

# The State College Choral Society



## NEWSLETTER

January 2006



### *From the Podium . . .*

By Russell Shelley

Hello Singers!

There is quite an interesting context to the Tippett piece. I encourage you to invest some time becoming familiar with his life and compositional approach. Here's the biography provided by the "official" website devoted to Tippett's life and career.

Sir Michael Tippett was born in London in 1905 and spent his childhood in Suffolk, making little contact with music until his teens. While at Stamford Grammar School, near Peterborough, he took piano lessons from a local teacher, Mrs Tinkler, sang in the local church choir and took part in amateur stage-productions. It was the experience of a hearing an orchestral concert in Leicester, conducted by Malcolm Sargent, that led him to decide to become a composer—even though he had little idea what it involved. His musical ambitions were not encouraged in school, so he pressured his parents into supporting him as a student at the Royal College of Music in London, where he enrolled in 1923.

While studying at the RCM, he took advantage of London concert life and the theatre scene to equip himself for his future career. After leaving the RCM in 1928, Tippett lived in Oxted, Surrey. Teaching French in a preparatory school and conducting a concert and operatic society, he earned just enough to enable him to spend long periods at composition.

In April 1930 a concert at the Barn Theatre, Oxted, featured his main works to date; but these he afterwards withdrew. He then went for further lessons with R.O. Morris. These proved formative: he developed special skills in counterpoint which propelled him towards the first works of his creative maturity, his String Quartet No. 1 (1935; revised 1944) and Piano Sonata No. 1 (1936-7). (*Continued on page 2.*)

### Recognize anybody?



Two of the people in this photo are part of the current leadership of the Choral Society. First five people to tell me (Janet) who they both are will win prizes. (Sorry, you two in the photo are not eligible for the prizes!)



## From the Podium . . .

(Continued)



Both during his student days and after, Tippett responded deeply to world events—the First World War, the Depression and mass unemployment, children starving. He became involved in political radicalism, organised the South London Orchestra of Unemployed Musicians and directed two choirs sponsored by the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society. At the same time his aesthetic ideas had crystallised in the course of several informal encounters with T. S. Eliot. The outcome of all this was the oratorio *A Child of Our Time* (1939-41), an impassioned protest against persecution and tyranny and now his most widely performed composition.

Tippett became musical director of Morley College in 1940 and remained there until 1951, giving it a new lease of musical life. The college became the focal point of the revival of Purcell's music; it also featured a lot of new music and upcoming artists like Alfred Deller, Peter Pears and the Amadeus Quartet, who were later to achieve worldwide fame. Meanwhile, in 1943, he was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for refusing, as a pacifist, to comply with conditions of exemption from active war service. He has remained committed to the pacifist cause.

After leaving Morley College, Tippett devoted himself almost entirely to composition, earning a small secondary income from radio talks. He completed his First Symphony in 1945 and then embarked on his first opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*; like his next three operas, it was first produced by the Royal Opera House, though they have all been presented abroad. They have exerted a considerable influence upon his subsequent symphonies, sonatas, concertos and quartets.

Tippett's international reputation blossomed from his sixties onwards, partly through a proliferation of recordings of his music. He is especially esteemed in America, and some of his most significant works (such as his Fourth Symphony and *The Mask of Time*) have been US commissions. Tippett has received many honours and awards; he was made a CBE in 1959, was knighted in 1966, became a Companion of Honour in 1979 and was awarded the Order of Merit in 1983; he is also one of the recipients of the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society.

Throughout his eighties, Tippett remained exceptionally active, composing, conducting and travelling worldwide. His fifth opera, *New Year*, commissioned jointly by Houston Grand Opera, Glyndebourne and the BBC, received its premiere in 1989, was toured all over the UK the following year and the BBC screened their own television production in 1991. Immediately after the opera came *Byzantium*, for soprano and orchestra (premiered in Chicago in 1991 and repeated the same year at the Proms) and a Fifth String Quartet (1992).

