8 rhythm against the vocal line at 3/4 rhythm and pianoforte accompaniment only [389 and 389⁺⁴]. They provide the ‘human’ or earthly aspect on the note of db^1 as opposed to the two preceding bars in each case which accentuate the divine aspect of Helen’s character. From [384⁺³⁻⁵] the piano alone provides the accompaniment with a series of octave scales.

The violas underpin Helen’s sensual declaration, “What can it be, that throbs in every nerve, beats in the blood and bone, down through the feet into the earth” [385⁻¹-

386⁺²]. This is a dramatic contrast with the following phrase, which is initially unaccompanied, “then echoed by the . . .”; followed by a *brillante* harp accompaniment on “stars” where Helen sings the note g² for the first time in the opera [386⁺²⁻⁴]. Although the g², accompanied by the harp, emphasises Helen’s divine qualities it also accentuates the heights that can be reached in passion. The harp is joined by the violas in the bar preceding Helen’s vocal line, “Intolerable desire burning ecstasy. All prices paid, all honour lost in this bewilderment” [386⁺⁵-387⁺³]. Here the tessitura is higher than previously, with wider leaps suggesting mounting passion.

The next phrase, “Immortal, incommensurable” [388-388⁺³], has a broad, strong melody line which has risen a tone from [376] suggesting that Helen is elevating herself in status as of divine right. Accompanied by harp and violas, Helen sings, “Love such as this stretches up to heaven, for it reaches down to hell” [388⁺⁴-390]. The melisma on the word “love” encompasses f², ab² and her signature note of eb². The same pattern is repeated on the word “heaven”. The music then plunges down to b for the word “hell” which is the final word in the aria. The contrast between “heaven” and “hell” confirms the theory of Donington who maintained that one of the themes in *King Priam* was “the reconciling of life’s opposite experiences, above all the delight and the pain of it” [SSB, 109]. However, as interpreted by Tippett, the overwhelming impression is that Helen embodies love.

The aria is followed by a short trio sung by Helen, Andromache and Hecuba as each prays to her own goddess for guidance [394-407⁺¹]. There is an interesting contrast in the characterisation as each woman prays to her own goddess: Hecuba prays to Athene for the preservation of Priam and the glory of Troy; Andromache prays to Hera for the preservation of Hector and her family life; Helen prays to Aphrodite for a blessing on all lovers, love, sexual desire and for “beautiful Paris, Paris, envied of all” [400-400⁺²]. Each character remains true to her ideals as Hecuba and Andromache focus on their own insular worlds whereas Helen’s prayer encompasses both Paris and “all lovers.” It may seem that Helen’s preoccupation with love and sex is inappropriate at a time when the downfall of Troy is imminent but she is, perhaps, aware that love may be the universal remedy for the ills of the world. Moreover, although Helen does not overtly link sexual desire with procreation, she may subconsciously do so as he did produce children with Menelaus.

Helen’s vocal line is often at odds with those of Hecuba and Andromache whose lines are in harmony for much of the time. However, at [403⁺¹-404] the three vocal lines are sung in unison on “death draws near” on the notes f^{#1}, e¹ and eb¹ (Helen’s signature note), the last two notes unaccompanied [Ex. 6]. This suggests the three women are,

momentarily, united in their grief. In the next section, Andromache's cry, "Hector is dead," commences on Helen's signature note, eb² [410]. This is echoed by Hecuba's cry, "O Priam," with the last syllable falling on e² [411⁺³]. The implication is clear: Andromache and Hecuba blame Helen for their terrible fate and they are not unjustified in doing so.

In Act III.4, as the saga draws to a close, Priam is before the altar mourning his doomed empire and the death of his beloved Hector. He rejects Paris' suggestion for flight and requests that he be left alone but, surprisingly, asks for Helen. Prior to Helen's audience with Priam, she and Paris farewell each other tenderly as each is conscious that Paris will shortly die in battle. The motif "Helen" [585] recalls [163 and 213]. The high flute passage [167], which interweaves with an oboe solo at [586], adds a poignant touch as it evokes happier days and emphasises the strength of the commitment of Helen and Paris.

In his analysis of the relevant tonalities in *King Priam*, Nicholas Morris points out that Priam is associated initially with "the regal key of D major" reflecting his "confident and strong" character.⁷³ As the opera progresses and Priam's life draws to its inevitable, tragic conclusion this pitch-reference weakens. Morris observes when Paris informs Priam of Hector's death that, "the pitch-reference to D becomes inflected by E flat" which is Helen's signature note [439⁺¹].⁷⁴ As Helen faces Priam, a blues chord which includes Helen's note of Eb at [592] underpins a striking trumpet fanfare which signifies the start of the recapitulation of the Prelude [1]. However, the Prelude marked the birth of Paris but now the recapitulation marks the death of Paris and the final, cordial meeting between Helen and Priam. Consequently, as Jones points out, the Eb form of the opening fanfares is given new meaning because Eb is Helen's signature note [RJ, 147].

Significantly, there is a change in Helen's mien during her brief meeting with Priam. In answer to Priam's query as to her identity she replies on eb¹, her signature note, that she "is Helen" [595] and observes that neither Priam nor Hector ever reproached her, that they were her sole support. Priam recognised that Helen loved Paris, the rejected son and that it was in Helen's arms that Paris found unconditional love. Priam queries why he speaks to her so gently but Helen replies that she does not know because she is "Helen" [598⁺²]. In this instance, "Helen" is sung on e¹, rather than eb which suggests that life does

⁷³ Morris in Lewis, ed., "A Jungian perspective on *King Priam* and *The Knot Garden*." *Michael Tippett O.M.: A Celebration*, 96.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

not have the same meaning for her now that she has lost Paris. Moreover, in answer to Priam's question whether Paris is already dead she replies "yes" which is sung on d¹ [599+2]. Finally, when Priam asks whether she will return to Greece, Helen replies "yes," which is also sung on d¹ [601]. Therefore, Helen has sung her last two monosyllabic words on d¹, echoing Priam's tonality which suggests she supports Priam in his mourning. Priam, on the other hand replies, "For you are Helen," pitching "For" on eb¹, although "Helen" is sung on c¹. He kisses her fondly before she leaves.

Various theories have been advanced as to why it is only Helen that Priam wishes to see at the end of the opera. In a complicated discourse, Clarke discusses the theory of the scholar, Camille Paglia (1947-), which contends that in Western Culture man is represented by Apollo and woman by Dionysus.⁷⁵ Paglia argues that women are biologically bound to nature by their reproductive powers and that bisexuality should be the accepted norm. Clarke suggests that there is some commonality between *King Priam* and the theories of Paglia in regard to "their representations of gender to an amoral nature" [DC, 85]. Clarke explains that at the conclusion of the opera Priam realises he has only just gained the knowledge of the human condition to which Helen has been innately privy which is why chooses to speak to Helen.

Jones, on the other hand, considers that Priam's preference for Helen's company at the end of the opera is linked to a dissertation written by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) entitled "The Theme of the Three Caskets" [RJ, 148]. Tippet had read the dissertation which explored the psychological meaning behind the mythological concept of a man's choice between three women. The chosen woman was usually mute which, according to Freud, signified that she represented death. By implication, therefore, in choosing Helen in the Aphrodite scene Paris chose death as Helen speaks only one word, "Paris". In the same way, by choosing to see Helen, Priam was choosing death. As he observes in Act III.2, "I do not want these deaths. I want my own" [461-462⁺¹].

Another explanation may be that Helen's beauty and calm nature are the panacea that Priam needs in his final hours. It must be remembered that based on the teachings of Plato (c.428 B.C.-347 B.C.), particularly as delineated in *The Republic*, the Greeks equated beauty with truth and goodness. According to Plato, the virtues of beauty and truth are derived from the good. Consequently, Helen, as a woman of great beauty, would

⁷⁵ Camille Paglia's "Sexual Personae": A Synopsis.

<http://kevincassell.com/PERSON/POLITICS/center/paglia.html> (accessed 10 January 2006).

automatically assume the qualities of truth and goodness. By extension, this can embrace humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism which were Tippett's inner values.

With the exception of Helen, Tippett's characterisation generally remained fairly true to that of Homer but Tippett did intensify the homoerotic nature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Witness the moving scene in Achilles tent which features a powerful aria, in effect, a love song to Patroclus. Moreover the war cry emitted by Achilles on hearing of Patroclus' death is soul-searing [335]. In the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus there may be a parallel with Tippett's own life, as from 1957-1974 Tippett was in a tempestuous and passionate relationship with Karl Hawker [MT, 228]. Tippett may have subconsciously compared his relationship with Hawker with that of Achilles and Patroclus. However, perhaps his idealistic side desired a relationship akin to that of Paris and Helen. There is no denying that Helen, as portrayed by Tippett, loved Paris unconditionally.

Of the five selected female characters, Helen has proved the most enigmatic. Although she abandoned her husband for Paris, as portrayed by Tippett there is no suggestion that she lacks integrity and compassion. Tippett seems to have emphasised her divine nature and her capacity for love. Due to her semi-divine characterisation Helen is, perhaps, more akin to Sosostris than to Denise, Hannah and Jo Ann.

Chapter 3

Denise in *The Knot Garden*

Table 5 *The Knot Garden* Dramatis Personae

Faber	a civil engineer; aged about 35	robust baritone
Thea	his wife; a gardener	dramatic mezzo
Flora	their ward; a psychologically-disturbed adolescent girl	light high soprano
Denise	Thea's sister; a dedicated Freedom-fighter	dramatic soprano
Mel	a negro writer in his late twenties	lyric bass baritone
Dov	his white friend; a musician	lyric tenor
Mangus	an analyst (psychiatrist)	high tenor baritone

Source: *The Knot Garden* Vocal Score⁷⁶

An Overview of *The Knot Garden*

Tippett wrote *The Knot Garden* between 1963 and 1965. *The Knot Garden* is an opera in three acts grouped into 32 scenes and was first performed at The Royal Opera House, London on 2 December 1970. It was commissioned by The Royal Opera House and directed by Sir Peter Hall [MB, 45]. The first performance of the reduced version, with a chamber orchestra, was given by the Opera Factory at the Wilde Theatre, Bracknell on 23 May 1984 and directed by David Freeman.

Tippett's third opera received generally favourable critiques which predicted future revivals. A number of reviewers noted that the opera was not easy to understand and that the libretto was stilted but the quality of the music, the high standard of production and the outstanding cast were highly-praised. Cooper reported:

If the new opera is designed as a total theatrical experience, Tippett's music remains the factor by which it will ultimately be judged. Perhaps with the potentially wider public of musical theatre – rather than opera – in mind, he has filled his score with an extraordinary variety of attractions. . . . a work which is a triumphant example of musical theatre concerning itself with genuinely human values.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Tippett, *The Knot Garden*, Vocal Score. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text noting the rehearsal number only. Where confusion could arise, the rehearsal number is prefixed with [KG VS].

⁷⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, quoted in *A Man Of Our Time*, 94.

Sydney Edwards expounded in *The Evening Standard*, "The opera's music and particularly the production have many outstanding points but the use of conventional, stereotyped characters and out-of-date language are flaws. . . . As a production *The Knot Garden* is one of the most integrated and brilliant Covent Garden has ever staged. . . . One looks forward to future revivals." *Ibid.*, 95.

Significantly, in 2005 *The Knot Garden* was the most-performed Tippett opera throughout Europe and The United States perhaps because there are only seven characters and it is cheaper to stage than Tippett's other four operas. However, the reviews in 2005 were mixed as critics commented on the disjointed libretto and the surfeit of ideas but praised the music. In reviewing the Scottish Opera production of January 2005, Willard Manus reported:

Tippett as dramatist was unable to successfully focus and construct his story, which consists of snippets of scenes, flashes of character insight, a fitfully starting and stopping narrative. But as composer Tippett holds the chaos together with his brilliant score, which alternates between evocative lyricism and angular dissonance, with touches of twelve tone, rock, blues, jazz and gospel. . . . Full of notes, but always going deep and hard into emotion, the arias were, on the whole handled well by the cast . . . In all, Scottish Opera did Tippett proud.⁷⁸

It seems, therefore, 35 years after its first staging the intellectual complexity of Tippett's libretto continues to be a source of contention.

Tippett was always forward-thinking and conscious of the need to develop new musical styles. He once stated:

Modern opera is a risk. In no other field of music, perhaps, is the repertoire so consistently of the nineteenth century. Yet it is always, at least to me, a stimulus and a challenge. . . . The 'subject' is perhaps the stimulus. But the invention of the exactly necessary musical forms is certainly the challenge. [TOM, 210]

Consequently, his third opera has a contemporary theme but includes traditional operatic forms including arias, duets and ensembles. There is no chorus, which is a departure from both *The Midsummer Marriage* and *King Priam*. Tippett further developed the mosaic-like musical structure which he had explored in *King Priam*, that is, small "blocks of musical material" or leitmotifs associated with the various characters and situations [MB, 117].

In line with the subject matter, Tippett integrated electronic music and elements of the American blues. In his autobiography, Tippett admitted that the critics took him to task for not writing the blues as a jazz form according to a prescribed formula [MT, 274]. Tippett believed, however, that the blues had become an integral part of contemporary music and that there were many ways of writing the blues. Furthermore, he emphasised

Philip Hope-Wallace in *The Guardian* observed, "Sir Michael Tippett's new opera "The Knot Garden", was given a first and beautifully presented performance at Covent Garden on Wednesday under Colin Davis. It will be broadcast tomorrow. . . . It is no use pretending that this work is easy, or instantly accessible, delivering instant rewards. . . . But there is a palpable magic coming off the stage here all the same. Sample it." Ibid., 96.

⁷⁸ Tippett's Knotty Garden. <http://www.lively-arts.com/lopera/0503/Tippetts.htm> (accessed 26 March 2005).

that he never attempted “to write blues as a jazz form” [MT, 275]. For Tippett, singing the blues was a way of expressing and releasing sad emotions.

Tippett explained that he once saw the young Noel Coward sing “Those twentieth-century blues are getting me down” in a musical play, with drug-use as the central theme [MT 274]. From that time, Tippett felt that the blues reflected a decadent society. While he acknowledged that decadence existed, he had no desire to promote it as a lifestyle. Therefore, he declared, “If blues belong in a decadent world, then I have to remake the blues within my own terms” [MT, 275]. His technique is illustrated in the Act I.7 Blues Ensemble [180-203].

In keeping with his quest for revitalising opera as an art form, Tippett decided that *The Knot Garden* should reflect contemporary television and cinema techniques. He dispensed with time-consuming scene changes by composing “16 bars of purely schematic ‘non-music’” to be played throughout the opera as one scene changed to another to give the effect of a cinematic “dissolve” [MB, 116]. This is particularly effective in ensuring slick scene-changes such as the transformation of the labyrinth from a maze to a rose-garden. In contemporary opera, of course, sophisticated lighting and computer graphics have replaced many of the cumbersome scene-changes.

With regard to voice types, Tippett has created a more even balance than was the case in *King Priam*. As there are only seven characters in the opera, balance is crucial. An interesting observation is that with the exception of Denise and Dov, Tippett has qualified the voice types with an adjective of his own choosing: Faber (robust baritone), Thea (dramatic mezzo), Flora (light high soprano), Mel (lyric bass-baritone), Mangus (high tenor baritone).⁷⁹ Compare these descriptions with *The Midsummer Marriage* where each voice type was encapsulated in one word, for example, “soprano”. By including the qualifying adjective, Tippett heightened the contrast in voice types. The difference in timbre between “dramatic” mezzo, “light high” soprano and “dramatic” soprano is therefore enhanced and adds to the uniqueness of each character. As in *King Priam* instructions on diction are included, albeit much briefer, to guide the singers and directors [KG, VS].

Over the years, Tippett decided that the conventional Italian terminology used for instructions in a musical score was “inadequate and imprecise in relation to the needs of

⁷⁹ In *The Midsummer Marriage* the voice types were not qualified in this fashion; in *King Priam* only Andromache’s voice type was qualified as “lyric” dramatic soprano, no doubt in an effort to differentiate her voice from Hecuba’s.

almost any composer” [TOM 261]. Consequently with Schott’s permission, from approximately 1970, Tippett supplemented the conventional Italian musicological terms with English explanations and clarifications. Over the years, due to greater accessibility of education, performers had the opportunity to increase their versatility as Tippett shrewdly observed. He explained that he, himself, had “coached innumerable young singers and instrumentalists” in his works and that had “paid great dividends” in raising standards [MT, 212].

Not unusually, Tippett drew the storyline and characters from a variety of literary sources. Raymond Furness claimed that *The Knot Garden* bore a striking resemblance to *Lila*, a play written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), which featured the character Dr Varazio, Doctor-Magus.⁸⁰ Tippett acknowledged the influence of *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), *Heartbreak House* by George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee (1928-) [TOM, 221]. All these plays focus on the complexity of human relationships with their power-struggles and the common experience of difficulties in communication.

Above all, Tippett acknowledged his debt to Shakespeare as *The Knot Garden* has strong links with Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*. Both play and opera explore the psyches of the characters and use music to express what words cannot. Arguably, in psychological depth, Tippett’s opera is the equal of Shakespeare’s play.

The story of *The Tempest* is based on human relationships: parent and child, ruler and subject, lover and beloved, and sibling rivalry. The relationships revolve around the central figure of an exiled Duke-turned-magician, Prospero, who was ousted from the throne of Milan by his brother, Antonio. Prospero has the ability to create illusions and enjoys manipulating situations. The play focuses on Prospero’s desire to avenge past wrongs within the space of one day while the stars are favourable. The setting is a desert island where Prospero has been in exile with his daughter, Miranda, for a period of years. Prospero’s manipulations bring the other characters to the island where he attempts to reconcile with them.

The Knot Garden, like *The Tempest*, commences with a storm and takes place within the period of a day, but in the home and garden of Thea and Faber. In common with the characters in *The Tempest*, the emotions of the various characters in *The Knot Garden*

⁸⁰ Furness in Lewis, ed., “Goethe and Tippett.” *Michael Tippett O.M. A Celebration*, 162.

move from fear to hope, from despair to happiness and from vengeance to forgiveness. In both the opera and the play there is not necessarily a clear resolution.

The Knot Garden focuses on the personal problems of six protagonists, three females and three males, who have varying degrees of difficulty with relationships. These six characters are manipulated by a seventh protagonist, a male psychiatrist named Mangus, based on the character of Prospero. As Mangus believes he has the power to assist them to overcome their problems he engages the characters in a game of charades and, as Tippett notes, “Mangus is not without success in sorting out the difficulties of the six other personalities” [TOM 220]. Ultimately, however, it is Denise who brings about reconciliation with her humanitarianism, compassion and integrity, which form Tippett’s inner values.

The title, *The Knot Garden*, alludes to the formal gardens of French origin, consisting of beautifully-manicured small box-hedges and miniature shrubs, which were popular in Elizabethan times. White suggests that Tippett’s own garden at his home may have inspired the idea of a knot garden as the central theme for the opera [EW, 94]. The knot garden which magically changes shape in line with the inner feelings of the characters is a dream-world fabricated by Mangus. The definitive transformation is from labyrinth to “fabulous rose-garden” which Tippett believes “affords an intimation of the forgiveness, the reconciliation, the ‘timid moments’ of love that are on the horizon” [TOM, 272]. Accordingly, it is at the discretion of the director when the rose-garden should form during the opera but, intriguingly, the only time Tippett has instructed that the labyrinth should change to a rose-garden is during Dov’s aria: “Under the influence of Dov’s music the rose-garden begins to form. By the last verse of the song it is all there: the enclosing walls, the fountain, the girl, the lover” [327]. Tippett, however, had a strong affinity with the character of Dov, a point which will be developed at a later stage in this chapter.

Each of the three acts has a title which describes the main action. Act I, Confrontation, introduces the problems and conflicts of each character. Act II, Labyrinth, presents each character as he or she explores a maze of emotions in order to deal with emotional problems. Act III, Charade, follows the characters as they participate in a series of charades in the hope of overcoming their problems. These titles echo Shakespeare’s use of the game of chess, the banquet and the masque in *The Tempest*. In the opera, the charades prove unsuccessful and Mangus brings them to a halt. Nevertheless, the characters have been forced to confront their own problems, which is a positive step

forward. Many of the characters in *The Knot Garden* were inspired by *The Tempest*: Mangus (Prospero), Faber (Ferdinand), Flora (Miranda), Mel (Caliban) and Dov (Ariel). Only Denise and Thea stand apart.

It could be that Tippet's mother, a suffragette, was the inspiration for the character of Denise. Tippet recalled his mother's involvement with social work, including "campaigning for women's rights" and providing aid for the underprivileged [MT, 3]. She joined the Labour Party at a time when it was considered *avant garde*. Moreover, in 1911, when Tippet was six years old, his mother was briefly sent to prison for participating in a suffragette demonstration in Trafalgar Square after the Women's Suffrage Bill was rejected by the House of Lords [MT, 4].⁸¹ Tippet's mother lived with him from 1951 until the mid-sixties when she moved to Essex where she remained until her death in 1969 [MT, 231]. It seems, however, that mother and son never resolved their differences but Tippet may have subconsciously used some of her traits as the basis for the character of Denise. Although Denise is portrayed as a warm-hearted individual who does ultimately become involved in a personal relationship, her physical distortion could well be Tippet's subliminal projection of his mother's perceived lack of affection for him.

David Ayerst, a life-long close personal friend of Tippet's paid an enlightening tribute to both Tippet and his mother:

I have not mentioned the influence of that remarkable woman, your mother. An early career as a novelist . . . ; an ardent period as a suffragette; endless personal generosity; a devotion to off-beat causes; and now, in late autumn, the self-taught painter of an inner world – this is clearly the kind of mother you had to have. Of course there have been occasions of friction, but it has always been friction between two remarkable people whose understanding is deeper than their misunderstandings. [SSB, 67-68]

Perceptions differ, of course, and Tippet may not have agreed with Ayerst. Nevertheless, like his mother, Tippet was a pacifist and it may be that he resembled her more than he realised.⁸² On the day World War II broke out, Tippet observed "If composition had been threatened in the past decade by conflicting personal drives, now it was at risk because of what I believed to be my public responsibilities" [MT, 113]. Thus, it could be argued that like his mother before him, he may have placed his "public responsibilities" ahead of his personal relationships. This is supported by his comments in regard to Allinson staying at

⁸¹ It is well-documented that Tippet's mother once declared her proudest moment in life was when Tippet was jailed for his pacifist convictions. This was in reply to a question concerning her son's illustrious career as a composer.

