

**SIR MICHAEL TIPPETT**  
*Composer, Conductor*  
(1905, London — 1998, London)

**RITUAL DANCES FROM *THE MIDSUMMER MARRIAGE***

*Composed: 1946-1952.*

*Opera premiered on January 27, 1955 at Covent Garden in London, conducted by John Pritchard; Ritual Dances premiered on February 13, 1953 by the Basel Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Paul Sacher*

*Duration: ca. 29 minutes*

*Scoring: two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and strings*

*Overview*

Michael Tippett was born in London on January 2, 1905, but spent most of his childhood in the Suffolk countryside. In 1919, Tippett's father retired as a lawyer and his parents moved to the Continent to live and work in France and Italy, where Michael visited them during his school holidays. He credited those early stays abroad with his fluency in several languages. Tippett's musical experience during his early years was scanty, but his determination to be a composer was strong, and he entered the Royal College of Music at eighteen. London's rich musical culture was overwhelming for the young musician, "rather like a dam bursting," he later recalled. He was exposed to much of the standard repertory for the first time during his student years, but was especially struck by the quartets and symphonies of Beethoven, whose influence on works throughout his career was profound. At the Royal College, he studied conducting with Malcolm Sargent and Adrian Boult and composition with R.O. Morris and Charles Wood. Morris and Wood introduced him to the contrapuntal glories of 16th- and 17th-century English music, and it was from that source, as well as from Beethoven's works, that Tippett drew much of his inspiration and compositional technique.

Upon leaving school, Tippett taught French for a short time at a preparatory school in Surrey, but he soon left that position to dedicate himself full-time to music. He settled in Oxted, Surrey, finding the country more conducive to his creativity than the city. During the Depression of the 1930s, Tippett continued composing while gathering a reputation as a conductor for his work with the South London Orchestra, a group of unemployed players who had lost their jobs as theater pit musicians because of the hard economic times and the coming of sound to the movies. Several works of those years were withdrawn, notably a Symphony in B-flat, but it was with the String Quartet No. 1 (1935) and Piano Sonata No. 1 (1937) that his music first saw publication. The Concerto for Double String Orchestra (1939) brought him to public notice, and the wartime premiere of the oratorio *A Child of Our Time* marked him as an important voice on the British musical scene. The works from those years show the influence of the rich counterpoint and rhythm of Elizabethan and Restoration music combined with a Beethovenian concern for form and thematic development.

From 1940 to 1951, Tippett served as music director of Morley College in London, a position once held by Gustav Holst. During his tenure, he performed a wide variety of works by such

composers as Monteverdi, Purcell and Stravinsky, as well as the London premiere of his Symphony No. 1 of 1945. Deeply concerned throughout his life with social and moral issues, Tippett was sentenced to prison for three months as a conscientious objector in 1942, despite the pleading of Ralph Vaughan Williams. He remained an avowed pacifist.

The soaring lyricism, luxuriant counterpoint and luminous orchestration that came to fruition in Tippett's first opera, the visionary *The Midsummer Marriage* (1952), gave rise to a series of splendid works during the 1950s, notably the *Fantasia Concertante on a Theme of Corelli* (1953), Piano Concerto (1955) and Second Symphony (1957). This last was a transitional composition with some indications of the more acerbic style Tippett found necessary for the dramatic requirements of his next opera, *King Priam* (1961). As with *The Midsummer Marriage*, *King Priam* spawned several important works in a related style. The Second Piano Sonata (1962) and Concerto for Orchestra (1963) are similar in their use of "mosaic form," in which non-developing blocks of musical material are juxtaposed and superimposed.

In his third opera, *The Knot Garden* (1970), Tippett began to combine elements of his earlier styles into a new, transcendent idiom, but one that, unlike the style used for the earlier operas, was freshly adapted to the requirements of each new composition. Though following closely upon *The Knot Garden*, for example, the links between that opera and the Third Piano Sonata (1973) and the magnificent Third Symphony (1972) are tenuous, seemingly an attempt to allow those works to stand by themselves, as though each represented an independent style. *The Ice Break* (1977), Tippett's fourth opera, is filled with social commentary and references to pop culture. There followed a productive period during the next half-dozen years that saw the composition of the Triple Concerto for Violin, Viola and Cello, Fourth Symphony, String Quartet No. 4 and *The Mask of Time*, a large-scale canvas for chorus and orchestra which the composer described as "a multiple panorama of experience." His late works included the opera *New Year*, premiered in Houston in 1989, and *Byzantium* (on a text by W.B. Yeats), commissioned jointly for the 100th anniversaries of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Carnegie Hall in 1991.

In addition to his work as a composer, conductor and educator, Sir Michael was also known as an author (*Moving Into Aquarius*), a musical scholar (several editions of works by Purcell), and a radio and television speaker. He served, as well, as director of the Bath Music Festival. For his services to music he was made a Commander of the British Empire in 1959, given an Honorary Doctorate in Music by Cambridge University in 1964, knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1966, and cited by the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1973.