Celebrations of Tippett's ninetieth birthday in 1995 opened with the BBC Music Magazine issuing a CD of Symphonies Nos. 2 and 4, played by the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer. A month-long Tippett festival at the Barbican reached a climax with the world premiere of his last major composition, *The Rose Lake*, given by the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Colin Davis. Subsequently, during a two-month tour of the USA and Canada, Tippett heard this greatly acclaimed work performed eleven times—in Boston (under Seiji Ozawa), Toronto (Andrew Davis) and Hartford (Michael Lankester).

Also in 1995, following upon his autobiography, *Those Twentieth Century Blues* (1991), there appeared his definitive collection of essays, *Tippett on Music*, and an idiosyncratic contribution to the Purcell tercentenary celebrations, *Caliban's Song*, part of a newly devised *Tempest Suite* commissioned by the BBC.

In 1996, Tippett moved from the isolated Wiltshire house in which he had lived for over 25 years to South London. That year saw the third production of his opera *The Midsummer Marriage* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. In November the following year, the Stockholm Concert Hall mounted the largest retrospective ever of Tippett's concert music. Sadly, the composer fell ill with pneumonia just after arriving in Stockholm. Although he recovered sufficiently to be brought home, he died there peacefully on January 8, 1998.

Retrieved from the World Wide Web January 25, 2006:  
<http://www.michael-tippett.com/mtbiogeng.htm>.



## Welcome, New Members!

- Tenor:** Harry Crissman  
Bradley Dunkin
- Bass:** Marsh Luther Drege  
Richard Serianni
- Alto:** Diane Neumann  
Jet Schneider  
Leah Tuorinsky



## SCCS First Great-Grandma?

On January 6, soprano Elizabeth Specht became a Great-Grandmother. Russell Lawrence Platt is the son of her granddaughter Marybeth and husband Andrew. They live in Northampton, Massachusetts, where Andrew is a grad student at UMass-Amherst.

Some in the choir might remember Mary as a member of the 2000 Pennsylvania Chorale trek through Germany, Czech Republic, and Austria.

Are there other SCCS members who are Great Grandparents? Send in info on your little darling for the next newsletter, due out in April.

## future member



Brendan Richard Cook entered this world at 11:11 a.m. on November 23, 2005. He impressed all in attendance with his healthy set of lungs. Now two months old, some of his favorite games involve mommy Sarah singing scales and daddy Sean whistling. We're convinced he's got a great ear!

- Alto Sarah Andrews Cook

Alto Hannah Inglesby invites all to attend the presentation of her Senior Culminating Project, the first performance of the first play she wrote and directed:

## The Room of Growing Words

Performed by the Bald Eagle Area Junior High Drama Club

Saturday, February 11 at 7:30 p.m.      Sunday, February 12 at 3:00 p.m.

Bald Eagle Area High School Auditorium, Route 220 in Wingate, PA

Tickets: Adults, \$5; Students & Senior Citizens, \$3; Children under 4, free

## Handel's *Messiah*

- submitted by Nona Uhler

Most people will at least have heard of this great oratorio composed by George Frederic Handel, but have you ever been to a live performance?

These are usually given around Christmas time. A gentleman thought he would like to attend a performance, which was to be held in Cleckheaton Town Hall (U.K.) and, unable to persuade his wife to accompany him, he told her all about it when he got home.

"Oh well" said Cuthbert, "It was all right but not quite what I expected. There wasn't a lot of movement on the stage. In fact, there wasn't a lot of room on the stage. It was full of singers.

"I was sitting there for quite a bit when in comes a load of fellas carrying fiddles. Then they brought in the biggest fiddle I have ever seen. It was so big that they had to wheel it in on castors. Then a little chap rubbed its belly with a stick and you should have heard it groan. It sounded like a cow with croup. Well, all the fiddles joined in and made such a racket. Then they settled down and it all went quiet.

"After about a minute in came the Messiah; well, I think it was him. He was a dapper bloke all dolled up in a white waistcoat with a red carnation in his buttonhole. Yes, I'm sure he must have been the Messiah. Then he picked up a little stick and started waving it at everybody on the stage. They were all staring at him, wondering what was up. Then they started to sing.