⁸² Witness his attempts to help amateur musicians, the deprived, the unemployed and those who were maimed during World War II [MT, 45]. In latter years he set up various trusts to assist the performing arts.

his home for only a fortnight at a time because of Tippett's preoccupation with his composing.

The characters in *The Knot Garden* have relationship problems. The marriage of Faber and Thea is at breaking-point, the former preoccupied with his business affairs while the latter withdraws to the sanctuary of her garden. Their ward, Flora, an immature teenager with psychological problems, is fixated on the partially-imagined sexual threat posed by Faber. Two visitors, Dov, a homosexual musician and his partner, Mel, a black writer, have a troubled relationship and can communicate solely by playing games; hence their simulation of the antics of Ariel and Caliban, two characters 'borrowed' from *The Tempest*.

Denise, a revolutionary freedom-fighter and sister of Thea, initially is the only character who is centred on an objective ideal. She plays a pivotal role in the drama, offering moral and emotional support to the other characters. Ultimately, however, she must confront her own sexual awakening when she becomes attracted to Mel.

The Portrayal of Denise

Tippett was delighted with the team of Hall as director and Colin Davis as conductor for *The Knot Garden*. Hall and Davis chose a group of exceptional young singers with outstanding acting skills who, as Tippett observed, "have since become stars (e.g. Josephine Barstow) on account of their ability to act as well as sing" [MT, 222]. In her interview, Barstow commented that she had very much enjoyed creating the role of Denise and that it had boosted her career. She confirmed that although Tippett attended many of the rehearsals, he left the interpretation of the role to the singer. Barstow considered that the role was "a gift" as there was something very specific on which to focus in the way of the disfigurement. She painted a very vivid picture of her own characterisation:

I had the easiest role really because what I was thinking was manifest physically in my body. . . . You know, I did it with this arm sort of like that (demonstrated by lifting right arm against body and hunching up shoulder) and I used to go home on the tube and find myself doing that! . . . I felt that it sort of gave me a crutch. I felt this was a physical reason for the grudge that I had and I felt I was looking from under my eyebrows at the world. I found myself still doing it when I wasn't there! . . . I didn't play it like a caricature but I slotted into a shape that was a slight caricature but obviously my job was to make her. I remember I didn't make her a caricature because that would be a disaster. That's the whole point about being a performer, that whatever shape you take on, you bring humanity to that shape and I hope that's what I did.

Humanity, which encompasses compassion and love, was a key word in Tippett's vocabulary.

Judging by the reviews, the young Barstow created the role of Denise to great acclaim. Cooper reported that the difficult role was "... sung with superb intensity and technical mastery."⁸³ William Mann, a music critic, observed after the opening night:

Most immediately striking, and most suitable for opera, is the entry of the maquis-girl Denise. Until her arrival the opera has been conducted in declamatory recitative and personal introduction. Then she walks on, physically deformed, hideously disfigured about the face, unnaturally thin, and bursts into a long solo aria, very florid, intense, loud (how can slim Josephine Barstow unleash so much searing, not to mention accurate and unforced, volume?). Denise reveals all her recollections of the torture she has suffered.⁸⁴

In the *Dramatis Personae* [KG VS], Denise is described as "Thea's sister; a dedicated Freedom-fighter, Dramatic Soprano" [KG VS]. White observes that Tippett pictured Denise as a freedom-fighter who had participated in a movement similar to that of the French Resistance and, consequently, a name of French origin for the character seemed appropriate [EW, 96]. Thus, Tippett draws a portrait of a woman who is capable of great loyalty, courage and determination.

Denise's traits are enhanced by the dramatic soprano voice which can convey a sense of power as it is capable of great volume and intensity of sound in both the upper and lower registers. To underline Denise's complex personality and breadth of vision, throughout the opera Tippett exploits fully the range of notes from c^1 to db^3 using some extremely awkward intervals. Barstow admitted that "it was very difficult to get Tippett's notes into one's head, very difficult."

Denise does not appear until Act I.13 but is mentioned twice beforehand, which gives the audience time to create a mental picture. The first mention is in Act I.7 when Flora suddenly remembers she has a message for Thea, "Oh, and I forgot. A message from Denise. Your sister? She comes here, today, later" [75]. The query after the word "sister" indicates that Flora has never met Denise nor is she entirely sure of the relationship between Thea and Denise. Apparently, therefore, Denise has not visited her sister for a considerable time, as is borne out by Thea's reply to Flora, "So she is home, Denise, my sister. The turbulent girl grown to a woman" [77⁺²]. The word "turbulent" suggests that Denise may have been unstable in temperament or that she was a fiercely independent spirit who was misunderstood by others.

⁸³ *The Daily Telegraph*, quoted in *A Man Of Our Time*, p. 94.

⁸⁴ *The Times*, *ibid.*, p. 92.

Denise is mentioned again, just before she enters, when Flora screams offstage and runs on singing, “Thea, Thea, Denise is come . . . she looks, she looks . . . Oh, I can’t tell you . . .” [134]. Unfortunately and anticlimactically, it is Mangus who enters with an armful of colourful costumes in preparation for a game of charades. Thea, Faber, Dov, Mel and Flora await Denise’s arrival.

Fig. 3 Denise’s Aria

O, you may stare in horror.
I was straight before they twisted me.
Ah, ah.
Angels have fought angels
As man has fought man
If the command comes
To redeem our manhood from a bestial time.
Ah, ah.

When we were tortured we screamed.
Ah, ah.
Indecent anguish of the quiv’ring flesh.
Ah, ah.
Until we broke.
Or they stopped.
Ah, ah.

I want no pity.
This distortion is my pride.
I want no medal.
The lust of violence has bred contamination in my blood.
I cannot forget.
I will not forgive.
Ah, ah.

How can I turn home again to you, the beautiful and damned?

[Act I.13]

Source: Vocal Score. Text reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Limited, London.

When she finally appears onstage, Denise makes an impressive and startling entrance as her body is twisted and disfigured. In the vocal score, Tippett gives a detailed description of Denise’s physical appearance as well as instructions for flashing lights to add to the dramatic effect. At this point, neither the onstage characters nor the audience know why she is disfigured. Denise introduces a jarring note in Thea’s peaceful, manicured, suburban garden where the characters are comfortably sipping cocktails.

To add to the disturbing effect of Denise’s entrance a series of *glissandi* alternating between the black and white xylophone keys slither up and down followed by chromatic “eruptions” on strings, woodwind and brass [Ex. 7]. There is a mixture of emotions as

Tippett seems to use strings to convey torment, brass to express forcefulness and woodwind to represent the warmth of Denise's personality. Denise's heroism is symbolised by the strong perfect fifths [Ex. 7]. Within each bar the dynamics increase from *piano* to *fortissimo*, adding to the feeling of instability. The angular intervallic shapes of the music symbolise Denise's twisted body and anguish. Major sevenths, minor sevenths and major second intervals give the phrase a highly distinctive character which clearly contrasts with the tight chromatic dissonances of the previous orchestral passage. The mood changes with the trombone and tuba entry two octaves below the previous bar creating a deeper sonority [141]. They are joined by the cello, its mellow and plaintive timbre serving to highlight the suffering of Denise. There is a sense of inevitability, as if all that has gone before is of no moment.

Denise's aria reveals a woman of great depth, warmth and complexity. Although she has been disfigured by torture, which caused great emotional and physical pain, Denise wears her scars with pride. She asks for respect rather than pity and abhors violence but does not regret fighting for her cause. Denise, moreover, feels that redemption is important but is unable to forgive her persecutors. Denise's aria, like that of Sosostriis, is divided into clearly-defined sections. Each section is separated by several bars of "Ah's" which are heavily-ornamented. The sharply rising and falling melody lines reveal her mental anguish and physical pain.

As seems appropriate, Denise's aria commences with "O, you may stare in horror" [143⁻¹-144⁻¹]. The words are sung *pianissimo* initially, even wistfully, the beautiful music in stark contrast with her twisted body. Her sense of resignation makes her agony all the more believable. Just as silence sometimes can be more effective than words, so it is with the *pianissimo* effect. At [143] the music swells to *forte*, adding to the dramatic intensity. Denise seems heroic because there is no hint of self-pity. There are many interesting instrumental effects, particularly in the wind section. Initially, the penetrating timbre of the oboe doubles the voice [143⁺¹]. The clarinet then takes over, eliciting the effect of a dialogue as it is similar in quality to the voice. In contrast with the oboe the pastoral sound of the cor anglais, which later doubles the vocal line, suggests Denise is a person of warmth. There are two conflicting tonalities: A-C#-E, inherently unstable in second inversion form, clashes with G-B-D/D#-F#, the latter being a chain of (predominantly) major thirds. The emphasis on d² in the vocal line acts as a pivotal note to anchor the singer [143⁺¹].

The next passage, “I was straight before they twisted me” [144-144⁺³] decrescendos from *forte* to *pianissimo*, as if emphasising the pain endured by Denise. The trombones enter, rather like a “call to arms,” followed by the solo cello which generates the mournful sound of a soul in pain. As seems to be the case generally in this aria, Tippett has effectively matched the words with the music. For example, the words “twisted me” are sung on g^{#1}, c^{#2} and b^{#1} creating an angular result, and a trill on the first syllable of “twisted” seems to aurally depict a medieval torture rack. The clarinet doubling the voice gives the effect of a duet and perhaps echoes the voices of Denise’s compatriots who were also being tortured. As the cor anglais and the clarinet alternate the doubling of the melody line, the difference in timbre changes the texture and the subliminal meaning of the piece.

There is a pause in the vocal line while a single quaver is played on claves, emphasising Denise’s sense of wretchedness and isolation [144⁺³]. Ten bars of melismatic “Ah” follow, featuring leaps and *glissandi* typically over a minor ninth or inverted major seventh [145-147⁻¹]. These intervals recur frequently in Denise’s aria and are developed in the subsequent woodwind solos [155-60]. The string lines echo the vocal shapes and slides with dynamics fluctuating from *piano* to *fortissimo*. Again, these features seem to reflect pain and sorrow as Denise mentally re-lives the trauma of torture. Fig. [145] parallels a passage in Sosostri’s aria [MM VS 376].

The next section of the aria reveals Denise’s commitment to her cause and, consequently, Tippett’s inner values of humanitarianism and integrity. A lesser person might have abandoned the cause [147⁺²-152⁻¹]. As she sings with conviction, “Angels have fought angels As man has fought man. If the command comes To redeem our manhood from a bestial time,” she muses on the necessity to defend human rights in the face of violence. The vocal line moves stepwise creating a declamatory statement of her convictions and causes. The arpeggio shapes and leaps in both voice and brass, accompanied by a side-drum beating out drum-like rhythm motifs, add to the martial feel [149-152⁻¹].⁸⁵ As the process of torture is exacerbated by a feeling of anticipation, or suspension, Tippett has attempted to create that effect by prolonging the notes on “manhood” and “time”, for example. This is followed by a significant *fermata* [152⁻¹]. The sevenths, seconds and ninths remain important and are further highlighted by the lucid texture.

⁸⁵ There is a resonance here both with *King Priam* and *The Ice Break*. However, in *King Priam*, Helen remains enigmatic and it is difficult to know exactly what she is feeling when Troy burns; in *The Ice Break* the gentle, but assertive, Hannah remains resolute in believing violence achieves nothing.

In the next section Denise describes her gruelling experience under torture which was used to break the spirit of prisoners [160-164⁺³]. Tippett adds to the dramatic intensity by interspersing rests to interrupt phrases and words which give the impression of vocal incoherence due to the horror experience. An example is “Indecent anguish of the quiv’ring flesh,” where there is a rest after the first syllable of “indecent” [160-161⁻²]. Both text and music suggest that Denise reached the limits of endurance. Musically, this is expressed by an ascending sequence of restless four-note clusters for vibraphone [162-163⁺⁴]. The final word “stopped” is sung unaccompanied and resolves to an ab¹ from the previous note, bb1, which suggests submission but not lack of courage. Denise’s wails diminish to a whimper; the previous jagged progressions with huge intervallic leaps on “Ah” reduce to intervals of tones and fourths [164-165]. There are no *glissandi*. Added homophonic rhythms and textures in the accompaniment suggest her determination and stability [165-169]. This is a turning point for Denise. It is unclear whether she escaped from her tormentors or whether she was released. Nevertheless, she has courageously told her story and wishes to move on with her life.

With renewed vigour, pride, and optimism she commences the next section of her aria, “I want no pity. This distortion is my pride” [165-167]. On the surface it appears that Denise has come to terms with the torture but the words, “I cannot forget. I will not forgive” suggest otherwise [169-170⁺³]. However, the word “Ah” has a new strength and purpose with more lyricism, in contrast to the previous feeling of anguish [171-174⁺³]. Although Tippett still uses stepwise movement it is less jagged because the voice-trills facilitate the linking of the notes into a less disjunctive progression. However, the seconds are inversions of sevenths and ninths, with the latter leaps being retained in the accompaniment, which perhaps suggests an underlying anxiety [173-175]. The melodic phrases at [175-178] reiterate those at [145] and provide a resolution on the whole tone chord at [177⁺¹].

The meaning of the last two lines of the aria is ambiguous. Denise may believe the family is “damned” because it is insulated from the outside world. As Jones contends, Denise’s words “How can I turn home again to you the beautiful and damned?” allude to the book, *The Beautiful and Damned*, written by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), which tells the story of an idle and aimless heir to a fortune [RJ, 173]. Jones argues that Denise is accusing her wealthy middle class family of being too complacent about the troubles of the world. He points out that these “words from an American author and strains of a purely American music dominate from 175 to the end of the scena” [RJ, 194]. Moreover,

Jones contends that “the blues clash of D natural/E flat in the implied B major chord of 177⁺³ and a similar clash of major and minor sevenths in the A major chord following it, help to give this passage its disguised jazz quality” [RJ, 195].⁸⁶

Nevertheless, while Denise may feel resentful it seems she has not been embittered by her experience. This is supported to some extent by Barstow who observed in regard to her own characterisation of Denise that she hoped she had softened the character as the opera progressed. At the conclusion of Denise’s aria Tippett has noted, “As there is no immediate answer to her questions, Denise remains aloof” but Denise’s aria raises so many questions that it is difficult for those present to find immediate answers [180]. To relieve the tension, the aria is followed immediately by a large-scale Blues Ensemble which commences with a solo sung by Mel who is joined progressively by Dov, Flora, Faber, Thea, Mangus and, lastly, Denise. Tippett has written the ensemble as an introspective one, with each character musing on his or her own feelings and problems. Lack of communication is part of the problem as, at this point, no one is listening to the problems of others. It is Denise’s vocal line which dominates with her “Ah” *glissandi*, in major sevenths and minor ninths, as she soars above the others [201-203]. This may mean that Denise considers her problem more important than those of other people or, conversely, that she feels no one truly understands her dilemma. On the other hand, is Tippett raising her status dramatically at this point to foreshadow her importance in the opera? As the opera progresses it is evident that Denise will be the force who effects some modicum of reconciliation as she impacts on the lives of the other characters.

Act II is a complicated one as all the characters except Mangus, who manipulates the action, are rapidly ‘whirled’ in and out of a labyrinth or maze for the purpose of solving their problems. As one character is being ‘whirled’ out, another is being ‘whirled’ in. Barstow explained that the staging was extremely effective because “there was a metal cage that went around and we kept being thrown out or thrown in.” Consequently, the characters interact with each other at various times but it is Denise who is the confidante, the heart of the opera.

In Act II.1 the two sisters examine their vulnerability towards men: Denise in general terms and Thea specifically in regard to Faber. They are accompanied by horns, the timbre of which accentuates the warmth of character of both women who have deep-seated fears but immense inner strength [206]. Denise’s passage “My goal” [210] recalls

⁸⁶ Jones argues well as Tippett visited The United States of America during the time he wrote *The Knot Garden*. Of course, this may reflect the influence of Gershwin’s music.

her aria [147] and Thea's entrance [17], suggesting they may be able to resolve their differences and reconcile [Ex. 8].

In Act II.2, Faber complains to Denise of Thea's unloving attitude towards him but Denise urges Faber to search his inner self for clues which may help his relationship with Thea. Faber and Denise find common ground as both feel confused, however, when Faber propositions Denise she rejects him before being 'whirled' offstage.

In Act II.7, as Denise sings a duet with Mel, she feels a deep bond with him [276]. Denise perceives Mel as symbolising a cause and suggests he should fight "for freedom, justice, dignity" on behalf of his race with her help.⁸⁷ She sings, "Your race calls you, calls for your words, for your strength, for your love. And I, who fight for all true causes, should I not follow such a man?" [280-283⁺²]. Denise's tuneful melismas and the growing softness of the harmony suggest her feelings for Mel are deepening, that her emotions are engaged. However, as Mel turns to Denise, they are interrupted and there is no musical or dramatic resolution. The labyrinth seems to reverse and then violently accelerate as Dov enters and mocks Mel. Denise is 'whirled' away but is followed by Mel.

In Act III, with the exception of Denise and Thea, the characters play a game of charades at the instigation of Mangus. In Act III.3, Thea urges Denise to form a relationship with Mel but suggests that personal relationships based on love are never straightforward, "In love the purities are mixed" [387-387⁺³]. Denise disagrees, as indicated by her reply, "Never," sung with conviction on f#² which plunges an octave to f#¹ [387⁺⁵]. Denise, naively, seems to equate "matters of the heart" with her freedom-fighting cause where, provided one had sufficient dedication and a clear sense of purpose, the mission would be accomplished. In Act III.4, during the course of the charades, Denise is horrified when Mel-Caliban, attempts to rape Flora-Miranda. Denise enters to the jangling sound of the xylophone and drags Mel-Caliban to his feet as Flora-Miranda runs offstage.

In Act III.5, Denise sings, "Mel! O crude:" to the accompaniment of brass [398-398+3] which recalls a passage in her aria [147]. With the realisation that Mel may not be a man of honour, Denise is devastated [407] and repeats her *glissandi* passage in her aria [158]. Because she again refers to "torture", it seems her disillusionment with Mel's behaviour may be more hurtful than was her torture for a public cause as she now sings, "I

⁸⁷ This foreshadows *The Ice Break*, where Olympion, a black champion, fights for the Black Cause. However, in contrast with Denise, Olympion's black girlfriend, Hannah, does not feel that fighting is the answer.

break,” and departs in tears [Ex. 9]. Urged by Dov, Mel follows her offstage. There is a dawning recognition for Denise that personal relationships can engage the emotions more deeply than universal causes on a grand scale.

Denise’s final appearance is in Act III.9 in an ensemble with Flora, Dov, Mel and Mangus. Denise is the first to commence singing the line “If, if for a timid moment we submit to love,” commencing on f^2 , her vocal line soaring above the others [489]. Periodically, Dov’s vocal line soars above that of Denise as if to reaffirm his newfound confidence as a composer [490]. The last chord of the ensemble is unresolved on the word “all” [497¹]. There is a clash between b^1 sung by Denise and db^1 sung by Mel but Denise’s b^1 and Dov’s eb^2 are in harmony. Dov wryly concedes in the closing moments of the opera that as he and Mel no longer belong together the latter should go with Denise. Mel decides to follow his advice but looks back over his shoulder to encourage Dov to follow. After some hesitation, Dov obeys.

Tippett once observed that of all the operatic characters he had created the one with whom he most identified was Dov, the lonely, heartbroken, homosexual singer/musician in *The Knot Garden* [TOM, 223]. Tippett was 65 years old when *The Knot Garden* was staged but evidently the feeling of isolation and insecurity remained with him throughout his life. The Dov/Mel relationship shows a parallel with Tippett’s personal life at the time *The Knot Garden* was composed and staged.

In 1962 Tippett met Bowen, affectionately known as “Bill”, an outstanding musician. At the time Tippett was still living with Hawker, who was jealous of Tippett’s relationship with Bowen. Hawker threatened to commit suicide if Tippett left him. Tippett was aware that temperamentally the intellectual, charming and kind Bowen was a more suitable partner for him but bowed to Hawker’s demands. In 1974, however, Hawker’s son-in-law, a doctor, pointed out that the relationship with Hawker was detrimental to Tippett’s health. Subsequently, Tippett separated from Hawker but not before organising a financial settlement [MT, 243].⁸⁸ Bowen remained the mainstay of Tippett’s life until the latter’s death.

Tippett’s mother died in 1969, a year before *The Knot Garden* was staged. Tippett inherited a modest sum of money from his mother and was thus able to purchase a house called Nocketts. Although he had had a turbulent relationship with his mother, when she died Tippett became an orphan. His feeling of isolation, therefore, may have deepened.

⁸⁸ Several years later, Hawker committed suicide.

Old age, after all, does not guarantee immunity from the pain of losing a parent regardless of the quality of the relationship. It seems that Tippetts never resolved his differences with his mother, just as the relationships in the opera are not resolved. However, Denise's presence has given the others a new perspective, just as the other characters have given Denise a new perspective.

Chapter 4

Hannah in *The Ice Break*

Table 6 *The Ice Break* Dramatis Personae

Lev	50-year old teacher; released after 20 years prison and exile	bass
Nadia	his wife; who emigrated with their baby son	lyric soprano
Yuri	their son; a student and second generation immigrant	baritone
Gayle	Yuri's present and native-born white girl friend	dramatic soprano
Hannah	Gayle's black friend; a hospital nurse⁸⁹	rich mezzo
Olympion	Hannah's boyfriend; a black champion	tenor
Luke	a young intern at Hannah's hospital	tenor
Lieutenant	a lieutenant of Police	baritone
Astron	a psychedelic messenger	lyric mezzo and high tenor (or counter tenor)
Chorus	of various groups	

Source: *The Ice Break* Vocal Score⁹⁰

An Overview of *The Ice Break*

Tippett wrote *The Ice Break* between 1975 and 1977. *The Ice Break* is an opera in three acts grouped into 29 scenes. It was commissioned by The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden where it was premiered on 7 July 1977. The opera was directed by Wanamaker.