#### *What To Listen For*

Tippett said that *The Midsummer Marriage*, his first opera, was conceived at the end of World War II around a visual impression: "a wooded hill-top with a temple, where a warm and soft young man was being rebuffed by a cold and hard young woman to such a degree that the collective, magical archetypes take charge — Jung's *anima* and *animus*." Tippett created his own libretto for this rather idiosyncratic vision, modeling it on Mozart's *The Magic Flute* as a quest opera in a timeless, mythical setting involving a man and woman of noble birth (Tamino and Pamina = Mark and Jenifer) who must pass through trials of self-awareness before they are

united, an earthy couple (Papageno and Papagena = Jack and Bella) concerned with more mundane matters, a parent (Queen of the Night = King Fisher, Jenifer's father) resentful at losing a child, and the keepers of ritual and tradition (Soroastro and his priests = Sosostriis and the Ancients). The story that Tippett created around the interactions of these hierarchies is laden with symbolism and philosophical allusion (as is *The Magic Flute*), "a complex labyrinth of ideas, images and situations which Tippett gives shape through his interest in both psychology and literature," wrote Kenneth Gloag, a Cardiff University professor and authority on 20th-century British music.

Tippett worked on *The Midsummer Marriage* from 1946 until 1952 and had to wait another three years for its premiere, so in 1953 he extracted the *Four Ritual Dances* from the opera for concert performance by the Basel Chamber Orchestra led by the Swiss conductor and staunch new-music patron Paul Sacher. In the first three of the *Ritual Dances* — *Earth in Autumn*, *The Waters in Winter*, *The Air in Spring*, performed continuously in Act II — Strephon, the lead dancer of the temple, appears successively in the guise of a hare, a fish and a bird hunted by a female dancer representing a hound, an otter and a hawk, Tippett's choreographed allegory of the female pursuit of the male from his initial concept. In these *Dances*, the hare escapes, the fish is injured, and the bird is caught. Strephon and his dancers perform *Fire in Summer* in the opera's final scene before Mark and Jenifer, now successfully finished with their trials and ready for their spiritual and physical union. Strephon holds a lighted torch above his head and becomes enfolded within the petals of a lotus flower, associated in Hindu and Buddhist cultures with spiritual awakening, rebirth and purity. As Strephon is enveloped by the petals, the flower begins to glow from within with metaphorical fire to complete the midsummer ritual.

## **CARL ORFF**

*Composer*

(1895, Munich — 1982, Munich)

### ***CARMINA BURANA, CANTIONES PROFANAE***

*Composed: 1935-1936.*

*Premiered: Premiered in Frankfurt on December 8, 1937, conducted by Bertil Wetzelsberger.*

*Duration: ca. 65 minutes*

*Scoring: two piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat, two B-flat and bass clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, celesta, two pianos and strings*

### *Overview*

About thirty miles south of Munich, in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps, is the abbey of Benediktbeuren. In 1803, a 13th-century codex was discovered among its holdings that contains some 200 secular poems which give a vivid, earthy portrait of Medieval life. Many of these poems, attacking the defects of the Church, satirizing contemporary manners and morals, criticizing the omnipotence of money, and praising the sensual joys of food, drink and physical love, were written by an amorphous band known as "Goliards." These wandering scholars and ecclesiastics, who were often esteemed teachers and recipients of courtly patronage, filled their

worldly verses with images of self-indulgence that were probably as much literary convention as biographical fact. The language they used was a heady mixture of Latin, old German and old French. Some paleographic musical notation appended to a few of the poems indicates that they were sung, but it is today so obscure as to be indecipherable. This manuscript was published in 1847 by Johann Andreas Schmeller under the title, *Carmina Burana* (“*Songs of Beuren*”), “carmina” being the plural of the Latin word for song, “carmen.”

Carl Orff encountered these lusty lyrics for the first time in the 1930s, and he was immediately struck by their theatrical potential. Like Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson in the United States, Orff at that time was searching for a simpler, more direct musical expression that could immediately affect listeners. Orff’s view, however, was more Teutonically philosophical than that of the Americans, who were seeking a music for the common man, one related to the everyday world. Orff sought to create a musical idiom that would serve as a means of drawing listeners away from their daily experiences and closer to the realization of oneness with the universe. In the words of the composer’s biographer Andreas Liess, “Orff’s spiritual form is molded by the superimposition of a high intellect on a primitive creative instinct,” thus establishing a tension between the rational (intellect) and the irrational (instinct). The artistic presentation of the deep-seated psychological self to the thinking person allows an exploration of the regions of being that have been overlaid by accumulated layers of civilization. To portray the connection between the physical and spiritual spheres, Orff turned to the theater. His theater, however, was hardly the conventional one. Orff’s modern vision entailed stripping away not only the richly Romantic musical language of traditional opera, but also eliminating its elaborate stagecraft, costumes and scenery, so that it was reduced to just its essential elements of production. Orff’s reform even went so far as to question the validity of any works written before 1935, including his own, to express the state of modern man, and he told his publisher to destroy all his music (i.e., Orff’s) which “unfortunately” had been printed. The first piece that embodied Orff’s new outlook was *Carmina Burana*.