"They had not been going long before they were fighting like cats. They wanted to know who was the King of Glory. First one side said HE is the king of glory, and then the other side said HE is the king of glory, and then they went at it hammer and tongs, but it fizzled out in the end.

"Then there was a right to do about some sheep which had gone astray. Some of the singers must have been partial to a bit of mutton because they kept singing 'All we like sheep.' Personally, I like a bit of well-done steak but never mind. Well, I think that them lost sheep must have belonged to one of the singers, because he stood up and said that every mountain and hill should have been laid low. Good, I thought to myself, if they flatten all the mountains they'll be sure to find the sheep that had gone astray.

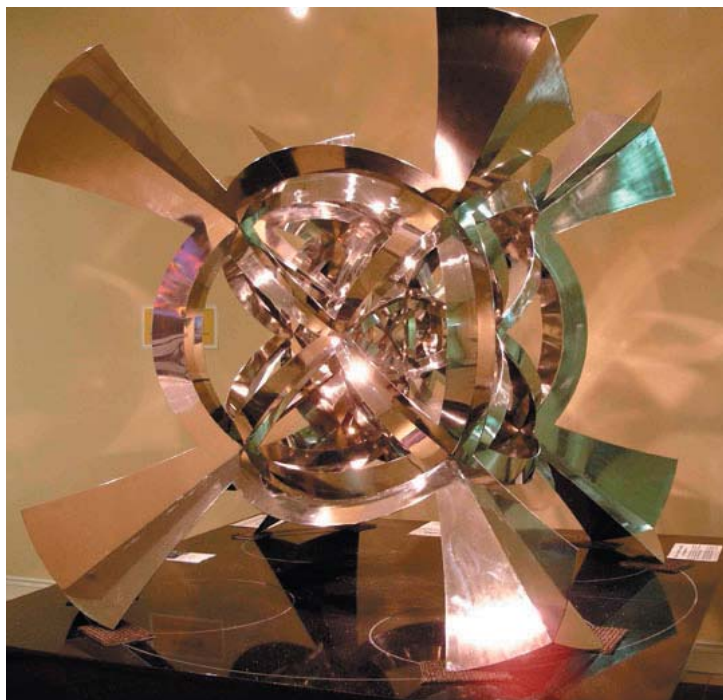
"Then the organist started up and the band joined in, and by gum, they seemed to be getting mad over something, the way they were sawing at those fiddles, I was expecting them to fall apart.

"Then after that all the women stood up and started to sing. Believe me, some of them were a bit past it by looking at them. They must have been 70 if they were a day and they sang 'unto us a child is born' and all the fellas shouted 'wonderful'. I thought it was a bloomin' miracle! Then they all composed themselves a bit and sang about a woman called Joyce Greatly. I had never heard of her, but apparently she's a daughter of Zion, whoever he is.

"I was getting a bit fed up by now. I had been seated for nearly two hours when all of a sudden I got a cramp in my leg. I jumped up at the same time.

All the rest of the audience must have had a cramp it seemed to me, for they all stood up too. Then the choir shouted 'Hallelujah. It's going to rain forever.' Well I'd never thought to bring my brolly so I thought I had best get off home before it started. So seeing I was on my feet, I reckon I'd had my money's worth. Anyway, it was a good do, but I hope they find all those lost sheep."

## Adrian's Sculpture



Tenor Adrian Ocneanu's sculpture "Octacube," the first good visualization of a 4-dimensional regular solid, is on permanent display in the McAllister Building on the Penn State campus. McAllister, located near the HUB, is open to the public Monday-Friday, 7:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. Adrian will give a public talk about the sculpture, "Visualizing Four Dimensions: A Sculpture," on Wednesday, February 1, 2006 at 2:45 p.m. in the Lipcon Auditorium, the Palmer Museum of Art. His presentation is part of the John M. Anderson Artists and Scholars Speakers Series.