Tippett awaited the premiere of *The Ice Break* with eager anticipation. In an interview with David Fingleton prior to opening night, Tippett commented that as he was now 72 years old, *The Ice Break* was his fourth and last opera.⁹¹ Tippett was delighted with the team of Wanamaker and Davis as director and musical director, respectively, as he had great respect for their talents. Wanamaker had successfully directed *King Priam*

⁸⁹ Nowadays, Hannah's race would be described precisely, for example, as "African-American." For consistency, both Hannah and Olympion will be referred to as "black" in accordance with Tippett's vocal score.

⁹⁰ Tippett, *The Ice Break*, Vocal Score. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text noting the rehearsal number only. Where confusion could arise, the rehearsal number is prefixed with [IB VS].

⁹¹ *Music and Musicians*, Vol. 25, No. 11, July 1977, 28.

and Davis had proved a superb musical director for the 1968 production of *The Midsummer Marriage*. Tippett observed that the input of Wanamaker had been invaluable in the re-writing of the libretto of *The Ice Break* to bring it into line with contemporary American idiom.⁹² Nevertheless, as the libretto was criticised heavily for its use of American slang, Wanamaker's assistance may have been a hindrance. Tippett acknowledged that the complex text was filled with quotations and allusions borrowed from various sources. He stressed, however, that it was not necessary for the audience to have an in-depth knowledge of all the allusions in order to enjoy the opera. That is debatable.

The opera was not well-received, much to Tippett's disappointment. Clements criticised the lack of depth in the characterisation and the negative message conveyed by the opera but praised the music.⁹³ Winton Dean was disappointed in several aspects:

But something has gone seriously wrong. . . the characters . . . with the partial exception of . . . the black nurse Hannah, are stereotypes lifted from the newspapers or television, not embodied in flesh and blood. . . The conflicts seem to have been assembled by Tippett's social conscience, not worked through his creative imagination. . . . Tippett has always been a naïve dramatist. . . . The music must carry the main burden of any opera, and here too one can only register disappointment. The substitution of slogans for character in the first half of the opera devalues all that follows.⁹⁴

Dean makes a valid point in regard to "stereotypes". Although the theme for *The Ice Break* is "whether or not we can be reborn from the stereotypes we live in" it may be that Tippett has ventured too far into the archetypal pattern. Arising from his interest in mythology, Tippett presented the opera as a modern myth. The wealth of sources can prove bewildering, however, and the opera may have benefited from an in-depth study of some of the issues raised. For instance, Nadia is not well-drawn in that there are certain incongruities such as her sudden death for no particular reason and her pathetic demeanour, given that she had had the strength of character to migrate to a new country and single-handedly bring up her son. Moreover, at times her idiom is absurd, for instance, "I fall away to extinction" [29²-297].⁹⁵ As Tippett was convinced that this would be the last opera he wrote due to his advanced age, he crowded the opera with a surfeit of issues. It is well-documented that the critics agreed that *The Ice Break* was the least "successful" of Tippett's operas due to the complex text and lack of in-depth characterisation.

⁹² Ibid., 29.

⁹³ *Music and Musicians*, Vol. 26, No. 1, September 1977, 43.

⁹⁴ *Musical Times*, Vol. 118, No. 1613, July 1977, 747-48.

⁹⁵ In a letter dated 7 February 2006, Tillett stated that he had "once asked Michael over the phone why Nadia had to die – he simply replied 'Oh, everyone asks that' – and gave no further explanation!"

Dean's comment that "the music must carry the main burden of any opera" is open to argument. The visionary Tippett was acutely aware that boundaries in the performing arts shift continually.⁹⁶ In line with his intention to 'update' opera as an art form, he integrated dance, cinematic techniques and sophisticated technology to assist scene-changes, as demonstrated in previous operas [MT, 222]. Dean, nonetheless, criticised Wanamaker's production and Ralph Koltai's set which "emphasised the mob at the expense of the individual" with congested crowd scenes, complicated lighting and overuse of microphones. Perhaps the complex nature of the staging, added to an over-complicated libretto, tipped the balance and created confusion.

It seems that Barstow concurred with the critics: "Gayle was a lousy part. . . . [*The Ice Break*] wasn't his most successful piece. It didn't gel." Barstow had chosen to perform only in the first season of *The Ice Break* and subsequently recorded the part of Gayle. However, in fairness to the composer, Barstow wondered whether the production, rather than the opera itself, had been responsible for the lack of success. She compared Wanamaker's production with the "formidable production" of *The Knot Garden* directed by Hall which she considered to be "really one of his best efforts." On the other hand, Barstow observed that the libretto was "too complicated for transmitting to the audience as a direct experience in *The Ice Break*."

In 1978, *The Ice Break* was re-staged in a German translation by Ken W. Bartlett as part of the Kiel Festival, Germany [EW, 123]. This was followed by a 1979 production in Boston, the first professional staging of a Tippett opera in The United States of America. According to White, audiences in Boston expressed great enthusiasm for *The Ice Break*, which was performed by a talented young cast [EW, 123]. This warm reception, however, has not encouraged theatre companies around the world to stage the opera: since then, *The Ice Break* has been conspicuously absent.

Nevertheless, a 1992 recording of the opera by the London Sinfonietta, conducted by David Atherton, received a favourable review by Malcolm Hayes:

So many of the work's qualities here leap out at the ear even more potently than they seemed to before – the formidable dramatic succinctness; the vividness of the characters; the concentration of the musical ideas and the way they image the drama from moment to moment. . . . You won't come across a finer opera recording anywhere. You won't come across a much finer opera either.

⁹⁶ Some of the relevant factors may be artistic, musical, cultural, political, geographical, religious, economic, sociological or philosophical.

It may be, therefore, that *The Ice Break* is a more satisfactory listening experience than it is a visual one as there are fewer distractions. Conversely, Tippett's rather quirky operas may appeal to a limited, but enthusiastic, audience, which has led to a 'cult' following. Nevertheless, it is difficult to form a valid judgment based on only one favourable review.

The Ice Break includes traditional operatic forms: arias, duets, ensembles and choral pieces. The opera is short with each act being less than 30 minutes in length. There is an added dimension which owes more to the world of musical theatre than to opera. Tippett notes in the paragraph preceding the *Dramatis Personae* [IB VS] that electronic amplification plays an important role in the opera. Tippett required two amplification systems, one for the performers and one for the orchestra, and of his five operas this is the most 'disturbing' in terms of noise levels. Tippett was possibly attempting to make an exceptionally strong statement concerning the injustices in the world as he believed at the time that this would be his last opera.⁹⁷ This was not the first time Tippett had used amplified sound. Witness the use of an offstage amplified voice for Sosostri's initial introduction in *The Midsummer Marriage*.

The voice types are an interesting mix. On balance, *The Ice Break* tends to favour slightly the higher voices. Tippett has qualified the voice types with an adjective of his own choosing, although to a lesser extent than in *The Knot Garden*: Hannah (rich mezzo), Astron (lyric mezzo and high tenor or counter tenor).

Tippett has depicted Hannah as a caring and compassionate mother-figure, although she is a young woman and the rounded tones and warm quality of a "rich mezzo" lend themselves well to the role. A contralto voice would have been of too mature a quality for such a young person but Hannah's sympathetic personality requires a voice type with a warm timbre.

The role of Astron is sung by two people because Tippett created the character as an unearthly, genderless creature, perhaps slightly more masculine than feminine. Here there is a link with Sosostri in the ambivalence of gender. The mezzo voice provides a marked contrast to the high tenor or counter tenor which makes it clear that two voices are intended to be perceived. However, as a mezzo voice is generally heavier in quality than a

⁹⁷ The opening line in one of Tippett's most famous essays reads, "As a musician my sharpest sense is that of sound" [MIA, 7]. It may be that as Tippett's eyesight deteriorated his aural sense became even more important, to balance his ever-declining visual sense, hence his increasing interest in sound systems.

high tenor voice Tippett obviously was seeking to balance the timbres, hence the “lyric” mezzo. In reality, the female half of the role could be sung by a dramatic soprano.

The fact that Nadia, a middle-aged woman, is cast as a lyric soprano is unusual. Traditionally in opera, more mature roles tend to be sung by mezzo-sopranos or contraltos. However, as Nadia dies in the course of the opera, the lyric soprano voice conveys a suitable sense of frailty. Tippett devised an extremely ‘artistic’ death for Nadia, with sleigh bells and a multitude of percussive instruments accompanying her final aria, timbres which blend well with the voice type. Most of all, perhaps, Tippett wanted the spectacular sound of the “ice break” music to contrast dramatically with the lyrical high notes.

As always, Tippett’s literary and musical sources were many. He maintained that the basic concept for the opera came from a play called *Masse und Mensch* by Ernst Toller (1893-1939). In this play, groups of actors with their backs to the audience suddenly turned to the front and revealed that they were wearing faceless masks [MB, 127]. Tippett had seen the play while studying at The Royal College of Music from 1924-28.

Furthermore, Tippett seems to have been fascinated by the varied role of the chorus in *Benvenuto Cellini*, an opera by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869). Tippett had attended a Covent Garden performance during the 1968-9 season and was intrigued by the difference in characterisation portrayed by the actors when they performed as anonymous, masked revellers compared with their characterisation in named roles [MB, 127]. Tippett felt that people masked their true feelings by hiding behind stereotypes or by acting in accordance with the perceived expectations of other people. The use of masks in *The Ice Break* is entirely appropriate as the focus is “whether or not we can be reborn from the stereotypes we live in” and the loss of identity experienced by many people [MB, 125]. Tippett felt people were motivated by archetypal feelings which are never far below the surface of our modern world.

Under the heading of “Chorus” preceding the *Dramatis Personae* in the vocal score, Tippett noted:

The chorus is always anonymous, whatever group it represents. It must be masked in some form, not only to enforce anonymity; but so that the stage presentation is unrelated to the singer’s real body, in the sense that, for example, the traditional black-and-white minstrels might be played by Chinese. The masking is also necessary to show that stereotypes altogether are in question, rather than any presently exacerbated example e.g. ‘black and white.’ [IB VS]

The chorus plays a variety of different roles. In Act I, the chorus plays the role of Olympion’s black and white admirers. In Act II there are two choral groups, set up as rival

masked white and black gangs, which clash violently and cause injury and death. In Act III, the chorus becomes the flower children of Paradise Garden.

As with all Tippett's operas, *The Ice Break* deals with the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation. In this opera, Tippett was inspired by Goethe's play, *Wilhelm Meister*, which featured a reconciliation scene between a father and his son [TOM, 226]. In addition, Tippett's imagination was stimulated by contemporary Soviet writers including Solzhenitsyn, a Russian dissident who was exiled from his home country. The Paradise Garden Scene, Act III.7, was based on the masque scene from *The Tempest*, quoting the evocation of spring [TOM, 225]. *The Tempest* appears to have been a constant source of fascination for Tippett.

The title of the opera is both literal and figurative. On the one hand it refers to the unique sound of ice breaking on the great northern rivers, which each year signals the arrival of spring, particularly in Northern Russia. On the other hand, the title symbolises hope for the removal of barriers between East and West, between black and white races, between age and youth. *The Ice Break* commences with a musical motif which imitates the sound of ice breaking [Ex. 10]. This motif recurs three times during the course of the opera, most importantly within Hannah's aria.

Act I introduces the problems and conflicts of the characters. Act II shows the characters exploring their emotions and motivation. Act III portrays the surviving characters coming to terms with their lives. Although this pattern is similar to *The Knot Garden*, which deals with the psychological problems of the characters, in *The Ice Break* some of the psychological problems experienced by the main characters are related to political issues. Granted, Denise in *The Knot Garden* is a freedom-fighter but her bias seems to be ideological.

There are nine named characters, six major and three minor. The six major characters are grouped into two sets of three. The first group is a family consisting of Lev, who is released into the West after twenty years imprisonment and exile; Nadia, his wife who was forced to flee to a new country twenty years earlier and has found it difficult to adjust; and Yuri, their 22-year old son, who emigrated as a two-year old but, like his mother, has found it difficult to adjust. He does not support the Black Cause.

The second group includes three young people: Olympion, a famous black champion who aggressively defends the rights of his race; Hannah, his black girlfriend, who is extremely distressed by Olympion's antagonism and feels that there must be a peaceful way of resolving the racial tensions; and Gayle, Hannah's white American friend,

who supports the Black Cause and naïvely idolises Olympion. Gayle is the girlfriend of Yuri and it is her behaviour which acts as the catalyst for the volatile chain of events that lead to her death and Yuri's life-threatening injuries.

The three minor characters include Luke, the doctor; Astron, the Messenger; and a Police Lieutenant. The chorus, like that in *The Midsummer Marriage*, plays a major part in the opera. However, the chorus in *The Midsummer Marriage* assumed the role of wedding guests throughout while in *The Ice Break* it plays a changing role.

In an effort to create a surreal effect at times, Tippett has suggested the use of lighting rather than cumbersome sets. Act I is set mainly at the airport with two scenes using intimate lighting located in Nadia's small apartment. Act II follows a similar pattern but, instead of the airport, the main setting is the street with two scenes in Nadia's apartment. Act III has three settings: Nadia's apartment which uses only a small portion of the stage; the Paradise Garden where the full stage is utilised; and the hospital where Yuri is a patient and Hannah works as a nurse.

The Portrayal of Hannah

In Hebrew, the name "Hannah" means "grace of God."⁹⁸ There are many synonyms for the word "grace": "benevolence", "kindliness" and "mercifulness", amongst other definitions. Tippett has characterised Hannah as a gentle and caring person but one who is strong enough to uphold her inner values of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism.⁹⁹

In the *Dramatis Personae* Hannah is described as "Gayle's black friend; a hospital nurse, Rich Mezzo" [IB VS]. The voice type evokes a powerful, warm timbre. Perhaps it is that Hannah represents an idealised mother-image whose humanitarianism encompasses everyone, regardless of their colour, race or creed. The vocal range required for the role of Hannah extends from b to a². The musical compass for Hannah's aria is the same as for Helen's in *King Priam* but in Hannah's case the overall tessitura is lower. At times, Tippett exploits the lower, sensual register of the voice. If Helen's signature note is Eb, with eb² being the most common pitch, then c#¹ and f#¹ can be regarded as Hannah's signature notes. These notes occur frequently, particularly on key words such as "blue",

⁹⁸ Meaning of the Name Hannah. <http://baby-names.adoption.com/search/Hannah.html> (accessed 10 November 2005).

⁹⁹ To an extent, Tippett's portrayal of Hannah has some commonality with the stereotype of the kind-hearted black mammy who featured in some of the older American movies such as *Gone with the Wind*.

“black” and “soul”. In addition, Hannah’s aria features several one-octave, and wider, leaps recalling the aria of Denise.

In Act I.2 at the airport Hannah is introduced as a sympathetic and likeable person when she and her friend Gayle welcome home Hannah’s boyfriend, Olympion. Unexpectedly, they meet Nadia and Yuri who are awaiting the arrival of Lev who has been a political prisoner for the past twenty years. Gayle is portrayed as enthusiastic and superficial. In contrast, Hannah is depicted as sympathetic and caring as, for example, it is Hannah who is aware that Yuri’s father is alive. Gayle sings to Yuri, “I never knew you had a father.” Hannah replies in a floating *cantabile* line, “O yes, he has. Nadia has often told me. Years of prison for some no-crime” [19⁺¹]. Obviously, Hannah has spent time talking with Nadia. When Olympion arrives he is besieged by a crowd of admirers. Hannah is caught up in the excitement and enthusiasm of the crowd as they surge offstage. In Act I.6, Hannah re-appears with Olympion, Gayle and the crowd. Although Olympion is portrayed as a flamboyant and arrogant figure, Hannah is happy, proud and supportive of his achievement.

In Act I.9, Olympion becomes increasingly belligerent when Yuri refuses to join the throng of admirers. Hannah tries unsuccessfully to mediate between the two men. Olympion then sings of his birthright, the fact that his forebears preceded Yuri’s to this land and decides that “Whitey gotta pay”. He asks for Hannah’s support, singing her name on her signature notes, c#² and f#², “Ain’t that so, Hannah?” [Ex. 11]. Yet, although Hannah adores Olympion she is distressed, as is evidenced by her vocal leap of a major ninth from the first to the second syllable of his name and a plunge of a minor ninth on the third syllable, “Maybe is so, Olympion.”

As Gayle kneels admiringly at Olympion’s feet, Hannah becomes extremely anxious. Hannah’s love for Olympion is overshadowed by her real fear of violence, which is highlighted by the fact that she now sings “Olympion” on c#², g¹ and bb¹ [125⁺²⁺³]. As the mood of the crowd becomes angry, Hannah pleads with Olympion to control the situation before a riot erupts. However, it seems that Hannah may be the one who is gradually gaining control as in her vocal line f#² predominates, with c#² also in evidence, when she sings, “Olympion, take command; before the devil’s in us too and we all go under” [125⁺²-127⁻¹]. Yuri tries to attack Olympion, who retaliates by hitting him on the jaw and kicking Gayle while Hannah is an unwilling bystander.

In Act II.3, Olympion and Hannah sing a duet in which he expresses his heroic role and godlike status while Hannah wrestles with her feelings of love for him. Olympion tries

to convince Hannah that they must support the Black Cause in the confrontation which will ensue [161]. Although Hannah disagrees, she is torn between feelings of compassion for the whites and her love for Olympion. She and Olympion share a loving relationship as is evidenced by the phrase, “What is so strange and deep as love, lover leaning to lover in the spring” [164-165⁺²]. This phrase is repeated [169-170⁺³]. The second syllable of the word “lover” is sung on c#¹ by Hannah and f#² by Olympion signifying their love is not in question. Nevertheless, their vocal lines are seldom in harmony. In several instances, the vocal lines are a discordant semi-tone apart, which suggests there are issues to be resolved. Hannah’s mood of disquiet causes her to touch upon the heart-searching that is to come, “Stranger and deeper into myself” [168⁺²-169⁻²]. This pensive phrase anticipates her aria.

As Olympion commits to mob violence, he encourages a troubled Hannah to go with him but she knows violence will not solve the racial tension. In an attempt at reconciliation, Hannah asks Olympion to search within himself to discover whether he really wants to follow the path of violence and divisiveness. At that moment, however, the noisy masked “black mob” arrives and, after masking Olympion, depart with him. Hannah is left alone with her thoughts to reflect on the events.

Fig. 4 Hannah’s Aria

HANNAH: Stranger and darker, deeper into myself.
 Blue night of my soul.
 Blue-black within this city’s night
 I scramble for unformed letters
 That might make a word to speak sense
 to the blue night of my soul,
 Blue-black within this city’s night.
 But no;
 No time is yet for sense.
 Alone,
 Deep in the body:
 Dark in the soul:
 An incommunicable voice murmuring:
 not that, only not that.

[Act II.5]

Source: Vocal Score. Text reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Limited, London.

Hannah’s aria is an appealing one. Perhaps it is due to the fact that the aria forms a peaceful ‘oasis’ in contrast to the noise and chaos which has preceded it. Conversely, perhaps it is due to the easily-discernible melody line accompanied by simple words which are both meaningful and realistic in relation to the character herself. Although Dean mercilessly criticised *The Ice Break*, he remarked on Beverly Vaughn’s fine performance:

“Outstanding among the cast [was] . . . especially the black mezzo Beverly Vaughn (Hannah) in a memorable Covent Garden debut.” Tillet recalled that “Hannah’s aria made a big impression in the theatre - because she was all alone on the vast Covent Garden stage - she came right to the front and, in contrast to the tall Olympion - was quite a tiny compact figure and seemed a real person.”¹⁰⁰

In Act II.5, Hannah’s aria opens with an instrumental prelude where orchestral dialogue presents the themes and rhythmic patterns of her aria. The opening bars are marked *dolcissimo* and *pianissimo* and this tone colour and dynamic prevail throughout the aria. The first bar [182¹] commences with the distinctive sound of a solo oboe which is joined by the harp in the second bar. The oboes and harp are coloured intermittently by woodwind and strings which alternate with the gently-rocking rhythm of the harp. The overall mood created by those instruments is quietly reflective and soothing as Hannah attempts to come to terms with the events.

In the opening bar of the aria the voice takes the musical idea, characterised by a semitone interval and demisemiquaver rhythmic motif, which has been introduced and developed in the preceding bars. Hannah’s vocal line commences with a distinctive octave leap to the accompaniment of flutes which supplant the oboes [188]. Her search for meaning is depicted by Tippett’s highlighting of three adjacent notes, e¹, f¹ and f#¹, as significant tonal centres which recur during the aria. In particular, f¹ is a focal point as the words “stranger” and “darker” are sung on that note. The note is underpinned by electric guitar which links Hannah with Olympion, as this instrument was previously identified with him. Equally, the words “blue” and “black” are sung on f#¹. Tippett has used the combination of c#¹ and f#¹, Hannah’s motif or signature note, extensively throughout the aria. As Hannah contemplates, the electric guitar enters reflecting her theme, “Blue night of my soul” [192]. The electric guitar again recalls Olympion. Although Tippett stated that Hannah’s aria was a “lyrical” piece of music, there is an element of the blues suggested by the electric guitars [MB, 129].

Hannah struggles to find some meaning for the violence as she cries, “I scramble for unformed letters that might make a word to speak sense” [195⁺²-197⁺¹]. The tessitura sits in the upper third of her register, with an emphasis on the minor third, eb²-f²-gb² for this section. Her vocal line is accompanied by xylophone, bells, *pizzicato* strings, horns and clarinets. The variety of instruments, perhaps, reflects all aspects of the society with

¹⁰⁰ Letter dated 7 February 2006 from Tillet to the writer of this dissertation.

which she is involved and her sense of frenetic hope. The accompaniment is distinctive with its triplets and wide-ranging leaps. As if in sympathy with Hannah, the woodwind section doubles her vocal line for much of the section.

