



Patron: Samuel West
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OPEN LETTER – FOR IMMEDIATE USE 24 April 2017

Open letter from the Chairman of Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus

The relevance of classical music

We've heard it before, many times; "What possible relevance could classical music have in today's world? It's a music form that is 'dull' and lacks resonance with real life. It's for old people sitting in posh concert halls, nursing a G&T, whose view of the world hasn't changed for the last 40 years. Classical music has nothing to do with me. It doesn't reflect *my* situation, and it has no connection to my experience of this world. It doesn't resonate with me, it doesn't 'touch' me in anyway".

Those speaking such words point to the rise of Punk, Hip Hop, and Rap, suggesting these, and their related genres tell it like it *really* is. And they may well do, but there are always at least two sides to a story, and a narrow view of the world – musical, political, whatever - can be a dangerous thing.

I'm not ashamed to say that I have struggled recently to rehearse what others may consider to be 'safe', 'staid', 'dull' music since my thoughts have turned to war, conflicts, genocide, leaders with hate in their hearts and in their very public words. Who wouldn't when put in the place of the Persecutors to sing "Away with them! Curse them! Kill them! They infect the state". To be answered with "Why? Why? We have no refuge" from the Persecuted.

As I sit politely in my choir bench, flinching whilst Tippett's brutal words scar the air, my mind reels. The words could have been written this very morning rather than inspired by the assassination in 1938 of a German diplomat by a young Jewish refugee, and the Nazi government's reaction in the form of a violent persecution against its Jewish population - the Kristallnacht pogrom of 9 November 1938.

I'm rehearsing *A Child of our Time*, written and composed by the British composer Michael Tippett (1905–98), a conscience objector, jailed for two months during World War 2, and I'm deeply troubled, since I'm sure Tippett would have hoped while composing his oratorio, such dark days as he was writing about would be far behind us. The soprano sings "How can I cherish my man in such days, or become a mother in a world of destruction? How shall I feed my children on so small a wage?" The work talks of the plight of migrants who "shall not work nor draw a dole" and find there is no-one to turn to, that authority does not help them and desperate souls are met with hostility.

The global terror of man's inhumanity to man is writ clear; in "Burn down their houses! Beat in their heads!" we see reflected the wars and conflicts facing us daily from our TVs, massacres, starving and unwanted children. And yet, Tippett's use of poignant spirituals, sees an equally heartfelt desire to see a world where dark forces no longer rise like a flood.

Classical music can, and does both resonate and have deep relevance in today's troubled world, and anything we can do, however minuscule, to help lighten the load of those suffering should and must be done. If such music has even the tiniest possibility to cause a solitary person to stop, consider and perhaps rethink their prejudices and behaviours then this musical form should be seen for what it is – the gentlest of butterfly effects - that with hope and perseverance can be deeply powerful.

Paul Henstridge, Chairman – Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus

- ENDS -

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Links & social media

- www.sheffieldphil.org
- <https://www.facebook.com/SheffieldPhilChorus>
- Twitter - @SheffPhilChorus

About Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus

Founded in 1935 as the resident chorus for the new Philharmonic Society's series of concerts in Sheffield City Hall, Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus was formed from two Sheffield choirs whose origins date back to the 1860s. The modern day Chorus continues to sing with leading conductors and orchestras and fulfils a challenging and exciting programme under the vibrant and inspiring leadership of its Music Director, Darius Battiwalla.

Background

On Saturday, 6th of May the Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus will join forces with the Halle Choir to perform the secular oratorio *A Child of our Time*, written and composed by the British composer Michael Tippett (1905–98). Tippett was a conscience objector, jailed for two months during WW2, while composing his oratorio, which was inspired by the assassination in 1938 of a German diplomat by a young Jewish refugee, and the Nazi government's reaction in the form of a violent persecution against its Jewish population - the Kristallnacht pogrom of 9 November 1938.

Tippett used a traditional three-part oratorio format, structured in the manner of Bach's Passions, but with the poignant spirituals "Steal Away"; "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See, Lord"; "Go Down, Moses"; "O, By and By"; and "Deep River" carrying out the role allocated by Bach to chorales. The cries for help of refugees are matched by the selfish calls for rejection, but Tippett then used "Deep River" as the finale in order to express the hope of a fresh spring after a long, dark winter.

Such calls are particularly poignant for Sheffield singers since Sheffield is a City of Sanctuary – part of the movement to build a culture of welcome and hospitality for refugees and asylum-seekers. In 2007, with the support of the City Council, Sheffield became the UK's first 'City of Sanctuary' for asylum-seekers and refugees, and is a city that takes pride in the welcome it offers to people in need of safety.

Sheffield's own Ryan Wigglesworth (a former student at King Edward VII School) will conduct the Halle orchestra, the Halle Choir and the Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus with soloists Elizabeth Llewellyn (soprano), Madeleine Shaw (mezzo-soprano), Joshua Ellicott (tenor) and James Platt (bass). Tickets are subject to booking fees and are priced at £21, £19 and £16, £5 for students & under 18s. Available online at www.sheffieldcityhall.co.uk, through the ticket hotline on 0114 2 789 789, and in person at the Sheffield City Hall Box Office.