Though *Carmina Burana* is most frequently heard in the concert hall, Orff insisted that it was intended to be staged, and that the music was only one of its constituent parts. “I have never been concerned with music as such, but rather with music as ‘spiritual discussion,’ ” he wrote. “Music is the servant of the word, trying not to disturb, but to emphasize and underline.” He felt that this objective was best achieved in the theater, but *Carmina Burana* still has a stunning impact even without its visual element. Its effect arises from the monumental simplicity of the musical style by which Orff sought to depict the primitive, instinctive side of mankind. Gone are the long, intricate forms of traditional German symphonic music, the opulent homogeneity of the Romantic orchestra, the rich textures of the 19th-century masters. They are replaced by a structural simplicity and a sinewy, electric muscularity that is driven by an almost primeval rhythmic energy. “The simpler and more reduced to essentials a statement is, the more immediate and profound its effect,” wrote Orff. It is precisely through this enforced simplicity that Orff intended to draw listeners to their instinctual awareness of “oneness with the universe.” Whether he succeeded as philosopher is debatable. Hanspeter Krellmann wrote in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, “The four aspects of Orff’s musical theater [tragedy of archetypes, visionary embodiment of metaphysical ideas, bizarre fantasy and physical exuberance] are usually intertwined; and it is apparent from the works that Orff’s main concern is not with the exposition of human nature in tragedy, nor with whimsical fancy, nor with the

statement of supernatural truths, nor with joyous exultation. His intention seems to be to create a spectacle.” So what then is *Carmina Burana*: a set of ribald songs? a Medieval morality play? a philosophical tract? Perhaps it is all of these. But more than anything, it is one of the most invigorating, entertaining, easily heard and memorable musical creations of the 20th century.

### *What To Listen For*

Orff chose 24 poems from the *Carmina Burana* to include in his work. Since the 13th-century music for them was unknown, all of their settings are original with him. The work is disposed in three large sections with prologue and epilogue. The three principal divisions — *Primo Vere* (“*Springtime*”), *In Taberna* (“*In the Tavern*”) and *Cour d’Amours* (“*Court of Love*”) — sing the libidinous songs of youth, joy and love. However, the prologue and epilogue (using the same verses and music) that frame these pleasurable accounts warn against unbridled enjoyment. “The wheel of fortune turns; dishonored I fall from grace and another is raised on high,” caution the words of *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi* (“*Fortune, Empress of the World*”), the chorus that stands like pillars of eternal verity at the entrance and exit of this Medieval world. They are the ancient poet’s reminder that mortality is the human lot, that the turning of the same Wheel of Fortune that brings sensual pleasure may also grind that joy to dust. It is this bald juxtaposition of antitheses — the most rustic human pleasures with the sternest of cosmic admonitions — coupled with Orff’s elemental musical idiom that gives *Carmina Burana* its dynamic theatricality.

The work opens with the chorus *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi*, depicting the terrible revolution of the Wheel of Fate through a powerful repeated rhythmic figure that grows inexorably to a stunning climax. After a brief morality tale (*Fortune plango vulnera* — “*I lament the wounds that fortune deals*”), the *Springtime* section begins. Its songs and dances are filled with the sylvan brightness and optimistic expectancy appropriate to the annual rebirth of the earth and the spirit. The next section, *In Taberna* (“*In the Tavern*”), is given over wholly to the men’s voices. Along with a hearty drinking song are heard two satirical stories: *Olim lacus colueram* (“*Once in lakes I made my home*”) — one of the most fiendishly difficult pieces in the tenor repertory — and *Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis* (“*I am the abbot of Cucany*”). The third division, *Cour d’Amours* (“*Court of Love*”), leaves far behind the rowdy revels of the tavern to enter a refined, seductive world of sensual pleasure. The music is limpid, gentle and enticing, and marks the first appearance of the soprano soloist. The lovers’ urgent entreaties grow in ardor, with insistent encouragement from the chorus, until submission is won in the most rapturous moment in the score, *Dulcissime* (“*Sweetest Boy*”). The grand paean to the loving couple (*Blanzifor et Helena*) is cut short by the intervention of imperious fate, as the opening chorus (*Fortuna*), like the turning of the great wheel, comes around once again to close this mighty work.

Karl Schumann wrote of the universality of Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, “No individual destiny is touched upon — there are no dramatic personae in the normal sense of the term. Instead primeval forces are invoked, such as the ever-turning wheel of fortune, the revivifying power of spring, the intoxicating effect of love, and those elements in man which prompt him to the enjoyment of earthly and all-too-earthly pleasures. The principal figure is man, as a natural being delivered over to forces stronger than himself.”