As Hannah becomes more agitated, the tonal centres of e^1 , f^1 and $f\#^1$ are abandoned as the harp supersedes all other instruments, “But no, no, no, no” [202]. Hannah’s sense of isolation and momentary loss of hope is reflected in the word “alone” which is repeated several times over 30 bars [206-210⁺⁵]. The tessitura of the passage is wide-ranging, from $b-ab^2$, characterised by leaps of octaves and tenths. It is coloured by oboes, harp and strings at various points with the electric guitar providing a plethora of demisemiquavers which are repeated throughout this section. Hannah senses that Olympion may die and she will be left alone. This passage, perhaps, is reminiscent of a similar sense of isolation which is experienced by Sosostriis when she sings “alone” [MM VS 372⁻¹-373⁺¹].

Hannah’s natural optimism re-asserts itself as her inner “incommunicable voice” murmurs that perhaps there is hope. This is implied by the return of the three key tones of e^1 , f^1 and $f\#^1$ and the resolution on to a chord of C which contains the major and minor thirds of the ice-break motif [213-214⁺³]. As Hannah’s last few words are sung on eb^1 , perhaps coincidentally there is also a link here with Helen in *King Priam* whose signature note is Eb.¹⁰¹ Although Hannah is not semi-divine, perhaps this signifies her deeply-spiritual soul, rooted in her heritage. The key words in the aria are the words “blue night,” “blue” and “black.” Hannah is black and the blues tradition emerged from the songs of the black African slaves who were transported to America. Thus, Hannah has gone ‘back to her roots’ to seek an answer.¹⁰² In Act II.6, as Hannah finishes her aria, the masked black and white gangs interrupt her musing with a confrontation.

Tippett claimed that his final opera, *New Year*, was influenced by musical theatre. In Act II.8 of *The Ice Break*, however, the dramatic structure and use of percussion recalls the fatal confrontation of the New York gangs, the Jets and Sharks, in *West Side Story* (1957) by Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), in Act I.11, “The Rumble.”

In Act II.9 Luke, the doctor, unmasks each body in turn; the first two are dead. To the horror of Luke and Hannah, Olympion and Gayle are revealed. A devastated Hannah

¹⁰¹ Eb appears several times in Hannah’s aria, as it does in Jo Ann’s. As Tippett’s works are full of hidden meanings, it is tempting to make the association with Helen in *King Priam*.

¹⁰² There are varying opinions as to the origin of the blues but there is the sociological view that the blues are an entire musical tradition rooted in the Black Experience following the American Civil War (1861-1865) during which the black slaves in the South tried to win their freedom.

recalls her duet with Olympion as she asks, “What has more power of pain than love?” The words are coloured by gentle strings and bass clarinet, giving a plaintive effect. As Lev arrives, a badly-injured Yuri is unmasked. Luke stresses that Yuri may survive but that his recovery will take some considerable time. He suggests Lev should seek solace from the kindly Hannah.

In Act II.10, Hannah and Lev find a bond in their shared sorrow [271-274⁺²]. This is conveyed wordlessly with solo violin and cello clearly identifying the characters and the horns providing an evocative cry tinged with sadness. The gently-rocking rhythm suggests a lullaby as Hannah and Lev console each other. Tippett’s stage instructions note, “Perhaps, Lev, as the cello takes over from violin for a time, decides to accept Luke’s advice to turn to Hannah” [275]. This suggests that Lev will gain comfort and courage from Hannah’s remarkable compassion and strength of mind. However, Lev’s own strength, self-discipline and determination should not be under-estimated, as he did spend 20 years in prison merely for expressing his views. Consequently, he is a welcome support for Hannah who, it seems, has spent much of her life caring for others with little reciprocity.

In Act III.2 Nadia, who is ill, questions Hannah and Luke in regard to Yuri’s health. She knows that she will not live to see Yuri’s recovery but Hannah, in an effort to raise Nadia’s spirits, sings an isolated line without conviction “Indeed you will” [292⁺¹⁻²]. Nadia, who has accepted her own death, asks Hannah to care for Lev.

In Act III.3, Lev feels despondent and passionately questions his decision to emigrate as his wife is now on her deathbed and his son has rejected him. Hannah comforts him by suggesting “That other country has troubles too” [304-304⁺¹]. Lev recalls the brutality of the guards, questions his own pacifist attitude and wonders whether he should have reacted more violently in view of the fact that Yuri informed him earlier in the opera that pacifism was a cowardly approach. As Tippett was 70 years old when he commenced writing *The Ice Break*, perhaps he was reflecting on, and evaluating, his own stance of pacifism.

The invincible Hannah reflects that the world consists of people struggling in their own ghettos but that the ultimate goal should be to determine “how to be reborn” and thus rise above the ghettos [319-322⁺³]. Musically, Hannah’s positive attitude is confirmed by the brass underpinning her response, in contrast to Lev’s grief-stricken melismatic cries supported by solo cello [321-322]. In Act III.4, Hannah provides emotional support for both Lev and Nadia as the latter dies.

In Act III.7, Hannah wheels in Yuri, totally encased in plaster. As he is discourteous to her, she firmly insists that he refer to her as “Nurse” rather than “Hannah”. In the stage instructions, Tippett has noted that Yuri is “ [at least metaphorically] encased in plaster” and that Yuri’s egress from the plaster cocoon depicted a spiritual rebirth. Tippett ‘borrowed’ this idea from Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah*, in which a teenage girl stepped out of an enormous egg [TOM, 225]. However, the concept proved not entirely successful in *The Ice Break* as there is some incongruity attached to a human being emerging from a plaster cocoon, metaphorically or otherwise, in an opera with a serious storyline.

Yuri’s egress from the plaster cocoon in Act III.9 is depicted harmonically in the orchestra by the chords of the ice-break motif in the brass, symbolising freedom, the coming of spring and the possible reconciliation of father and son [IB VS 440⁺¹⁻²]. Although Yuri takes some tentative steps he is by no means healed either physically or spiritually. His arrogance and cynicism has not diminished as is evidenced by his dismissal of Lev and mockery of Hannah as he mimics Olympion’s “Ain’t that so” from Act I.6 [444+446]. As he would be well-aware that both Gayle and Olympion were brutally killed, his attitude is insensitive. Hannah reprimands Yuri but there is an element of hurt and despair as, in her final phrase, she recalls the melody and words of her aria, “Much deeper, O much deeper” accompanied by the electric organ, which gives the effect of a prayer [447⁻¹-448]. Significantly, [447⁻¹] recalls the *Adagio* in [182] which was the opening bar instrumental interlude to her Act II.5 aria. Moreover, the word “Much” is sung on eb¹, Helen’s signature note in *King Priam* which, perhaps, signifies Hannah’s spirituality. The eb¹ is repeated in [447⁺²⁺³]. The opera closes with Lev quoting words from Goethe to the effect that there must be conflict before there can be resolution. However, it is the kindly Hannah who is a symbol of hope for the future, although her path will not be an easy one. Tippett states that Yuri is the symbol for reconciliation: it is Yuri who experiences a ‘rebirth’ as he recovers from his injuries. However, perhaps it is the compassionate and far-seeing Hannah who is the real symbol of reconciliation. It is Hannah who interacts positively with her fellow humans in the opera. That is not to say that reconciliation takes place by the end of the opera but, rather, that there is some hope.

By the time Tippett wrote *The Ice Break* he had settled down with Bowen to a tranquil existence and commented that many of his friends observed that once Bowen had become his acknowledged partner in life “laughter returned to Nocketts” [MT, 243]. Tippett had also made several journeys to The United States of America by that time and

was fascinated by the diversity of culture and the resulting tensions. This is reflected in *The Ice Break*.

Tippett was 72 years old when this opera was staged. Although he remained cheerful and optimistic, perhaps there was now a dawning recognition that it is very difficult to find a solution to many of the human problems. Perhaps that is why, with the exception of Hannah, the characters are curiously unsympathetic. Admittedly, Tippett was dealing with stereotypes, but stereotypes in theatre are normally used for their comedic or tragic value. In *The Ice Break*, with the exception of Hannah, the characters do not provoke laughter or tears. On the other hand, by giving only Hannah an in-depth characterisation in *The Ice Break*, Tippett may have been substantiating his belief that it is the Hannahs of this world through whom the good of mankind will triumph.

Chapter 5

Jo Ann in *New Year*

Table 7 *New Year* List of Characters

<i>From Somewhere and Today</i>		
Jo Ann	a trainee children's doctor	lyric soprano
Donny	her young brother	light baritone
Nan	their foster mother	dramatic mezzo
<i>From Nowhere and Tomorrow</i>		
Merlin	the computer wizard	dramatic baritone
Pelegrin	the space pilot	lyric tenor
Regan	their boss	dramatic soprano
<i>Outside the Action</i>		
Voice	presenter	microphoned male singer
Chorus and Dancers		

Source: *New Year* Vocal Score¹⁰³

An Overview of *New Year*

New Year was written between 1985 and 1988. *New Year* is an opera in three acts, grouped into three preludes, nine scenes, four interludes and one postlude. It was co-commissioned by Houston Grand Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and the British Broadcasting Corporation. The world premiere was staged at the Wortham Theater Center, Houston, USA on 27 October 1989 and directed by Hall. The European premiere took place at Glyndebourne on 1 July 1990. *New Year* was broadcast on BBC2 on 21 September 1991.

New Year received favourable reviews, both in Houston and at Glyndebourne. The critics lauded Tippett's triumphant manifestation of contemporary themes with the successful blending of words and lyrical music. Max Loppert in *The Financial Times* enthused:

New Year overflows with wonderful Tippett sounds, wonderful Tippett melodies unfolding their special dramatic enchantment. It gathers together threads and themes from

¹⁰³ Tippett, *New Year*, Vocal Score. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parentheses in the text noting the rehearsal number only. Where confusion could arise, the rehearsal number is prefixed with [NY VS].

its predecessors in a way that seems to sum up his gift to the 20th-century lyric theatre: that ability, unique in our day, to dream up theatre-works that bring music and the world we live in face to face unflinchingly, exuberantly, and with a poet's knack of fusing images in notes and words that reveal the 'inner life' of his characters and situations.”¹⁰⁴

Despite the international premieres and the favourable reviews, however, *New Year* has been rarely performed and remains commercially unrecorded. One can only surmise as to the reasons. Perhaps it is perceived as being “dated” or maybe the large cast numbers make it expensive to stage. However, *Suite from New Year* was recorded by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Richard Hickox in 1994. This scenario is reminiscent of the fate of *The Midsummer Marriage*. Tippett wrote the *Suite from New Year* which draws on music from the opera. However, the *Suite* was conceived as a separate concert work and does not follow the same sequence as the opera. It is 25 minutes in length and consists of 13 episodes. The work was commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra which premiered the *Suite* in 1990.

New Year includes traditional operatic forms including arias, duets, ensembles and choral pieces. It is the shortest of all Tippett's operas and, again, Tippett used television and cinematic techniques to accelerate the action. He did, however, restore the transitions between scenes by using the Presenter and Chorus to link the world of Somewhere and Today with the world of Nowhere and Tomorrow. This recalls *King Priam* where a Greek Chorus was used to link the scenes with a narration. Furthermore, there is a return to the lyricism which is characteristic of *The Midsummer Marriage*, although there is a sparser chordal structure.

As always, Tippett was keen to experiment with a new approach and thus ventured into an arena where his opera took on some of the unique characteristics associated with musical theatre or, at least, that was his perception:

With *New Year*, I approached as far as I dared the character of a musical, and I thus favour the use of all the stage techniques deployed within that genre. This includes amplification of voices. . . . I am not at all amongst those who regard the amplification of voices as a distortion of their true character. It is simply a matter of technique. Broadway and West End theatres of London abound in singers who have learnt to use microphones with ease

¹⁰⁴ Tippett in Focus, November 1989. <http://perso.wanadoo.es/crazylovejob/tifnov89.htm> (accessed 27 May 2004). Nicholas Kenyon, in *The Observer*, commented on “the piercing musical imagination of Tippett's score.” Tom Sutcliffe, in *The Guardian*, reported that the work “reveals Tippett with a remarkably fresh and reconceived musical language pared down to a confident minimum of expressive threads. The composer has, astoundingly, moved on to yet another original sound-world. . . . He has created brief arias of intense and vaunting lyrical energy.”

and naturalness. The technology now exists, also, to achieve the best possible results. It is simply that the training of opera singers has yet to catch up! [TOM, 273]¹⁰⁵

Tippett created a new sound-world which he considered was appropriate for contemporary musicals. He used an orchestra which was similar to that of a West End or a Broadway musical. The orchestral requirements, for approximately fifty players, are detailed in the introductory pages of the vocal score. In contrast to the diverse mixture of instruments that he deployed from *King Priam* onwards, he established homogeneous groups: three flutes (doubling three piccolos), three saxophones, four horns, for instance [MB, 134].¹⁰⁶ Moreover, he extended the range of percussion instruments and, for the first time in thirty years, excluded the piano from his orchestration. Tippett had experimented with the electric guitar in *The Ice Break* and extended its use in *New Year* because he felt the timbre of the instrument lent itself well to the concept of outer space as symbolised by the world of Nowhere and Tomorrow.

Furthermore, although Tippett had used an amplification system in *The Ice Break*, he now incorporated electro-acoustic effects for the ascent and descent of the spaceship and the voice of the computer. In this area, the skills of Thorne, assisted by Bowen, proved invaluable. For much of the opera, the Presenter is heard as an offstage voice singing through a microphone. Although this voice-over technique was already popular on television and in musicals, it was a new approach for opera. Granted, Tippett had used amplification in previous operas but here he took it one step further to emphasise the importance of the role of the Presenter. Unusually, Tippett nominated the Presenter, rather than a named leading character, to deliver the all-important final line in the opera as Jo Ann exits. Tillett explained that in the Glyndebourne production the Presenter was “visible on stage” throughout the performance which gave added impetus to the role.¹⁰⁷

Tippett acknowledged that in *New Year* there is a resonance with *The Midsummer Marriage* in the interplay of two different worlds. This interaction between the natural and supernatural realms is a continuing theme through his operas, be it in different guises, but this particular link between his first and last opera is very strong. Both *New Year* and *The Midsummer Marriage* include classic rituals of renewal and regeneration. In *New Year* the

¹⁰⁵ Tippett’s statement that “the training of opera singers has yet to catch up!” is certainly controversial. Opera singers normally pride themselves on producing a naturally resonant sound which does not need amplification.

¹⁰⁶ The Houston production used a reduced orchestra because of the small orchestra pit and the Glyndebourne production used a full orchestra. As both productions were successful, it argues that *New Year* has the versatility to be staged either as a chamber or a larger production, as does *The Knot Garden* which was originally scored for chamber orchestra but later reduced for chamber orchestra by Bowen.

¹⁰⁷ Letter dated 7 February 2006 from Tillett to the writer of this dissertation.

rituals are initiated by the ancient shaman whereas in *The Midsummer Marriage* the Ancients are aided by the powers of Sosostriis. *The Midsummer Marriage* takes place on the eve of the summer solstice whereas *New Year* is the antithesis as it occurs at the winter solstice when the Old Year gives way to the New Year [MT, 267].

Furthermore, in common with *The Midsummer Marriage*, *New Year* integrates dance into the main action and includes two separate choruses, one singing and one dancing.¹⁰⁸ Although dance was integral to the action in *The Midsummer Marriage*, the leading protagonists were not required to dance as professional dancers were used in the Ritual Dances. In *New Year*, the roles of Jo Ann and Donny require the combined skills of dance, voice and acting. Therefore, conventional musical theatre performers who are competent dancers may have difficulty in singing the complicated vocal lines. On the other hand, conventional opera singers may have difficulty with the dancing. Contemporary performers tend to sing, dance and act but there are few who have an equally high standard in all three aspects of performance. Times are changing, but certainly in the era in which *New Year* was composed, many opera singers were not necessarily capable dancers.

There is a balance of voice types. In the case of the “Presenter, microphoned male singer” Tippett did not include the voice type. However, it is clear from the vocal score that the role requires a tenor voice. The voice types are conventional, with the exception of Donny who is cast as a “light baritone” although, seemingly, he is a teenager. In view of his youth, a tenor voice type may have been more appropriate but perhaps Tippett felt that the depth of timbre of the baritone voice was more suited to Donny’s African-American-Caribbean heritage.

It is apparent that *New Year* is influenced by the ideas, images and experiences which Tippett had most taken to heart during his lifetime. Perhaps in *New Year*, more than in any of his other operas, there is a feeling that Tippett touched his youthful memories of family, isolation and the plight of orphans. Memories of being “orphaned” in his youth when his parents moved to Europe seem to have fused with the horror he experienced when confronted with the plight of the many abandoned children in Germany first in 1919 and then in 1930 [MT, 32].

As a student, Tippett had read a contemporary story, *Men Like Gods* (1921), by H. G. Wells (1866-1946) where the main character has a car accident and awakes in an

¹⁰⁸ Tippett acknowledged that the chorus of combined singers/dancers had not proved a success in *The Ice Break*.

imaginary, futuristic utopia [MB, 132]. Tippet was intrigued by Wells' speculations on the transitory nature of time, all the more so as he approached old age. In addition, Tippet was inspired by *The Russian Novel from Pushkin to Pasternak*, edited by John Garrard, which summarised three post-revolutionary novels dealing with the concept of utopia [MB, 133]. This utopian theme is implicit in all his operas but perhaps is the most overt in *New Year*.

A key influence on *New Year* was the two-part BBC television film entitled *The Flipside of Dominick Hyde* and *Another Flipside for Dominick* [MT, 266]. There, the hero, Dominick, who lived in the year 2130, travelled in a flying saucer back to the year 1981 and met the heroine, Jane. Tippet enjoyed the collision of space-age fantasy with earthly reality and the straightforward manner of the story.

Tippet incorporated all the above images in *New Year*. Principally, however, Tippet wished to highlight his own commitment to humanitarianism and pacifism. In 1988, the televised 70th birthday tribute concert for Nelson Mandela (1918-), a black South African humanitarian whose ideals resounded strongly with Tippet's own, proved inspirational [MT, 268]. The concert was held at Wembley Stadium and featured many famous performers. Tippet's emotions were stirred by the words of the lead singer of Dire Straits, as he felt they embodied his own ideals. Consequently, those words, "One humanity; one justice," appear as the final words in *New Year*, Tippet's operatic swansong. This was a fitting conclusion to the operas of the humanitarian Tippet.

New Year revolves around the hopes and dreams of its main characters and their reactions when confronted with reality. There are two sets of three characters inhabiting two different realms, the natural and the supernatural. Jo Ann, Donny and their foster-mother, Nan, live in Somewhere and Today. Pelegrin, the handsome young pilot/explorer; Merlin, the technological wizard; and Regan, the ambitious career-woman who is in charge of the spaceship laboratory, live in Nowhere and Tomorrow. The Presenter, with the assistance of the chorus, links the two worlds with a commentary.

The main protagonist is Jo Ann who dreams of overcoming her agoraphobia and venturing out into Terror Town to help the orphans. Donny, who is Jo Ann's African-American-Caribbean young foster-brother, dreams of finding his real parents and communing with nature and the animal kingdom. Bowen points out that Donny is "one of Tippet's extraordinary operatic creations, threatening . . . to upstage Jo Ann as protagonist" [MB, 137]. This is so. Tippet sometimes developed a rapport with a character in his operas to the extent where he gave that character a "life after the opera."

For instance, Tippet wrote *Songs of Dov*, based on the character in *The Knot Garden*, well after the opera had been staged. In regard to Donny, Tippet stated, “Donny’s development, in actual terms, in so far as we may think of him as having a life beyond the opera, might entail some form of group therapy. . . . It is not impossible that Donny might become socially integrated, though he is bound to remain a wounded figure, an oddball, an outsider” [TOM, 227]. Perhaps Tippet was thinking of his own life.

On Bowen’s advice, Tippet further developed the character of Jo Ann by expanding her role in Act III. Donny, with his exuberance and extroversion, acts as a foil to Jo Ann who is timid and withdrawn initially but, by the end of the opera, it is Donny who bows to the wishes of his foster-mother while Jo Ann blossoms. All the same, the role of Jo Ann perhaps is still overshadowed to some extent by the role of Donny. As dance plays an important part in her development as a character, moreover, her aria is not as effective as that of the four other selected characters. However, Jo Ann is still at the heart of the opera.

It appears that Jo Ann may be younger than the four other selected female characters and there is a sense of life just beginning. Jo Ann wishes to alleviate the suffering of the orphans, a theme which was very close to Tippet’s heart.

The Portrayal of Jo Ann

In the List of Characters, Tippet describes Jo Ann as “a trainee children’s doctor, Lyric Soprano” [NY VS]. Both the terms “trainee” and “Lyric Soprano” suggest a young woman, perhaps in the late teens or early twenties. Certainly in musical theatre, the heroine is normally cast as a lyric soprano and portrayed as young and innocent, for example, Laurie in *Oklahoma* (New York, 1943), Sarah in *Guys and Dolls* (New York, 1950) and Christine in *The Phantom of the Opera* (London, 1986). In opera, there are some variations. For example, Donizetti’s Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) and Verdi’s Leonora in *Il Trovatore* (1853) are young and innocent; Puccini’s Mimi in *La Bohème* (1896) is young but not so innocent.

In Hebrew, the name “Joanne” means “God is gracious.”¹⁰⁹ Tippet used the American version of the name. To the end of his days he still considered The United States of America to be the “land of his dreams” because of the warm regard which the

¹⁰⁹ Meaning of the Name Joanne. <http://baby-names.adoption.com/search/Joanne.html> (accessed 10 November 2005).

Americans showed for his work [MT, 248]. For instance, the American influence in Donny's American-African-Caribbean heritage is quite marked.

In Jo Ann's case, perhaps God has been gracious in that Jo Ann has been fostered by Nan, a kind woman, who has provided a safe home. On the other hand, Nan may feel that God has been gracious because although she was unable to procreate, she has been able to foster Jo Ann and Donny.¹¹⁰ There is no mention of Nan's husband or partner. Jo Ann, moreover, has trained as a child psychologist, a career of her own choosing, which suggests that Nan understands Jo Ann's needs. Despite the support of her foster-mother, however, Jo Ann suffers from agoraphobia, a psychological condition which means she has an extreme fear of open or public places. It is implied that Jo Ann's condition is a direct result of being an orphan from an early age. Agoraphobia is a condition which isolates people and here again is a parallel with Tippett's own sense of loneliness. Despite the agoraphobia, however, Jo Ann's goal is to practise as a child psychologist. That she has a warm heart is obvious from her attachment to Donny.

Jo Ann lives independently of Nan and, at the start of the opera, has taken on the role of caring for Donny. It seems there is a strong bond of sibling love between foster-sister and foster-brother. Although Jo Ann is a person of integrity who is compassionate and loving, she is fearful and unsure of herself. Thus, Tippett has created a person with the potential to develop her inner values of humanitarianism and compassion based on her integrity. If she can but become more optimistic it will surely increase her self-confidence. Furthermore, she has voiced her humanitarian beliefs in her desire to help orphans, but lacks the courage to venture out into the world.

As the opera progresses, Jo Ann's development and maturing are reflected through dance as much as through song. Compare her reluctance to dance at the commencement of the opera with her joyous dance in the finale. The dance element, of course, has links with mythology and religion. Dance features strongly in Classical Greek mythology, Hinduism and Christianity, for example, as a sacred ritual element. In Hindu scriptures, dance is used to please the gods and express the ultimate truths in the magic of movement.¹¹¹ In learning to dance, therefore, Jo Ann sheds her inhibitions and finds a way of expressing her love.

The vocal range required for the role of Jo Ann is from c^1 to bb^2 . Tippett does not explore the upper extreme of the lyric soprano voice, as if to emphasise Jo Ann's restricted

¹¹⁰ There may be a link here with Tippett's own inability to procreate.

¹¹¹ Dance in mythology and religion – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_in_mythology_and_religion (accessed 29 January 2006).

lifestyle and fears.¹¹² It requires a sense of adventure and courage and ability to sing at the extremes of the range. Moreover, the dynamics for Jo Ann's vocal lines remain within the *pianissimo* to *forte* range during Acts I and II. The dynamic expansion to *fortissimo* is withheld until Act III in the Paradise Garden.

Although the tessitura of Jo Ann's Act I aria is similar to that of Denise's aria, the intervals are not as wide generally nor does the music have the edgy, jagged feel which is a feature of the music of Denise. Moreover, Denise's aria has a wider range and is characterised by huge leaps both upward and downward. Of the five arias analysed, Jo Ann's is possibly the one which is the least demanding for the singer. That is not to say it is easy to sing but merely that the tessitura of the aria sits comfortably within the range of a lyric soprano voice. Compare, for instance, the length and constant change of pace and style in Sosostri's aria which requires a great deal of stamina and technical expertise on the part of the singer; or the tessitura for Helen's aria which sits in an ungrateful (*passaggio*) area of the mezzo-soprano voice with some unaccompanied vocal lines which are difficult to pitch; or Hannah's aria which has large leaps and take her to the extreme upper end of her register.

Jo Ann's aria, at the commencement of Act I, reveals her fears and insecurity. In Act II she starts to gain confidence and, finally in Act III, she realises her goal.

Fig. 5 Jo Ann's Aria

JO ANN: Safe, safe –
My books, my dreams, myself safe from the storm out there.
Never Donny, never safe from the wound within,
scars over mem'ry, over childhood.
If we remember too much we orphans go under.
Do not remember, Donny, go free.
But I remember and I dream.

Children of the terror town, waifs and orphans though you be,
Crowd around me, round and round
to dream of paradise with me.
But they are out and I am in,
They are open and I am shut.
Where do I find the force to drive me through
the door to meet the children of the town?

[Act I.1]

Source: *Vocal Score*. Text reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Limited, London.

¹¹² Denise, for example, who is cast as a dramatic soprano sings db^3 . One would expect that a lyric soprano could sing db^3 as the voice type is lighter in quality and, therefore, has less 'weight' to carry.

The opera begins with an instrumental introduction which reappears at the beginning of each act and at the critical point in Act III when Jo Ann overcomes her fears, assisted by Pelegrin [558]. The opening scene commences with a violent mob confrontation. The music, a combination of clarinets, guitars, percussion, and saxophones, evokes a mood of concealed violence and tension but “offstage voices in the far distance” hint at a remote world beyond, perhaps another realm [2].

In a manner reminiscent of musical theatre, Jo Ann is introduced by the Presenter and offstage chorus chanting “Dance, dance, dance little lady” accompanied by a cacophony of police whistles and gunshots [12⁺³⁻⁴]. It seems that Jo Ann has ventured outside briefly but is intimidated by the mob which intones “How can she dance, Jo Ann, my Jo dance nightmare away? How can she undo the door to go through into the terror town, Jo Ann, my Jo” [16-19]. There is a sense of tonal freedom, but also a feeling of disorientation which symbolises Jo Ann’s sense of searching for inner strength. Jo Ann flees to the sanctuary of her apartment and sings of the feeling of safety represented by her books and her dreams but she may be deluding herself as the orchestra seems to reflect her inner turmoil.

Jo Ann’s opening word is “safe” and her vocal line is supported by muted violins, pitched one octave higher, which cover her note [24⁺¹]. The harp enters with a twanging sound, creating a sense of tension [24⁺²]. The oboe, symbolising Jo Ann’s fears, joins the strings, and supports Jo Ann’s vocal line [24⁺³] as she prolongs the word “safe” for eight bars. A few bars later Jo Ann sings the word “safe” unaccompanied, suggesting she feels alone with no emotional support while the rising pitch suggests panic and fear [26⁻²-26⁺²]. This pattern is repeated, although Jo Ann prolongs the word “safe” sung on eb² for only four bars, a minor third higher than previously [26⁺¹]. Muted violins take over from the harp to support Jo Ann’s vocal line which is sung on the word “safe” while two bars later the oboe takes over from the muted violins.

There is some stability in the tempo for the first time as it remains in 3/4 time for five bars suggesting that Jo Ann begins to feel at peace with herself [28⁻²-28⁺³]. The bells enter, creating a touch of enchantment and hope, as Jo Ann sings of “my dreams” [28⁺¹]. The woodwind instruments accompany Jo Ann’s “safe from the storm” and reflect her mood with their comfortable, mellow sound [28⁺²].

Jo Ann’s emotional pain is reflected in the music and poignant words “Never Donny, never safe from the wound within” [29-30⁻²]. The vocal line veers from f² to eb¹ and gb² in the space of two bars. Tippett has marked “anguished” in the orchestration [30⁻

¹]. Here is the root cause of Jo Ann's pessimism and hurt, the feeling of rejection caused by her orphaned state. Will Jo Ann be able to overcome these negative feelings?

The three bars preceding Jo Ann's Dreamsong are in 2/4 time scored in fourths and thirds reminiscent of a lullaby, while the French horns play simple chords [33⁺²-34]. In her imagination, is Jo Ann rocking the orphan children, and herself, to sleep? Jo Ann's Dreamsong commences with a pensive but evocative melody with the bass clarinet and bassoon, in sonorous duet, accompanying the vocal line "Children of the terror town waifs and orphans" [34-35¹]. This foreshadows the next few bars.

Jo Ann shows her compassionate and humanitarian qualities as she visualises inviting the orphans to "crowd around me, round and round to dream of paradise with me" [36-38]. She is accompanied by the confident sound of the horns and unmuted cellos as the vocal lines become more melodic and the volume swells to *forte*. For a brief moment it seems that the confusions and doubt which Jo Ann expressed earlier are forgotten, as both text and music depict optimism and serenity. The whole of the Dreamsong remains in 3/4 time, waltz tempo, which anticipates the importance of dance in Jo Ann's life. If only she can allow herself the freedom to dance she may be liberated from her doubts and fears.

There is a change to a rather "offbeat" feeling as Jo Ann sings "But they are out and I am in, They are open and I am shut" [40-41⁺³]. The word "out" plunges from ab²-g¹; the word "open" plunges sharply from gb²-f¹ and rises to db² while the word "shut" is sung on e¹. The word "dark" appears in the orchestral notation. This phrase, the intervallic shapes of which are prefigured earlier, seem to signify Jo Ann's fluctuating emotions [29-39¹]. As Jo Ann sings, "Where do I find the force to drive me through the door to meet the children of the town?" the brittle, tinkling sound of the xylophone accompanies her vocal line, echoed by the mellow sound of woodwind instruments [42-44¹]. This suggests that perhaps her fears will be overridden by her deeper desire to help the children. At the conclusion of the Dreamsong, the chorus encourages Jo Ann to leave her room by singing the word, "Go" [44-46]. Subsequently, the chorus and orchestra seem to comment on Jo Ann's sadness [46-47].

When Donny unexpectedly rushes into Jo Ann's room to the accompaniment of a jazzkit, he tries to whirl her into a dance but she resists [48²-51]. Unabashed, he continues to dance by himself but Jo Ann tries to reason with Donny as she is afraid that he may have committed a crime [54-58]. The tempo is unstable, fluctuating from 4/4 to 6/8 to 2/4, reflecting Jo Ann's fears.

Donny exits quickly as Nan enters searching for him. Nan is concerned that Jo Ann's love may be undermining the discipline he needs and points out that Jo Ann is neglecting the orphans in the town in favour of Donny. Jo Ann acknowledges this fact but admits she needs psychological help to free her from her fears. Donny suddenly re-appears and performs a song and dance which demonstrates his lack of inhibition or, possibly, his tendency to court danger. As Nan leaves, she queries whether Jo Ann can now justify his behaviour but Jo Ann replies that she cannot chastise Donny because she loves him [120-121²].

Donny departs as Jo Ann sadly harks back to her Dreamsong [127⁺²-136⁻¹]. Significantly, Jo Ann has taken a step towards overcoming her fears because now she sings "Where do I find the love to draw me through the door to help the children of the town" [135-136⁻¹]. Previously she sang "Where do I find the force to drive me through the door to meet the children of the town." She now realises that if she channels her energies for the benefit of the children she may be able to overcome her fears. This certainly reflects Tippet's desire to assist orphans and those less fortunate than himself. The importance of love, which was possibly the foundation of Tippet's life, is highlighted here.

In *Nowhere and Tomorrow*, after Pelegrin views the image of Jo Ann's distressed face on his computer screen he manoeuvres the spaceship towards earth. As the spaceship descends in *Somewhere and Today*, Pelegrin declares, "I am Pelegrin, the wand'rer."¹¹³ Woman with the anguished face, who are you?" [216-217⁺³]. Hope surging, Jo Ann replies, "I am Jo Ann the lone dreamer. Pelegrin coal-haired stranger are you come at last to lead me through the door, the door . . . [220-223⁺¹]. Pelegrin tells Jo Ann that it is not possible for them to touch as the magic will fade, but promises that one day she will ride in the spaceship with him [226-229⁻¹]. As Jo Ann reaches for his hand, the spaceship vanishes but in the Act I Postlude a voice in Jo Ann's mind suggests that she should mentally embrace the vision of Pelegrin and move forward with her life [231-235⁺⁴]. There is a glimmer of hope for Jo Ann.

In Act II.2, as the midnight bell tolls, a spaceship lands in Terror Town and to the astonishment of the crowd a flamboyantly-dressed Merlin appears. He is followed by Pelegrin who recognises Jo Ann and walks towards her. As Regan emerges from the spaceship, she challenges Pelegrin and Jo Ann but Pelegrin tells Jo Ann to "stand strong"

¹¹³ Jung's theory of archetypes includes six basic ones. One archetype is the "wanderer" who needs to find himself. Another archetype is the "orphan" who needs to survive difficulty.

[352⁺¹]. He declares that it “could be the power of love” which gives him and Jo Ann strength [355-356⁻¹]. The word “love” is reiterated. Regan threatens to punish Pelegrin and admonishes Jo Ann by telling her that she is a “man-dominated fool” [361-363⁻¹].

Jo Ann is frightened and turns to Pelegrin for help but he encourages her to seek strength within herself by believing in her dreams. She feels, however, that she needs Pelegrin by her side if she is to gain psychological strength but Pelegrin confirms their relationship is not permanent. Nevertheless, Jo Ann sings the high note b³ for the first time and the scaling of these new heights vocally suggests there is a new-found confidence [Ex. 12]. Jo Ann feels that in dreaming she has a type of marriage bond with Pelegrin whereas he equates dreaming with the increased power of the mind to overcome obstacles. Pelegrin and Jo Ann are oblivious to the rest of the world as the mob attacks Merlin who flees to the spaceship aided by Regan. Eventually the spaceship departs, piloted by Pelegrin.

In Act III.1, as Nan takes Donny away as she feels he needs to be rehabilitated, she suggests that it is time for Jo Ann to think of others [438⁺³]. Donny leaves reluctantly but gives Jo Ann a video cassette which, he says, will reveal his dreams. As he leaves, Jo Ann cries out “Ah” in anguish on bb² as parting with Donny is painful. Jo Ann views the cassette on her television screen and is much moved by Donny’s dream to find his family. As the cassette ends, Jo Ann hears a spaceship landing.

Pelegrin appears and invites Jo Ann, the “Woman with the radiant face” to board the spaceship with him [495-496]. Jo Ann, who indeed feels “radiant” and happy, hesitates briefly and then boards. In an Interlude the voice of the Presenter and chorus sing of the magic wonderland of the mind which can become reality in the form of a “sacred place” for Jo Ann and Pelegrin. In Act III.2, as Jo Ann and Pelegrin enter the sacred place, she sings, “Dark”, unaccompanied [511] which resonates with the word “safe” [24+1]. Jo Ann, who is now tired and troubled, asks how far they have come. She is extremely thirsty but Pelegrin replies reassuringly “thirst is the start point of the ritual. As the light beckons, you will know” [514-515]. Suddenly, “a fountain of shining, running water and a white cypress tree” become visible. The glockenspiel, its tinkling tones sweeping upwards with semiquavers in an arpeggio, adds a touch of enchantment and symbolises the soothing sound of running water.¹¹⁴ This passage is underpinned by woodwind and strings around a single, sustained note sung by offstage voices.

¹¹⁴ The use of semiquavers parallels the use of demisemiquavers to reflect the supernatural element of both Sosostriis and Helen; the tinkling glockenspiel parallels the harp used to reflect Helen’s semi-divinity.

Jo Ann feels a sense of excitement as she finally sees the water. This is an important moment in her life as she prepares to drink the water which is sometimes referred to as “the fountain of life.” Part of this scene is conducted as spoken dialogue as Pelegrin explains that Jo Ann must choose between the sweet-tasting water of the fountain and the bitter-sweet waters of the lake. From a container, Jo Ann sips the delicious water from the fountain but, with a supreme effort of will, pours most of it back into the fountain which is immediately replaced by a shimmering lake. The music which symbolises the lake is almost static, gleaming with harp triplets and a hauntingly mournful oboe melody [531]. As Jo Ann heroically drinks the unpleasant-tasting water, she remembers her orphans in the cruel world and cries, “How can I bear it, Pelegrin?” [538-538⁺²]. Pelegrin urges, “Endure, imagine, care, laughter will come with the children”. Jo Ann suddenly hears a sound from within her heart which seems to be “a richer song” and feels that with Pelegrin’s help everything is possible. The oboe doubles Jo Ann’s phrase “with your help, not alone,” sung in 6/8 time, which indicates a surge of optimism [544-544⁺²⁻³]. This is reminiscent of Act I.1 where Jo Ann sings “safe” but in 3/4 time [27¹].

Tippett has written in the score “They are now, in lovers’ parlance, one” [545]. Jo Ann and Pelegrin make love to the sound of the glockenspiel, trumpets and strings in a joyous melismatic “Ah” to a series of arpeggios set as triplets [549-556]. Pelegrin reassures Jo Ann that despite love and dreams, people have “bad moments” and Jo Ann accepts his wisdom. Pelegrin informs Jo Ann that the time has come for her to learn to dance, and leads her to a group of dancers. Jo Ann goes willingly, in contrast to her stance earlier in the opera when she refuses to dance with Donny. An interesting point is that from this point on Jo Ann is silent and her characterisation depends on dance.

Tippett has instructed that the stage should be “flooded with light to show the Paradise Garden in full flower” and the motif [558] recalls the opening bars of the opera.¹¹⁵ The whole scenario reflects the joy Jo Ann feels as she finds the courage to dance, after which Tippett has noted “Jo Ann is jubilant at her bodily freedom” [568]. This important moment in Jo Ann’s life is realised through dance rather than through song, which is a major departure from Tippett’s earlier operas. Pelegrin picks a rose from the garden and leads Jo Ann offstage in readiness for re-entering the spaceship.

¹¹⁵ The dream sequence in Paradise Garden recalls the musicals, *Oklahoma* (1943, New York) and *Carousel* (1945, New York) by Rodgers and Hammerstein. In both musicals there is a dream sequence, and dance is integrated into the storyline.

When Jo Ann steps into her room she realises it is no longer a sanctuary but she no longer needs one as she has almost overcome her fears. Pelegrin presents Jo Ann with the rose he plucked in Paradise Garden explaining that when she finds the courage to venture out into the Terror Town alone, she should hold the rose up high as she exits through the door. The rose will then return to Pelegrin as a symbol that Jo Ann has attained her goal. Pelegrin departs.

To the sound of a jazzkit, which was originally associated with Donny's dancing, an optimistic Jo Ann begins to dance towards the door with Pelegrin's rose held high. As Tippett has noted in the vocal score, the dance is a "crisp, light 'Jazz-style' solo" initially [586-587⁺³]. The dance accelerates and as Jo Ann approaches the door, the rose vanishes and 'flies' to Pelegrin [589¹]. At that point in the score, Tippett has written, "We must imagine time in Somewhere is temporarily stopped, with Jo Ann immobilised at her door; while time in Nowhere goes on" [589].

In Somewhere and Today, the voice of the Presenter states it is near the end of the dream, presumably Jo Ann's dream [605], which gives rise to the notion that Pelegrin is a figment of Jo Ann's imagination. Jo Ann, therefore, has successfully overcome her psychological fears due to her own efforts, akin to Tippett's own Jungian self-analysis.

As Jo Ann dances to the door and opens it, the noise outside causes her to flinch [608]. The music here recalls Act I.1 [46] and as Jo Ann listens intently, the voice of the Presenter booms, "One humanity; one justice" [609]. Head held high, Jo Ann walks through the door into Terror Town to help the orphans, buoyed by her new-found inner strength and heroism which has helped her to defeat agoraphobia. The symbolic gesture of walking through the door embodies her achievement. As the door shuts, there is silence and the curtain falls. There is a positive feeling that Jo Ann will begin her new life in accordance with Tippett's inner values of integrity, compassion, humanitarianism and optimism. Although it is obvious throughout the opera that Jo Ann is depicted as embodying those ideals it is only at the conclusion that she, herself, realises her full potential.

Tippett composed *New Year* between the ages of 80 and 83, a remarkable feat.¹¹⁶ By that time, he was conscious of his own mortality and the fleeting nature of time as he had undergone major surgery for cancer in 1987. Consequently, this opera was written

¹¹⁶ This highlights Tippett's ongoing and passionate engagement with operatic endeavour. To my knowledge, the only precedent for a composer writing an opera at such a mature age is Verdi, who composed *Falstaff* when he was 80.

before and after his surgery, which makes the achievement even more startling. Tippett wrote his autobiography during the time he was composing *New Year*. In 1991, his book was published and he declared, “I’m glad *Those Twentieth Century Blues* is now written, for I dislike focusing endlessly on what is past and gone” [MT, xiii]. Perhaps through the character of Jo Ann and her aspirations, however, Tippett took a retrospective glance at his own life.

Conclusion

One of the greatest pleasures in life is the unexpected discovery of new horizons while traversing seemingly-familiar terrain. And, certainly, the study of the operas of Tippett has proved an exciting adventure for one who has a predilection for nineteenth-century Italian Romantic Opera, operetta, and twentieth-century musical theatre. As Tippett was ‘a man of our time’ the link between his operas and contemporary historical events together with his evolving musical idiom is fascinating.

Tippett’s operas may be complex but one of the attractions is their eclecticism and the resulting intellectual challenge, both musical and literary. That is not to say there have not been moments of frustration and perplexity. Indeed, if one approaches Tippett’s works with an entrenched set of expectations based on nineteenth-century Romantic Opera, for instance, one may be disappointed. As Kemp rightly observed, “. . . nearly all Tippett’s music is bracing and challenging rather than sensuously pleasurable . . .” [IK, 345].

Tippett’s importance as a composer is demonstrated by his ability to experiment and to regenerate older art forms such as opera. His awareness, too, of the need to encourage directors and performers to bring their own interpretations to his operas highlights his visionary nature. As Tippett explained, “All productions – unless they are to ossify into the form Gilbert & Sullivan took while copyright was still held by Doyle [sic] Carte – must balance the composer’s intentions against the desire to bring the piece to life in the first instance, and to renew and revitalize it thereafter with new interpretations” [TOM, 269-270].

Like many famous composers Tippett was both prodigious and versatile in his output, as is evidenced by his extensive contribution to different genres, but that is not always acknowledged.¹¹⁷ Although his critics are quick to point out that Tippett had a tendency to follow contemporary trends for the sake of being ‘fashionable’ this is, perhaps, unjust. Tippett had a long career and, like others before him, initiated considerable stylistic changes as a natural progression. It must be remembered that Tippett was 41 years old when he commenced writing his first opera and 84 years old when his last opera was staged, a time span of 43 years.

Despite the wide time span, Tippett’s five operas share many musical characteristics. Thematic repetitions and returns of musical passages generally establish or

¹¹⁷ Tippett also wrote symphonies, concertos, string quartets, cantatas, sonatas, song cycles and an oratorio entitled *A Child of our Time*, possibly his most famous work. “Caliban’s Song,” his last work, was composed in 1994 at the age of 89. His literary output, too, was substantial.

clarify links between the dramatic events and situations they accompany. The use of the harp and two flutes to indicate Helen's semi-divinity, and the signature notes of both Helen and Hannah are examples of small-scale musical clarifications. Demisemiquavers to establish the supernatural or magical is a continuing theme throughout Tippett's operas. Moreover, the operas use analogous melodic conventions such as in the pattern of asymmetrical phrases and an irregularity of pulse. Tippett's work evolved from the lyricism of *The Midsummer Marriage* through the mosaic structure of *The Knot Garden* to the expressionism of *New Year*. Unlike many twentieth-century composers, however, Tippett never abandoned tonality although his music tended to become tonally 'freer' with fewer key signatures as time progressed. However, one can constantly link the harmonies with a tonal centre. In all, Tippett kept 'song' alive.¹¹⁸

The five selected female characters, Sosostriis, Helen, Denise, Hannah and Jo Ann, have arias of varying lengths but each aria is self-contained in that it can be performed as a concert item in its own right. It is interesting that Tippett has marked the commencing vocal line of each of the arias for the selected five characters either as *piano* or *pianissimo*. This adds to the feeling of introspection in the arias on which East has remarked. In the case of both Sosostriis and Denise who make a grand entrance physically, the contrast is effective as their arias commence in a prayer-like, spiritual manner.

When one looks at the five arias side by side, the initial impression is that Tippett's music became 'simpler' with each succeeding opera but an attempt to sing the arias or to play them on the piano proves otherwise. Sosostriis' aria, for instance, appears extremely complicated because of the sheer number of note clusters but the lyrical music is underpinned by lush orchestration which is helpful to the singer. Helen's aria, which is possibly the least appealing of the five, poses more difficulties with its many unaccompanied lines. In the case of Denise, the aria has many jagged intervals and huge leaps but the words and music "fit like a glove", to quote Tippett. Hannah's aria, although lyrical, has many wide leaps, as has Jo Ann's. In reality, therefore, aspects of Tippett's later music became more complex with its rhythmic instability, less clear tonalities and widening intervals. Some of these developments were due to the influence of the blues and jazz and electronic music in which Tippett had a profound interest. In simple terms, therefore, one could say that the vocal score of *The Midsummer Marriage* more closely resembles conventional nineteenth-century opera scores than do Tippett's later operas.

¹¹⁸ This is reminiscent of Gershwin. See p. 15 of this dissertation.

Certainly in Tippett's two final operas the dramatic structure, use of percussion and sense of tonal freedom recall *West Side Story*.

All in all, to sing the roles in Tippett's operas requires a high degree of expertise as there are many technical difficulties. A study of the singers who have performed Tippett's operas confirms they are artistes of the highest calibre, for example, Hodgson, Monica Sinclair, Anne Murray, Barstow, Vaughn and Helen Field.

The literary merit of Tippett's libretti, with the exception of *King Priam*, has been an ongoing issue. Barstow observed that perhaps Tippett had done himself a "disservice" by writing libretti with such highly-intellectual content and that he "might have been better to have employed a straightforward librettist." Donington argues that in *The Midsummer Marriage* the allusions to Hindu mythology, coupled with Greek mythology and Celtic folk-lore, can prove problematic because "The sudden change of context makes a violent demand on our imaginations in the audience" [SSB, 105-106]. Although the hidden meanings and allusions in Tippett's operas can be intriguing, the writer of this dissertation tends to agree that the libretti do sometimes detract from the beauty of Tippett's music. Tippett, however, was a man of high intellect and complexity and this is reflected in his libretti. As both Tillett and Barstow observed in their interviews, Tippett may not have been aware of the degree of difficulty involved in performing his works. Opera, nevertheless, is a composite art form consisting of music, drama, characters, costumes, staging and lighting. The libretto is only one aspect.

Tippett's operas have an appealing element of spirituality which reflects the composer's inner values of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism. Each opera poses a dilemma which is resolved, or partially resolved, due to the efforts of one of the five selected female characters. Although death is a feature in *The Midsummer Marriage*, *King Priam* and *The Ice Break*, the deceased characters all fought for a cause, either personal or public. All five operas, consequently, tend to conclude on a note of optimism which reflects Tippett's outlook on life.

The initial appeal of the five selected female characters was their perceived strength, warmth and intelligence and this impression was strengthened in the course of research. Much has been said concerning the lack of depth in Tippett's characterisation but after months of study and analysis of the characters they have all become three-dimensional, 'human' and familiar to the writer of this dissertation. That is not to say that any one of the characters provokes strong emotions such as tears or laughter but then Tippett's operas do not wallow in sentimentality.

To a varying degree at the start of each opera, the selected character is aware of the true meaning of reconciliation and its importance in terms of human relationships. There is a growing consciousness that reconciliation involves genuine compromise and the recognition of possible differences which means that the unqualified attainment of individual goals is not always possible. Accordingly, each character learns that reconciliation entails pain, just as the situation to be reconciled caused pain. Above all, Sosostriis, Helen, Denise, Hannah and Jo Ann learn that true reconciliation cannot be forced and can occur only when all parties desire it.

There are many differences, nevertheless, in the physical characteristics of each character. Sosostriis is enveloped in black veils throughout the opera, Helen is extremely beautiful, Denise is disfigured, Hannah is black and Jo Ann is personable.

Sosostriis is the most complex character of the five selected. She has a grand entrance and sings a very lengthy aria which is divided into four clearly-defined sections. The aria has conventional key signatures and a lyrical vocal line throughout. Sosostriis begins her aria as a clairvoyante with supernatural powers but, as time progresses, she explores her womanly emotions and desires. With difficulty she attempts to reconcile her womanhood with her career as a clairvoyante, and eventually succeeds. After the divination which proves her veracity, however, she vanishes as her black veils mysteriously turn into huge lotus petals which open to reveal Jenifer and Mark. Although she is supposedly, human, the supernatural aspect is perhaps more marked than it is with Helen.

Helen is of semi-divine birth and Tippett has created an idealised image. Although she abandons her husband by eloping with her lover, Paris, Tippett's interpretation ensures she is blameless. This makes her an enigma as, strictly speaking, her behaviour is not honourable. As a Greek scholar, however, Tippett may have used the Greek philosophy of equating beauty with goodness and truth which could explain Helen's characterisation. Tippett symbolises Helen's divinity with a harp and her earthly attributes with two flutes and gives her the signature note Eb. Presumably Helen is not unintelligent but her constant insistence that "I am Helen" does, perhaps, give rise to the notion that she is not endowed with the highest intellect. It is unclear whether Tippett intended to give this impression.

Denise proved the most interesting of the five characters selected. Not only is Tippett's characterisation convincing but all three people interviewed commented on Denise. Prior to the interviews, Tillett stated in a letter that he would be happy to discuss

“Denise & Co.” Significantly, Denise was the only character he mentioned.¹¹⁹ In Tillett’s interview, he mentioned Barstow’s remarkable portrayal of Denise and Groves also commented on Barstow’s “riveting” performance. Although Denise is a dominant and forceful character, of the five selected female characters Denise is the only one who increases her vulnerability at the end of the opera. [See Table I.] For instance, Sosostri reconciles Jenifer and Mark, Helen farewells Priam and returns to Greece, Hannah grows in emotional stature and gains inner strength while Jo Ann overcomes her agoraphobia. Denise’s relationship with the bisexual Mel, however, does not seem to have a sound foundation. On the other hand, perhaps the ending to *The Knot Garden* reflects reality as there are no simple solutions in life. Denise has paid the price for her beliefs with a physical disability but has now commenced a relationship with a bisexual where the outcome is unlikely to be happy. Denise’s aria is an extremely difficult one to sing, with its awkward intervals and wide leaps which characterise her heroism, humanitarianism and complexity. As characterised by the music, therefore, Denise may feel a need to place herself in difficult situations.

Hannah provides an interesting contrast to Denise who is, overtly, a much more forceful character. Both Hannah and Denise fight for basic human rights but their approaches differ. This illustrates that there are different pathways to the same destination. Hannah has two signature notes, C# and F#. As portrayed by Tippett, she is a gentle and caring character. Hannah is the only character of the five selected who does not appear to have emotional problems despite a fairly stressful life as a nurse and her troubled relationship with Olympion. Her aria is a beautifully lyrical one with meaningful words which reflect the goodness of her soul. At the time the opera was written, the black races in The United States of America were still struggling for their rights, so life would not have been easy for Hannah. Despite this, she is perhaps the most compassionate and humanitarian of the five selected characters. It is Hannah who, from the beginning of the opera, selflessly helps others.

In comparing Jo Ann with her four predecessors, it is apparent that she is a more timid character than Hannah, Denise, Helen and Sosostri who are all assertive and authoritative to varying degrees. It is interesting to compare Sosostri’s melodramatic representation with the ‘simplicity’ of Jo Ann’s stage demeanour. Tippett’s own process

¹¹⁹ Early in my research, well before the interviews, Denise proved the most engaging of all the characters in Tippett’s operas. Prior to meeting Barstow, a very clear mental picture of Denise had already formed.

of maturation both in his personal life and as a composer over the years may have had some bearing on this.

Jo Ann appears to be less complex than her four predecessors in that her main problem is agoraphobia. She is single, is not an adulteress or a freedom fighter and her relationship with Pelegrin is part of her dream world. Of the five selected characters, however, Jo Ann is the only one who is overshadowed by others in the cast although she is the leading lady. Her dramatic stature does not match that of the four other selected characters and this is due partly to the fact that she has the shortest aria. Traditionally, in opera, the dramatic stature of a character is determined by the number and length of arias commanded by the role. Jo Ann's development, too, relies on dance to some extent, unlike the four other selected characters. On the other hand, Jo Ann has the grandest exit of the five selected female characters as she walks through the door while the Presenter sings the line which embodies Tippett's ideals, "One humanity; one justice." This is in keeping with Jo Ann's role which is at the heart of the opera and in keeping with the fact that it was Tippett's exit from the opera stage.

The five selected characters possibly do include some of the traits of Kemp, Allinson, Maude and Tippett's mother. One could argue that Jo Ann has the vulnerability which seemed to characterise Allinson while Hannah's kind heart and Helen's even-tempered nature may reflect aspects of Maude's personality. Denise seems to embody some of the traits of Tippett's mother, but there may be aspects also of Kemp in the political idealism which is part of Denise's character. Sosostriis, who is perhaps portrayed in the most melodramatic manner of the five selected female characters, may symbolise the composer and his inner turmoil at the time.

Despite the wide time span over which Tippett composed his operas, the five selected female characters all reflect Tippett's inner values of humanitarianism, compassion, integrity and optimism, based on love. It is interesting that Tippett's inner values as delineated above remained a constant factor throughout his life in times of tremendous upheaval and change. Nevertheless, it is apparent that Tippett never overcame his sense of isolation and his high intellect seems to have been one of the factors which distanced him from others. Over the years, however, Tippett did reconcile many of the conflicting elements in his life. He was able to voice his feelings by endowing the five selected female characters with his own inner values, which may have acted as a healing process.

There is another important factor which has emerged during the course of research. It is apparent that Tippet had a wider vision: Tippet wanted the human race to recognise and embrace his inner values. Sosostris, Helen, Denise, Hannah and Jo Ann, therefore, are good ambassadors for Tippet's beliefs which are embodied in the words "One humanity; one justice." We live in a culture which venerates rational, linear thought processes and, consequently, ignores feelings. Yet, it is our feelings that make us human, as Tippet well knew.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1

The Midsummer Marriage Synopsis

Appendix 1

The Midsummer Marriage Synopsis

Act I: Morning

Just prior to dawn on Midsummer Day a group of exuberant young wedding guests assemble in a wood, which surrounds a mysterious temple, to attend the wedding of their friends, Mark and Jenifer, who are eloping as the bride's father has forbidden the marriage. The guests suddenly feel uneasy, however, as the enigmatic occupants of the temple, the He-Ancient and She-Ancient accompanied by an entourage of dancers including Strephon, appear at sunrise. Mark arrives and requests from the Ancients a new dance for his wedding day but they refuse because it is their view that old traditions should be upheld. As the dancers depart, Mark sings of his love for Jenifer. However, when Jenifer arrives, she rejects Mark's advances, saying that she now has doubts about their marriage, that it is truth, rather than love, which she needs. She ascends a flight of steps which seem to lead nowhere and disappears from view. Mark, warned of the approach of Jenifer's angry father, King Fisher, escapes in the opposite direction through some gates, which swing shut behind him, and runs towards an underground cave.

A concerned King Fisher searches for his defiant daughter and tries, unsuccessfully, to bribe the young wedding guests for information. King Fisher, who is convinced that Mark and Jenifer are together, enlists the help of his secretary, Bella, and her boyfriend, Jack, a mechanic, to unlock the gates leading to the temple. Suddenly, a mysterious offstage voice is heard, apparently the voice of Sosostriis, a clairvoyante, echoing from behind the gates warning King Fisher not to interfere. King Fisher, however, insists that Jack force open the gates but he is unsuccessful. Unexpectedly, Jenifer and Mark re-appear in a dreamlike state and voice their internal conflict in a highly-emotional duet. They then depart in directions opposite to those originally taken: Jenifer descends into the cave and Mark ascends the steps. King Fisher is more determined than ever to prevent the marriage.

Act II: Afternoon

Strephon, symbolising Mark's shadow, is poised to dance the Midsummer Ritual Dances but is diverted by the young wedding guests as they pass by. Bella arrives with

Jack and persuades him to marry her, after which they sing tenderly of their prospective domestic life together and then disappear into the shadows of the wood to make love.

There are four Ritual Dances in the opera, three of which are staged in Act II, and in each dance female predators attack males. The dancers begin the first of three Ritual Dances which are integral to the action as they depict Jenifer and Mark's spiritual journey. The dances include: The Earth in Autumn (the Hound chases the Hare), The Waters in Winter (the Otter chases the Fish), The Air in Spring (the Hawk chases the Bird). In the first two dances, the Hare and Fish, respectively, escape. The violent sacrificial end of the third dance is forestalled only because Bella screams, as if waking from a nightmare.

Act III: Evening, Night and Morning

In a mansion in the wood the young wedding guests sing and dance after eating a meal which was to have been the wedding breakfast. King Fisher dispatches the male guests to fetch Sosostriis and in their absence issues a challenge to the inhabitants of the temple demanding that they enlighten him as to the whereabouts of his daughter. In the meantime, the male wedding guests decide to play a trick and return with Jack disguised as Sosostriis but the hoax is discovered amid much hilarity.

However, when the real Sosostriis arrives, dressed in black veils, the guests are over-awed by her presence. King Fisher asks Sosostriis to use her mystical powers to locate Jenifer. She gazes into a crystal bowl and describes the vision which appears: the ancient Hindu ritual of the Divine Marriage. King Fisher becomes angry, questions the veracity of Sosostriis, and commands Jack to unveil her but Jack refuses and quickly departs with Bella. King Fisher, himself, tries to unveil Sosostriis but as he tries to remove the last veil it drops off to reveal a luminous bud with a gauze centre which gradually opens like huge lotus petals. As the gauze disappears, Jenifer and Mark are revealed and Sosostriis has vanished. Enraged, King Fisher draws a pistol to shoot Mark but unexpectedly dies of a heart attack. From the death of King Fisher springs the fourth Ritual Dance: Fire in Summer (the voluntary human sacrifice) which symbolises the spiritual rebirth of Mark and Jenifer. At the culmination of the dance Strephon collapses and dies as the final gesture of sacrifice. Strephon, as Mark's shadow, has been integrated with Mark.

As dawn breaks on the following day Mark and Jenifer, with their spiritual and emotional turmoil resolved, arrive to take their marriage vows.

Appendix 2

***King Priam* Synopsis**

Appendix 2

King Priam Synopsis

Act I

In the royal palace of Troy, King Priam's wife, Hecuba, is troubled by a dream concerning her new-born baby boy, Paris. To soothe her fears King Priam summons an Old Man (soothsayer) to interpret Hecuba's dream. Hecuba is horrified when the Old Man predicts that Paris will eventually cause his father's death and she insists that the child be killed immediately. Priam is torn between his duty as a king and his love for the child but eventually agrees to his wife's plea. The Nurse, Old Man and Young Guard, who act as a Greek Chorus, comment on the action with its moral implications. Priam orders the Young Guard to kill the baby but, unbeknown to Priam and Hecuba, the compassionate Young Guard takes the child into the country to be reared by a shepherd.

Several years later Priam and his eldest son, Hector, are hunting in the countryside outside Troy when they unexpectedly meet a very handsome young lad who astonishes them with his athletic feats. The lad, whose name is Paris, tells them that he wishes to leave his shepherd father and move to the city to become a hero like Hector. Priam joyfully realises that his son was not killed at birth after all but it is with foreboding that he remembers the prophecy of the Old Man. Despite Priam's fears, he takes the boy home to the palace at Troy.

The Chorus again comments on the action: Hector's marriage to Andromache, the growth of Paris into an extraordinarily handsome young man, Paris' eventual rift with his father and brother and his departure for Sparta in Greece, which is ruled by King Menelaus and his wife, the beautiful Queen Helen, daughter of Zeus.

The next scene opens with the sounds of Paris and Helen making love. When Paris asks Helen to sail with him back to Troy initially she wavers in loyalty to her husband but then agrees to elope with Paris if he so wishes. Paris, who is fully aware that Menelaus will declare war on Troy if Paris steals Helen away, prays to Zeus for guidance. Eventually, Hermes, the divine messenger of Zeus appears and commands Paris to bestow an apple on the one he perceives as the most beautiful of the three Graces: Athene, goddess of wisdom, Hera, queen of the gods, and Aphrodite, goddess of love. As Hermes points out, Paris cannot escape his fate. Paris gives Aphrodite the apple and takes Helen back to Troy, knowing that war is inevitable.

Act II

War on Troy is declared by Menelaus and Agamemnon. They sail to Troy with a 1000-ship flotilla, carrying with them the great warrior Achilles and his cousin, Patroclus. Back in the royal palace of Troy, Hector resents the fact that Paris' relationship with Helen has caused the war but prepares for battle.

Outside the walls of Troy in a tent on the Greek battle lines, Achilles is talking with Patroclus, for whom he has a very warm regard. Achilles has removed to his tent because of a minor dispute with Agamemnon but Patroclus dons Achilles' legendary armour and goes to battle. He knows this will baffle the Trojans who believe that Achilles has withdrawn from battle.

In the next scene Paris tells Priam of Hector's fight and ultimate slaying of the figure in Achilles' armour. As Priam, Paris and Hector celebrate, their victory is overshadowed by the spine-chilling sound of Achilles' war-cry of revenge as he realises that Patroclus is dead.

Act III

The act opens with Hecuba, Andromache and Helen musing on their fate. Andromache feels intuitively that her husband, Hector, will be killed by the vengeful Achilles. She and her mother-in-law, Hecuba, rebuke Helen because they feel she is ultimately responsible for the war. In an aria, Helen defends her actions and stresses her semi-divinity. The three women sing a trio to their respective goddesses followed by a chorus of serving women commenting on the death of Hector.

When Paris informs his father of Hector's death, Priam is devastated and retorts that he would have preferred Paris' death. Distressed by Priam's attitude, Paris swears to avenge his brother by killing Achilles and Priam is left to reflect on the irony of life.

In the evening, a grieving Achilles sits in his tent when Priam appears with the body of Patroclus and offers to exchange it for that of his beloved Hector. Achilles agrees and offers Priam a drink of wine as they bond in their time of grief. Both Achilles and Priam are conscious of their certain fate: that, inevitably, Paris will slay Achilles, Agamemnon will murder Paris and Achilles' son, Neoptolomus, will kill Priam. Hermes, in the role of Messenger of Death, sings of Priam's imminent death and acknowledges the spiritual healing power of music.

In the final scene a grief-stricken Priam isolates himself by retreating into his own private world to mourn the loss of Hector and to prepare for his own impending death. He

refuses to communicate with Paris, Hecuba or Andromache but asks for Helen. As Priam and Helen gently converse as kindred spirits, she thanks him for his kindness towards her while he acknowledges her semi-divinity and kisses her. He asks her whether Paris is now dead, to which she replies in the affirmative, realising that she has no option but to return to Greece. She leaves.

As Troy burns, Neoptolomus bursts in and kills Priam who has collapsed before the altar.

Based on the *King Priam* Vocal Score

Appendix 3

The Knot Garden Synopsis

Appendix 3

The Knot Garden Synopsis

Act I: Confrontation

The psychiatrist, Mangus, is lying on a couch in the home of a middle-aged couple, Faber and Thea. He dreams that because he has the magical powers of Prospero, the magician, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* he will be able to successfully resolve the conflict in the marriage of Thea and Faber. Mangus feels that Thea is seeking refuge in her garden and Faber in his work. Thea enters to tend to her garden which, symbolically, represents her precious inner life. Flora, a psychologically-disturbed teenager who is in the care of Thea and Faber, enters. She is closely followed by Faber. Thea accuses Faber of forcing his attentions on Flora but an angry Faber, denying the allegation, blames Thea for their unsuccessful marriage. As he leaves for work he asks Mangus to inform Thea. While Mangus and Thea wander into the middle of the garden he ponders on the reasons for her unhappy marriage and then departs.

As Thea and Flora continue their walk around the garden, the former suggests that Flora pick some roses to place in a vase but Flora suddenly recalls that she has received a telephone message from Denise, Thea's sister, who will be visiting shortly. Thea departs in order to prepare for her unexpected guest while Flora ambles happily around the garden. Unexpectedly, her reverie is interrupted by a noise which heralds the arrival of Dov, a homosexual white musician and his partner, Mel, a black writer. In an attempt to overcome the problems in their relationship, Mel and Dov continually make-believe that they are Caliban and Ariel, respectively, two characters in *The Tempest*. To add to the illusion, they wear fancy dress. Flora watches their play-acting for a short time and then insists that they stop, after which Mel and Dov introduce themselves.

Mangus and Thea enter, the latter with a tray of cocktails. Thea is not impressed by Mel and Dov but Mangus is enthusiastic and encourages their role-playing. He and Flora depart to fetch more costumes. As Mel, Dov and Thea take a cocktail each Thea mentally revises her first impression of the two men. Sensing her own attraction to Mel, she draws him into the garden but Dov feels betrayed by Mel. He smashes his cocktail glass and, on all-fours, howls like a dog in distress, rather like Ariel's dog in *The Tempest*. In the meantime, Faber returns and is astonished by Dov's weird behaviour. However, Dov

courageously repeats his play-acting song to introduce himself and Mel. Faber is rather attracted to Dov but is unwilling to listen to his problems. Thea and Mel stand on the opposite side of the stage as silent spectators.

An agitated Flora runs in to announce the arrival of Denise but Mangus enters unexpectedly, carrying a pile of costumes. He is aware that all the characters on stage are preoccupied with their personal problems. Denise enters and there is a gasp of horror as she is horribly disfigured. There is silence as Denise sings of her resistance to tyranny, explaining how she received her scars. At the end of the aria she remains aloof, perhaps because she is uncertain of the reaction from the others.

In an effort to relieve the tension, Mel starts to sing a blues number and is joined Thea, Faber, Flora and Dov, who each express their own suffering. The number becomes more intense as it progresses and, as Mangus joins in, he acknowledges that he is unable to provide any solutions other than prayer.

Act II: Labyrinth

The garden has become a maze in which all the characters appear successively, controlled by Mangus. The characters appear to be whirled on and off the stage.

First to appear are Thea and Denise, singing of their respective fears. As Thea finally makes emotional contact with Denise, she is replaced on the stage by Faber who complains to Denise of Thea's behaviour. Denise, however, suggests that Faber should talk with Thea and is annoyed when Faber insinuates he is attracted to Denise. She is drawn into the maze and replaced by Flora.

Flora is still attempting to pick flowers but is frightened by Faber who insists that her behaviour is ridiculous and childlike. Terrified, Flora retreats into the maze and is replaced by Thea who strikes Faber with a horse-whip. In a bid to protect himself, Faber crouches on the ground on all fours but Thea is suddenly replaced by Dov, now dressed in his normal street clothes. The scene between Faber and Dov reverses their first encounter as now it is Faber who is distressed while Dov is unwilling to listen to his problems. As Dov tells Faber of his irreconcilable differences with Mel, Faber tries to kiss Dov but is whirled away as Mel arrives, dressed in his normal street clothes.

In a song-and-dance routine, Mel admonishes Dov for mistaking physical attraction for mature love and suggests that the love between them is not secure. He advises Dov, who howls periodically during this scene, to make his howls useful by turning them into

music but Dov is replaced by Denise. As Mel and Denise discover some commonality in their desire for freedom, justice and dignity for all, they are aware of a dawning attraction.

The maze now seems to reverse with the characters whirling on in quick succession. Dov mocks Mel and Mel mocks Thea after which Flora enters, pursued by Faber. She takes refuge downstage as Thea and Faber briefly face each other and then vanish. This is a defining moment in the opera as, from this point, there is the possibility of a resolution to all the psychological mayhem.

As Dov consoles Flora he persuades her to sing because he has learnt from experience that it is an excellent way of dealing with distress. Consequently, Flora sings a love-song composed by Schubert, which is the only song she knows and Dov responds by singing a song he has composed. The first verse is sung to Flora but the second stanza is addressed to the world at large, symbolising Dov's blossoming artistic talents. Meanwhile the maze transforms itself into a rose-garden. A jarring note is introduced as Mel interrupts in a derisory manner claiming it was he who taught Dov this song of love. The rose garden fades.

Act III: Charade

In the hope of providing a solution for the psychological problems being experienced by some of the characters, Mangus has convinced Flora, Mel, Dov and Faber to participate in a series of role-playing charades based on *The Tempest* by Shakespeare. Some of the characters assume identities 'borrowed' from *The Tempest* as Mangus envisages himself as a Prospero-like figure with magical powers. Thea and Denise are sceptical of Mangus' approach and do not participate. The first charade is based on the first exploration of the magic island of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with Flora-Miranda admiring the feats of her father, Mangus-Prospero who lifts up Mel-Caliban and releases Dov-Ariel from the tree in which he is imprisoned. Dov-Ariel flings himself on Mel-Caliban. They are separated by Mangus who points out that everyone is merely role-playing at his request. Thea, however, who is a bystander, warns that human beings are not just robots acting out a script. She suggests that Denise should encourage Mel's advances but Denise, uneasy about Mel's bisexuality and her own feelings, resists.

In the second charade, as Dov-Ariel guards a sleeping Flora-Miranda, Mel-Caliban sneaks up in an attempt to rape her. Denise enters and rebukes Mel-Caliban for his unacceptable behaviour as Flora-Miranda runs offstage, screaming. As she is extremely distressed by Mel's behaviour she departs but Mel tries to justify his actions by stating that

he was being manipulated by Mangus. With Dov's encouragement, Mel follows Denise. Thea questions the effectiveness of Mangus-Prospero's methods but pledges that there will be a scene of reconciliation.

In the next charade, Faber-Ferdinand and Flora-Miranda play a game of chess. She accuses him of cheating and, as she throws the chessboard across the stage, Flora realises that she has finally asserted herself. Faber-Ferdinand, feeling that he has been accused unjustly, sets up the chessboard again to play with Thea in an attempt to re-establish their relationship. Mangus-Prospero and Faber-Ferdinand leave as Thea sings of her loss of anxiety. The final charade is a mock trial scene in which Flora-Miranda and Mangus-Prospero decide the fate of Dov-Ariel and Mel-Caliban. The latter is chosen as the slave but as Dov-Ariel ridicules Mel-Caliban hostilities reignite.

Mangus finally realises that he does not have any magical powers, curtails the charades and advances to the footlights followed by the full cast. They conclude that reconciliation is possible only through tentative, fleeting expressions of love. Sharing in a vision of the whole of humanity holding a magic net and dancing inseparably together, which is the antithesis of their attitude at the beginning of the opera, they exit.

Mel leaves with Denise while Dov, the eternal loner, follows in their wake. Flora optimistically faces the world with a new-found wisdom and Mangus vanishes. Thea and Faber are left onstage to face each other at the end of a long day. They turn to each other supposedly in a spirit of acceptance as the curtain falls.

Based on *The Knot Garden* Vocal Score

Appendix 4

The Ice Break Synopsis

Appendix 4

The Ice Break Synopsis

Act I

In an airport lounge which seems to be located in The United States of America Nadia and her son, Yuri, await the arrival of Lev, their husband and father. Nadia compares her own unpleasant sea voyage into exile many years previously with Lev's present more sedate journey by air. She is excited at the prospect of his arrival and seems to hear Lev's voice in her mind but Yuri, who cannot remember his father, feels hostile. Nadia's reverie is interrupted by the arrival of Gayle, Yuri's girlfriend. Gayle is accompanied by Hannah who has come to meet her boyfriend, Olympion, a famous black champion fighter. Yuri resents his mother's attitude, ridicules Hannah's account of Lev as a political prisoner and insists, with the naïveté of youth, that Lev had weakly allowed himself to be crushed in spirit.

Olympion's fans crowd the airport, taking Hannah with them. Yuri is jealous of Gayle's admiration of Olympion but Gayle runs after Hannah and the fans, leaving Yuri with his mother. After a short time, the fans return, saluting Olympion's arrival with a cheerleader routine which Olympion acknowledges.

Nadia suddenly realises that Lev is watching her gravely from a distance. She takes Lev home to her tiny apartment where they exchange reminiscences, however, Nadia indicates that she is upset by the antagonistic attitude of their son.

In the airport lounge Olympion incites frenzy amongst the fans with his assertion of black supremacy and Yuri, unable to contain himself, taunts them, causing the white and black fans separate into two separate factions. When Gayle throws herself at Olympion's feet, the black fans urge him to take advantage of her. Enraged, Yuri tries to attack Olympion but is felled with a blow. Olympion then kicks Gayle and the scene ends in chaos.

In the apartment, Nadia and Lev discuss Yuri's attitude. They can hear the chorus shouting in the distance as Yuri bursts into the room, dragging Gayle in his wake. Face to face with his father for the first time, Yuri questions, bitterly, why he has come.

Act II

Night has fallen and in the apartment Lev, Nadia, Yuri and Gayle each present their own point of view. Based on his own experience as a political prisoner, Lev tries to pacify

Yuri and Gayle but is rebuffed. When Gayle and Yuri re-join the crowd of white people outside Nadia is distressed but Lev remains calm despite the fact that the whites sing a hymn proclaiming their racial purity and supremacy.

In another part of the city Olympion prepares to leave Hannah to join the black mob which has gathered outside. Hannah questions his inevitable acceptance of leadership of the black mob as the blacks welcome Olympion into their ranks. They all don masks and strike poses of aggression while Hannah endeavours to find some answers to the impending violence. Meanwhile, the black and white mobs begin their confrontation.

In her apartment Nadia feels powerless and depressed but Lev, questioning his own pacifist ideology, feels he must find Yuri. A riot results in major casualties and when the police arrive, the crowd scatters as the police lieutenant challenges everyone to regard him in either a “good” or a “bad” light. Luke, the doctor, reveals that both Olympion and Gayle are dead. Yuri, however, is alive but badly injured and after being identified by Lev is taken to hospital in an ambulance. Prompted by Luke, Hannah comforts Lev.

Act III

In her apartment as Nadia lies dying she reveals that the emotional stresses of the past many years have exhausted her. In anticipation of his reconciliation with his own son, Lev reads to her the passage from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* which documents the reconciliation of Wilhelm and his son. When Luke and Hannah arrive, they reveal that Yuri may yet survive and try to persuade Nadia to relax. Distressed by the imminence of his wife’s death and by his son’s hatred Lev questions whether, as Yuri had suggested, he has failed. Hannah points out, however, that conflict is omnipresent but only rebirth matters as a goal.

As death draws near Nadia reminisces about her childhood, evoking memories of the sleigh running through the snow-bound forest, the ice breaking on the river and the idyllic summers with the folk on the river. Lev cries out in anguish for Nadia to wait for him in Paradise. The scene changes to reveal a crowd of paradise-seekers invoking their cult hero, Astron. This androgynous figure gives them a message but is flustered by the excessive admiration. After stressing the futility of worshipping false idols he disappears, leaving the crowd to ponder on his words of wisdom.

In his consulting room Luke convinces Lev that, as Nadia is dead, he must accept responsibility for Yuri. In the hospital Yuri, fully encased in plaster is wheeled into the operating theatre by Hannah and Luke and, while the plaster is removed, Lev waits

apprehensively outside. As Yuri emerges from the plaster, a group of young people run through the hospital, repeating Astron's message of spring-like rebirth.

Hannah wheels Yuri out of the operating theatre in a wheelchair to meet his father. She helps Yuri to his feet but he is still antagonistic and cynical. Hannah despairs as she knows much time will elapse before father and son are able to reconcile their differences just as she knows that reconciliation between the black and white races and East and West will take many years to materialise. The curtain falls as Lev translates and summarises Goethe's words to the effect that the cycle of conflict and reconciliation is eternal.

Based on *The Ice Break* Vocal Score

Appendix 5

New Year Synopsis

Appendix 5

New Year Synopsis

Preamble

The story focuses on Jo Ann and Donny, two orphans who have been raised by a foster-mother called Nan. During her childhood, Jo Ann dreamed that as an adult she would help and comfort all other orphans and, consequently, she studied child psychology. Jo Ann suffers from agoraphobia, a fear of open spaces, which makes her fearful of venturing into the world to practise as a child psychologist. This fear is the legacy of her orphaned state as a child. Jo Ann's foster-brother, Donny, who has a Caribbean or African heritage, also has psychological problems which have led to delinquent behaviour. As Jo Ann is very fond of Donny she endeavours to assist him to overcome his problems.

Act I

New Year commences with a Prelude introducing Somewhere and Today, a modern Terror Town located somewhere on planet earth. The Presenter and chorus describe the Terror Town outside and introduce Jo Ann who is alone in her room with her books dreaming of the day when she will have sufficient courage to venture outside. Donny runs in to Jo Ann's room, mocks her caring attitude and retreats to his own room. When Nan comes to fetch Donny she warns Jo Ann not to be too compassionate as, in her opinion, it can undermine discipline.

Suddenly Donny prances on to the stage and performs a 'skarade' which he imagines is a representation of his Caribbean and/or African heritage. The dancers join in his peculiar antics, masquerading as lions to frighten spectators. Nan admonishes Donny but he is defiant and retreats to his room.

In an Interlude, the chorus introduces the world of Nowhere and Tomorrow, an imaginary realm in outer space which houses the spaceship laboratory of Merlin a technological wizard who is obsessed with the capabilities of his new computer. Beside him is Pelegrin, a handsome young pilot/explorer. They discuss a name for the computer which seems to have a personality of its own. In a fit of impatience the computer names itself while Merlin and Pelegrin raise a toast to their exciting voyage into the future. When the computer controls are operated, however, only a vision from the past can be obtained in the form of an image of Jo Ann's tormented face. Pelegrin is intrigued.

Regan, the female supervisor in charge of the spaceship, enters and instructs Merlin to clear the screen as she insists that everyone should concentrate on the future, not the past. She dreams only of a journey into unknown time and space on which they will embark when the New Year's bell sounds. Pelegrin, however, has other ideas. When he is left alone in the laboratory he retrieves the picture of Jo Ann on the computer screen. He then manoeuvres the spaceship towards Somewhere and Today to search for Jo Ann.

In an Interlude which is set in Jo Ann's room, the chorus comments on Pelegrin's journey. When Pelegrin's spaceship lands in Somewhere and Today, Pelegrin and Jo Ann introduce themselves but at this point are unable to touch physically. Jo Ann, however, senses he may be important to her, that through him she may gain the strength to leave her room to help underprivileged children. After this poignant moment Pelegrin returns to Nowhere and Tomorrow as he is concerned that Regan will remark his absence.

In a Postlude the Presenter reports on the progress of the action as Merlin attempts to monitor Pelegrin's trip in the spaceship.

Act II

The Prelude opens at night time just outside Terror Town in Somewhere and Today. The Presenter and the dancers point out that it is New Year's Eve while a crowd of singers and dancers comment that they will perform a universal New Year Ritual to purge the "bad" old year to make way for new beginnings. Nan, Jo Ann and Donny enter to watch a three-part Ritual Dance. In the first part a shaman dances himself into a trance in a bid to discover the identity of the scapegoat who represents the "bad" Old Year. In the second part the shaman and his followers decide it is Donny who symbolises the Old Year. In the third part the crowd symbolically "beat" Donny as a sign of welcome to the "good" New Year. As they hand clap him Donny flees and the crowd waits for the sound of the midnight bell but, when it rings, a spaceship descends unexpectedly.

When the spaceship opens, Merlin appears as a self-appointed Master of Ceremonies. Merlin, who is under the delusion that he has travelled into the future, congratulates himself on the successful spaceship he has built. As Pelegrin emerges from the spaceship Merlin orders him to roll out a carpet for Regan but Pelegrin has already recognised Jo Ann in the crowd and approaches her. As Regan appears, she demands to know the name of the location and the identity of the individuals in the crowd. Donny seizes the opportunity to mock her which results in a brief, hostile reaction when Regan realises that she has been hoodwinked by Pelegrin into travelling into the past. As she

confronts him Jo Ann, supported by Nan, defends Pelegrin. In concert, they sing of their various dreams and fears but the crowd is restless. Fantasising that he might fly off in the spaceship Donny performs more antics, this time imitating a bird. Regan and her companions struggle with Donny and the crowd but manage to return to the spaceship to escape into space. The crowd, which has been frustrated, beat Donny physically. As the real New Year bell rings everyone sings “Auld Lang Syne.” Jo Ann rescues Donny.

Act III

It is New Year’s Day and in the Prelude the chorus sings of the contrast between the cruel and joyous side of the New Year celebrations.

As Jo Ann sits in her room with her books and dreams, Nan enters with the news that she wishes to take Donny away to care for him. Jo Ann is distressed as she feels a strong bond with him but, eventually, they tell Donny of his fate and he reminds them of his childhood traumas. As Nan exits with Donny he gives Jo Ann a video-cassette which, he says, contains his secret dreams. Jo Ann plays the cassette which shows Donny leaving the real world for the primal innocence of the animal kingdom in an effort to find his roots. As Donny’s dream video comes to an end, Jo Ann hears the Nowhere and Tomorrow music which heralds the approach of a spaceship bearing Pelegrin. The spaceship lands outside and, after a short exchange, Pelegrin and Jo Ann journey into outer space. In an Interlude the chorus indicates the change of scene to an outdoor sacred place.

The sacred place is in semi-darkness but the shining waters of the fountain and a white cypress tree are visible. Pelegrin encourages Jo Ann to undertake a ritual to help her to make a choice. She can choose either to drink the pleasant waters of a fountain, which will enable her to forget the abandoned children or, to drink the bitter waters of a lake, which will ensure she remembers her past including her obligations to the orphans. She samples both waters and rejects the fountain in favour of the lake. Jo Ann and Pelegrin then declare their love for each other and Pelegrin leads Jo Ann to Paradise Garden where she is taught a dance that exemplifies her new-found freedom. She is overjoyed but, inevitably, they now must part. Pelegrin plucks a rose from the garden in readiness to give to Jo Ann as they embark on their return journey.

In an Interlude the Paradise Garden fades and is replaced by Jo Ann’s empty room. The Presenter, previously unseen, comes onstage and directs the reorganisation of Jo Ann’s room in line with her new-found psychological freedom.

In the finale, as Jo Ann and Pelegrin arrive in the spaceship outside her house Pelegrin gives Jo Ann the rose. He tells her to hold it high above her head when she feels she is ready to face the world and the rose will magically return to him. He will then know that Jo Ann is free of her fears. For one brief moment, Jo Ann and Pelegrin are overcome by their feelings of love but it is time for Pelegrin to depart and Jo Ann watches as he flies away. As she dances towards the door holding the rose high it disappears magically from her hand.

The scene is transformed into the laboratory of Nowhere and Tomorrow where Merlin is relieved when Pelegrin returns in the spaceship. Regan tells Pelegrin he was tricked by Jo Ann but, in a moment of silence, the rose which he has given to Jo Ann appears in his hand. Immediately he manipulates the controls on the computer and Nowhere and Tomorrow disappears. In her room Jo Ann gazes wonderingly at her empty hand as she slowly opens the door. There is such a barrage of noise that she recoils but the noise stops suddenly as the Presenter speaks the words, "One humanity; one justice." The noise resumes but, with renewed confidence, Jo Ann exits through her bedroom door into the outside world. The door closes behind her and there is silence.

Based on the *New Year* Vocal Score

Appendix 12

Summary of Interview with Michael Tillett

Appendix 12

Summary of Interview with Michael Tillett at his home at Loose, near Maidstone, Kent, England, on Monday, 12 September 2005 at 2 pm.

[Note: This interview was not recorded on tape and the summary is from memory. Michael Tillett kindly read my draft and made some additions and alterations. There was correspondence between the writer of this dissertation and Michael T. from 18 August 2005 to 10 February 2006. Some of the relevant observations have been included in this dissertation. All correspondence is on file and can be produced if required.]

Michael Tillett (henceforward referred to as Michael T.), pianist and viola-player, will be a familiar name to people in the musical world, especially to those who frequent the Dartington International Summer School. I had the pleasure of being invited to his home to interview him in regard to the operas of Sir Michael Tippett (henceforward referred to as Sir Michael).

Michael T., whose musical career has spanned close to eight decades, undertook the mammoth task of preparing the vocal scores of Sir Michael's five operas (as well as two large choral works). I spent many months poring over these scores while writing my dissertation and never ceased to wonder at the astonishing scope and musical complexity of the piano reductions. The vibrant, energetic and big-hearted Michael T. is an extremely modest character who seems to feel that hand-writing the five vocal scores presented no great difficulty. He observed that it was only subsequently he realised what a privilege it had been to become totally familiar with the operas before they were ever performed.

Michael T.'s initial introduction to Sir Michael came about as one of those "meaningful coincidences", as Sir Michael would have observed. Michael T. was 19 when he first encountered the name "Michael Tippett" in a review of a recording of his *Fantasy-Sonata* (later known as *Piano Sonata No. 1*). Michael T. immediately bought the recording and "fell" for the work. A few years later Michael T. was telephoned unexpectedly by the composer/pianist Antony Hopkins (who had been a contemporary student at the Royal College of Music) asking if he could that very evening play viola in a concert at Morley College where Sir Michael was then Director of Music. Michael T. went to the concert and met Sir Michael (who roared with laughter at the similarity of their names). As he had enjoyed the evening very much, Michael T. asked if he could join the choir; thus he

became involved in all the exciting happenings at the college and sang in the never-to-be-forgotten first performance of *A Child of our Time*.

In 1946, Michael T. left London to join the Music Staff at Rugby School. Soon after this, Sir Michael sent him the manuscript full score of the first scene of *The Midsummer Marriage* asking if he would like to “have a crack” at making a piano reduction. Sir Michael subsequently wrote in his autobiography, *Those Twentieth Century Blues*, that this reduction of the first scene was done with “such accuracy and discernment that he soon became my right-hand man for all tasks of this sort.” And so began a very friendly working association that continued until the end of Sir Michael’s composing life.

I asked Michael T. if Sir Michael had fairly definite ideas as to what he wanted to compose in his operas. The reply was that Sir Michael had very definite ideas musically, but had long discussions with a variety of friends about the dramatic structure and text of the operas before a note of music was written down. Michael T. said he received each batch of the manuscript scores with excited anticipation as he never knew what was coming next, and what challenges might await him.

Michael T. said he attended the first performances (and many subsequent ones) of the first four operas, but of course had to wait until *New Year* came to Glyndebourne before seeing the fifth opera. A vivid memory still remains of Josephine Barstow (not then Dame) as Denise in *The Knot Garden* (1970). He said that she dominated the stage from her first entrance. Her body appeared to be misshapen – which was the desired effect – making for an awe-inspiring stage presence, and her singing was fully up to the demands of the role.

As the music in Sir Michael’s operas is difficult to sing and play, I asked Michael T. if he thought the composer had realised this. Michael T. thought probably not the *degree* of difficulty – but Sir Michael had faith that later performers would master the technical problems eventually.

When I asked him if Sir Michael had had a favourite opera out of his five, Michael T. thought it was *The Midsummer Marriage* because of the huge imaginative labour of seeing the work evolve from conception to completion. Michael T. thought the composer did not have a favourite character from the operas. He added, however, that Sir Michael liked “complicated people” perhaps because the composer himself was complicated. This was an enlightening comment as Sir Michael’s operatic characters are all extremely complicated, albeit fascinating.

Michael T. very kindly produced a box of original letters which had been written to him in earlier years by Sir Michael. (Later communication was always by telephone.) I glanced through the letters, conscious of the wish that I had weeks to spare in which to study them properly. Nevertheless, merely viewing the hand-written letters did give me a sense of bonding with Sir Michael as they reflected the warm, caring individual whom I pictured mentally.

However, the lasting impression which emerged from the interview was that Sir Michael had been fortunate indeed to have Michael T. as a colleague.

[Note: Bowen once observed that Tippett found it necessary to work in isolation while composing and, therefore, a great deal of his socialising was done by telephone. Consequently, “regular calls were made to the Ayersts, the Sternfelds and Michael Tillett (his musical amanuensis since Morley College days – also an amusing, warm-hearted character who cheered him up when he was exhausted by the day’s work)” [MB, 48].]

Appendix 13

Interview with Dame Josephine Barstow

Appendix 13

Interview with Dame Josephine Barstow, backstage at the Coliseum Theatre, St Martins Lane, London WC2, England on Monday, 26 September 2005 at 5.15 pm.

(Note: The words on the following pages cannot adequately portray the charisma, enthusiasm, wonderful sense of humour and energy of this great diva. She welcomed my husband and me very warmly although she had been rehearsing all day for her latest opera, *The Dialogues of the Carmelites*. I interviewed her during a short break in her rehearsal schedule. She allowed me to record the interview which was punctuated with great bursts of melodious laughter from the heart. As I have been a long-time admirer of her singing, it was a great thrill to meet Barstow. The interview exceeded all expectations.)

JJT: Dame Josephine, I feel very honoured and privileged to be here.

BARSTOW: It's lovely to have you here.

JJT: Dame Josephine, in your long and illustrious career, you've sung a wide variety of roles. Do you have a favourite one?

BARSTOW: Well, it is usually whatever I am doing at the time. At the moment I would say Mère Marie in *The Dialogues of the Carmelites* is my favourite role – so what I am doing at the time. But I used to love doing Violetta. Tosca I used to enjoy; I didn't enjoy Tosca when I first started doing it but then I started to enjoy it.

JJT: Why didn't you enjoy Tosca?

BARSTOW: Because I found her very stupid. I came to her from doing a lot of Verdi and in Verdi you always know what the characters are thinking at any time. They are alive and thinking. I was wrong, because Tosca does think but she thinks in big swathes. She thinks impulsively and emotionally and she doesn't think in detail. I couldn't work out how to play her but then I just gave myself to the role and loved it. You just need to paint it in primary colours. You need to think of her in primary colours and it works; but she's rather stupid.

JJT: That's very interesting. It's not one of my favourite operas; I'm a Verdi fan. Now with Tippett, do you have a favourite Tippett role? You have sung both Gayle and Denise.

BARSTOW: I would love to have done something in *The Midsummer Marriage* but it never came my way.

JJT: Jenifer?

BARSTOW: Yes. It's a wonderful piece. I think it's the best. There's also *Priam*. But I'm very happy to have done Denise. It's such an honour to do a role for the first time and to create a role and Michael was there the whole time.

JJT: You met Michael Tippett?

BARSTOW: Oh, yes, he was there a lot.

JJT: Was he personable? Everyone seems to have liked him!

BARSTOW: He was an enormously likeable person. One of the things I found absolutely fascinating about him was that once he had written a piece – and *The Midsummer Marriage* took him ten years – it was something apart from him. It was like he had given birth to it and now it had its own life and its being and here was him. He was able to talk very analytically about the piece – as if it wasn't his own, as if he hadn't written it!

JJT: He always said that in his books, but I actually wondered whether that was so – whether he let you take over with your own interpretation.

BARSTOW: Yes, it was true. Like a lot of composers, he was so thrilled that what he had been struggling with in his head was suddenly in the mouths of people and on instruments and becoming a sonorous reality. He found that incredibly exciting which, indeed, I'm sure it must be if you're a composer. He was carried away by the excitement and he didn't really mind. He gave you enormous leeway because of that. I remember one day in particular he said to me – I can't remember these things in huge detail because it was a very long time ago, over 30 years ago – but anyway I had asked him this question. He took the score and said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, now you see, this is particularly brilliant," about what he had written himself! He said, "This is really good," as if someone else had written it! "Gosh, this is really good." He had a sort of pleasure in it for its own sake, not because he had written it.

JJT: So when you rehearsed Denise and Gayle was he actually there?

BARSTOW: Oh, yes. He didn't come to every single rehearsal but certainly once we were in the theatre I seem to remember he was there a lot.

JJT: Did he actually come up to you and say he wanted the role done in a particular way?

BARSTOW: No, no, he just left it to us.

JJT: And how did you find doing the part? When Sutherland did *The Midsummer Marriage*, she said she didn't have a clue as to what it was all about. When you were doing Denise and Gayle, did you find the same or did you find it quite easy?

BARSTOW: No, I think he can be obscure. I don't think I thoroughly understood but that's where you end up doing what the director asks you to do and I had the easiest role really because what I was thinking was manifest physically in my body.

JJT: Denise?

BARSTOW: Yes, and I found it a lovely role to do. It was a real gift for a young singer because I was young and unknown and along came this role and it pushed my career like anything, that role.

JJT: I'm most fascinated by your opening phrase [*The Knot Garden*]. It's this wonderful *pianissimo* right up there in the gods. It's amazing.

BARSTOW: I've always been able to do that; it's something I've always been able to do.

JJT: That's your gift. It's so poignant. The average singer might want to go in and start it much more stridently. I've listened to it so many times I can hear it in my head!

BARSTOW: I can't! It was so long ago! It was very difficult to get Tippett's notes into one's head, very difficult. Because I'm not a hugely wonderful musician or anything, I just had to struggle.

JJT: Truly?

BARSTOW: Oh, yes, just struggle and hit the notes.

JJT: I'm fascinated because you hit every note right in the middle; it's so satisfying to the ear.

BARSTOW: Well, that's good; I'm glad!

JJT: And you do those jumps of tenths with the same quality of voice; it's amazing.

BARSTOW: That's what I was going to say. It seems to me whatever you are doing, whether the notes are very difficult to get into your head or not, the way the voice copes with them is the same whether it's Verdi, Puccini or Strauss or Tippett. The sequence of notes might be different but the voice actually functions in the same way and I have always tried very hard to stick to that and I think it's stood me in good stead. But you know, there's no trick to singing. Whether it's a "diminished whatever" or a simple octave, the voice has to approach it and carry it in the same way.

JJT: But your palate sits very high, doesn't it?

BARSTOW: I have a very high roof to my mouth; it's very high and very narrow. As soon as I learned how to play with that instrument, I started to trust it. But it was difficult because at one stage I was studying with somebody whose body shape was completely different from mine. This person was short, with a short rib cage - whereas mine's very long - and presumably a wide palate and a square face. Of course, where she placed the

notes wasn't the same as where I placed the notes. You know, you just have to work with and get to know your body which is your instrument.

JJT: How do you feel it when you get that beautiful *pianissimo*? Do you feel it in your forehead?

BARSTOW: Yes. It has to be a different sensation from someone with a wider face.

JJT: It's a wonderful sound but your bottom notes are very good too.

BARSTOW: Well, they've got better, actually. I thank God because with age you tend to play roles with stronger bottoms!

JJT: When you get down to the F and E above middle C, it's a very, very strong, even sound on the recordings. Tippett's music is very jagged; it takes a bit of getting used to! So when you are going up and down, you have this wonderful sound. Do you still have that flexibility?

BARSTOW: I think so.

JJT: Dame Josephine, much has been said about Tippett's texts being silly and/or hilarious. How did you find his texts, singing the words?

BARSTOW: I found him difficult. I mean, he is difficult. There's no question about it that his texts are difficult and sometimes, possibly, more difficult than they need to be.

JJT: Say, compared with Verdi – more difficult than singing Verdi in English?

BARSTOW: I see what you mean. I thought you meant the meaning of the words.

JJT: Well, both. Much is made of the fact that Tippett's libretti are a lot of nonsense. Did you ever have the desire to burst into laughter when you were singing the words?

BARSTOW: No, I was too scared! Clearly, when you start to sing Verdi and start to sing Verdi in Italian, then you don't want to sing anything else, do you? But you have to sing Strauss; you have to sing all these other things. You just find out how it works and go for it.

JJT: How did you find the English?

BARSTOW: The way he [Tippett] set some of it, made it sound silly – well not "silly" ...

JJT: Well, yes, it can be! He also said he emulated Purcell's word-setting – the stress of the word as spoken. When I was playing around with the music, I didn't feel that was quite true! Would you agree with that – that he got the stresses in the wrong place sometimes?

BARSTOW: Yes, he does do that but a lot of people do that. Janacek does that. Janacek will set the same word in the same opera three or four different ways! Tippett's not alone in that. I think where he was alone is the intellectual content of the libretti. It was very often, in my view, too complicated for transmitting to the audience as a direct experience,

particularly in *The Ice Break*. He was an intellectual-supreme himself and not everybody who goes to opera is, nor everybody who performs opera, and I think that it was a disservice to him in a certain way. He might have been better to have got a straightforward librettist.

JJT: But he didn't want that. I'm fascinated when I read all his books, for example, that his word power is at such a high level and then I look at the libretti and really have trouble - it's like two different people!

BARSTOW: You never met him?

JJT: No.

BARSTOW: When you spoke to him it was amazing; he had the broadest terms of reference of anybody I have ever met. He would be talking about something and he would refer to something in Chinese Literature or an Indian piece of work or whatever. He was familiar with an enormous range of work, both musical work and literary work, and I have never come across anybody with quite that range. It was a huge brain. I don't mean physically; I mean he was highly, highly intelligent and for the sake of the libretti it might have been better if he was a slightly less so, I always thought.

JJT: That's true, of course, because unless you know your Greek Mythology, Yeats, Keats, Blake – for example, Sosostris' aria is such a conglomeration of things that it almost doesn't make sense unless you know the history behind it.

BARSTOW: That's right but he expected other people to know more than they did. Because he was so well-read himself, these things were familiar to him. It wasn't that he was showing off. It was coming out of his head and his experience - but his experience was different from most other people's. That was his dilemma. I don't think he ever really understood that - that that was a dividing line between him and others. That's what I felt, that he didn't quite understand that it distanced him slightly from other people. My late husband, Ande Anderson, directed *The Midsummer Marriage* at The Garden.

He directed *The Midsummer Marriage* and I can remember he spent hours and hours and hours reading the sources that Michael had referred to in *The Midsummer Marriage* and so, of course, he was able to talk to Michael who was very thrilled. But for Michael, that was who he was – he had access to all those things on a daily basis. He didn't have to read up.

JJT: So he really was an intellectual, not a pseudo-intellectual?

BARSTOW: He was. In my opinion, he was an intellectual.

JJT: He did say in one of his books that he wanted to extend the performer but do you think he really had any idea how difficult his music was?

BARSTOW: I don't think he quite understood. But he was slightly set apart from the rest of us because of this huge intellect and, more especially, not just the intellect but this range of knowledge that he had. When I say he could refer to Chinese Literature, he did once while I was speaking to him and then I had to say, "Well, Michael, I don't know what you're talking about!" and then he said, "Ah, well ..." and then he told me!

JJT: He was quite approachable?

BARSTOW: Oh, yes. He was lovely. He was a lovely guy.

JJT: Did you prefer singing Denise or Gayle?

BARSTOW: Denise – much. Gayle was a lousy part!

JJT: Because of who she was, you mean?

BARSTOW: It wasn't anything like the same success as a piece.

JJT: Actually, when you look at the tessitura, it seems to have the same range.

BARSTOW: But as a piece it didn't come off anything like as well as a piece. Whether it was the production, I don't know.

JJT: How many times have you sung the role of Denise?

BARSTOW: We did it twice. We did two runs and then we recorded it. I can't remember when we recorded it but we did two series of performances, as far as I remember. And I think there were two series of performances of *The Ice Break* but I did only the first one I think because I thought I wasn't going anywhere with it.

JJT: With Tippett's characterisations, did you actually follow the characterisation he suggested? I know you always bring something of your own – you said with Denise, the way she looked, you followed through.

BARSTOW: That's what I mean; it was a gift of a role because there was something very specific to hang on to. You know, I did it with this arm sort of like that (demonstrated by lifting right arm against body and hunching up shoulder) and I used to go home on the tube and find myself doing that!

JJT: When I interviewed Michael Tillett recently he said that you gave an incredible performance! As soon as you appeared onstage, that was it. He said it was really amazing!

BARSTOW: I felt that it sort of gave me a crutch. I felt this was a physical reason for the grudge that I had and I felt I was looking from under my eyebrows at the world. I found myself still doing it when I wasn't there!

JJT: Did you come across as bitter and twisted or did you start off with this grudge against the world but then soften your characterisation?

BARSTOW: I hope I did soften it. I can't remember to be honest with you. What I'm telling you is what I've retained after all these years!

JJT: And Gayle – you thought she was too shallow?

BARSTOW: I just didn't think the piece was as good either. It didn't go down anything like as well as *The Knot Garden*. *The Knot Garden* was a formidable production by Peter Hall. It was really one of his best efforts. There was a fantastic set by Tim O'Brien – you must have seen pictures of it. There was a metal cage that went around and we kept being thrown out or thrown in.

JJT: The maze and the knot garden. I know you're not a mezzo, but would you rather have sung Hannah than Gayle?

BARSTOW: I don't really know. I just remember feeling it was not a very satisfactory experience in comparison with the first one, *The Knot Garden*.

JJT: It was interesting when I interviewed Michael Tillett. I wrote him a letter first and he wrote in reply, "I'm happy to talk about Denise & Co." He didn't say "Madam Sosostri & Co," for example. Denise was the one that kept coming up!

BARSTOW: How interesting.

JJT: *The Knot Garden* out of the five operas is probably my favourite as I like the quirkiness. And Denise is the character I've done the most work on as she is fascinating. Because of Tippett's relationship with his mother, I feel that Denise is based on his mother who was a suffragette.

BARSTOW: I didn't realise that.

JJT: Yes, however, I feel Denise has a warmer side to her. Tippett's mother was very cold according to his autobiography. He said he never loved his mother the way he loved his father. He said his mother was more interested in the cause of the suffragette and the wider world than in her children. However, with Denise, I feel that even though she's angry, she has a warm side.

BARSTOW: Yes. Michael, himself had a huge warmth. It's interesting - because you must know Bill Bowen?

JJT: I know of him.

BARSTOW: I met Bill at university. I went to Birmingham University and I read English, in fact, but because of my interest in, and my intention to become an opera singer, I was very friendly with a lot of people in the Music Department. Bill was in the Music Department and he was a brilliant guy. He got a first and all of that - and then the next time I met him, he must have been Michael's partner.

JJT: Yes, for the last 30-35 years of his life.

BARSTOW: And he was an enormously nice guy and what made me think about that was the warmth that Michael had.

JJT: Was he handsome? Books suggest he was. Or just charismatic?

BARSTOW: He was a bit hawkish, gaunt. I would say he was slightly too gaunt to be handsome but tall and very blue-eyed – but slightly, slightly sort of in a world of his own, which was his problem.

JJT: So do you think, maybe, he wasn't entirely aware of people and their feelings?

BARSTOW: No – well, I don't know – maybe, possibly yes. But he was, on the other hand, very warm. I can remember the warmth coming from him - and very enthusiastic, hugely enthusiastic about what one was doing and what he had done and the whole event – he was highly enjoying himself.

JJT: He said that some of his characters are just archetypes. Would you agree with that? You're not saying that about Denise, are you? She's not really an archetype?

BARSTOW: She was slightly, wasn't she? That's what I mean about this shape and the lowered eyebrows and the looking from beneath the eyebrows.

JJT: So you played it like that?

BARSTOW: No, I didn't play it like a caricature but I slotted into a shape that was a slight caricature but obviously my job was to make her. I remember I didn't make her a caricature because that would be a disaster. That's the whole point about being a performer, that whatever shape you take on, you bring humanity to that shape and I hope that's what I did.

JJT: What about Gayle? The same thing or not?

BARSTOW: Well, yes, that's one's job, you know. I'm sorry; I'm not being very satisfactory about *The Ice Break*!

JJT: Well, actually with *The Ice Break*, I started off with Nadia and it wasn't coming together and I gave it up and switched to Hannah instead and it's made a huge difference because now the five characters are central, they are the heart of the operas really.

BARSTOW: That's interesting.

JJT: As soon as I disposed of Nadia, it made it so much easier. And I did look at Gayle and again I thought that the character was one-dimensional!

BARSTOW: It wasn't his most successful piece. It didn't gel.

JJT: The general opinion is that *New Year* was a lot better than *The Ice Break*. I've seen visuals of *The Midsummer Marriage* and *King Priam* but not *The Knot Garden*.

BARSTOW: It's just been done in Scotland.

JJT: Yes, I know. I've just missed all of the performances! The only Tippett show that's ever been done in New Zealand is *A Child of our Time*.

BARSTOW: That's a wonderful piece. The First Symphony was recorded. I didn't record it but it was a BBC concert and then they issued it on CD four or five years ago.

JJT: I would love to have seen your Denise onstage; I don't think there is a video or DVD of it. I have the CD.

BARSTOW: I doubt it. It was before all that. Life has changed!

JJT: Is it possible to compare the role of Mother Marie with Denise or is it entirely different?

BARSTOW: Mother Marie is very, very complicated.

JJT: Yes, I saw the Australian Opera production 15 or so years ago and cried at the end when the nuns were guillotined.

BARSTOW: I suspect that Mère Marie is probably the most complicated character in the piece. The piece is about all kinds of things but it's a lot about fear, the fear of dying. The old prioress dies extremely badly right at the beginning of the piece. Blanche has a fear of dying. The only one who doesn't die is Mère Marie. Now why doesn't she die? Because Blanche comes out of the crowd at the last minute and joins the nuns and goes off and is beheaded. Mère Marie watches. It's all true, the whole story is all true; it happened and Mère Marie, the character, then wrote the whole story. It's because she wrote it down we know it happened. She carried on living for a long time and wrote the story because she didn't die. The way I play it, she didn't die because she was too frightened. Of all the people in the piece the most frightened is the one who constantly – what I haven't explained is that Mère Marie makes all the people in the convent vow to give their lives and she vows, but it's her idea that they make a vow to give their lives for the convent, etc., and yet when it comes to it, she is the only person who doesn't. So she's very, very complicated and if you wanted me to compare her to Denise, Denise is pretty complicated too. I always get complicated characters – probably because I'm complicated myself!

JJT: You're renowned as one of the great singing actresses and are able to act the parts! Do you do a lot of research beforehand or do you just get the score and read it?

BARSTOW: I do as much research as I can but of course there wasn't a vast amount to do with Denise. But then I knew I had a very strong director. Peter Hall is a very strong director.

JJT: Yes, I love his productions. Do you think he was instrumental in its overall success?

BARSTOW: Oh, yes, and the whole thing was a huge event; it was a big event in London the first night of *The Knot Garden* and it had a huge impact – and it had a huge impact on my career, a big impact. It's a gift of a role and coming in and singing this frightfully difficult aria and everybody thinking, "Wow, who's that?"

JJT: Did Peter Hall ask you to do the role?

BARSTOW: The Garden asked me at the time; I don't know who it was but, yes, it was good, very good. Everybody needs little shoves and that was a big shove!

JJT: Thank you so much for your time, Dame Josephine, you've been very helpful. I have my dissertation half-written and it's been wonderful to talk to someone who has performed the roles. I have a friend in New Zealand who is President of the Opera Society and he has a recent recording of yours which he says is very impressive. Just one last thing, Dame Josephine. Why do you think the operas of Michael Tippett are not performed more often?

BARSTOW: I think because of the complexity of the libretti. You know, if you compare *The Knot Garden*, *The Midsummer Marriage* and *King Priam*, which are possibly the most accessible of his operas, with *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd*, Britten's operas are much more straightforward. Britten was much more straightforward as a theatrical presenter.

JJT: I think that Britten's women are all dull or weird!

BARSTOW: Yes, his operas are all about the same thing but they are much more accessible. You asked me why and I think it's the fact that Tippett has an aura of inaccessibility which stops him being performed and so people don't get familiar with his music, and so it carries on. It's a shame because some of the music is absolutely wonderful.

JJT: Out of the five operas, which is your favourite?

BARSTOW: I think *The Midsummer Marriage* is my favourite.

JJT: Followed by *The Knot Garden*?

BARSTOW: Well, probably.

JJT: Do you think the libretti matches the music a lot of the time.

BARSTOW: No, no, he is let down by his libretti.

JJT: Thank you once again for your time, Dame Josephine.

Appendix 14

Summary of Interview with Sally Groves

Appendix 14

Summary of informal interview with Sally Groves at the offices of Schott & Co. Limited, 48 Great Marlborough Street, London, England on Thursday, 8 September 2005 at 11.30 am.

[Note: This interview was not recorded on tape and was conducted as an informal conversation during the time I spent at Schott & Co. Limited studying archival materials relating to Tippett. Sally Groves confirmed in an email dated 22 December 2005 that she was happy for her comments to be used in my dissertation.]

It transpired that Sally Groves first met Tippett when she was 13 or 14 years old as her late father was the renowned conductor, Sir Charles Groves. Although there was not time for a formal interview, Sally Groves did remark that it meant “a lot” to her that someone was researching Tippett’s music. She remembered Tippett with warmth and affection and commented on his rapport with women.

I asked whether Sally Groves had ever met Tippett’s mother. She had not, but observed it had been her impression that Tippett had “looked after” his mother. Her comment confirmed the impression I had gained in the course of my research that, despite their stormy relationship, Tippett had taken care of his mother for much of his adult life.

On my return to New Zealand, I emailed Sally Groves to thank her for her time. In reply, I received the following email, dated 13 October 2005:

Dear Julie,

Thanks so much for your warm email. It means a great deal to me that you are helping to enlarge understanding and appreciation of Michael and his music. He would have loved meeting you – he loved warm, strong women and everyone with a sense of humour! That’s why he wrote such wonderful roles for women – unlike Britten!

I saw Jo [Barstow] as Denise – she was completely riveting and unforgettable. Good luck with the writing and we look forward to receiving a copy when it’s ready.

All best wishes,
Sally

[Note: In his autobiography, Tippett did mention Sir Charles. He recalled that Sir Charles was once presented with a ‘Turn on to Tippett’ T-shirt by a group of young American admirers in Houston when he was the guest conductor for Tippett’s oratorio, *A Child of our Time* [MT, 254]. This was just one occasion on which Sir Charles conducted Tippett’s music.]