

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO  
MICHAEL TIPPETT'S  
*THE BLUE GUITAR*

By

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## ABSTRACT

This study is a performer's guide to Michael Tippett's *The Blue Guitar*. Included is a detailed analysis of Tippett's work, treatment of form, structure, style, language and historical significance. The study will also trace and explore how Pablo Picasso, Wallace Stevens and Michael Tippett realized the subject of the 'blue guitar' in the arts of painting, poetry and music.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1934, the poet Wallace Stevens attended a Cubist exhibition in Hartford, Connecticut, which included some of Pablo Picasso's works. Stevens was struck by a painting featuring a guitar player. The painting was Picasso's *Old Guitarist*, completed in 1904 during his Blue Period. It so impressed Stevens that he was inspired to write a thirty-two-stanza poem entitled, *The Man with the Blue Guitar*. For Michael Tippett (1905 - ) the poem acted as a similar source of inspiration for his guitar sonata, *The Blue Guitar*.

Although much of Tippett's music has been the focus of extensive research, little has been written on *The Blue Guitar*. This study serves as a performer's guide to Michael Tippett's *The Blue Guitar*. Besides a detailed analysis of Tippett's work, the study will also examine the creation of selected independent works in the genres of art, poetry and music, and the evolution of the 'blue guitar' subject matter, which served as the inspirational material for Picasso's painting, Stevens's poem and Tippett's guitar sonata.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE OLD GUITARIST

Pablo Picasso was born October 25, 1881 in the Spanish coastal city of Málaga, and from his early childhood showed an extraordinary talent for art. His father Don José Ruiz, a local artist of little repute, was his first teacher.<sup>1</sup>

[Don José] was an academic artist who worked slavishly for his realistic effects. Don José had become locally celebrated by now as a painter of pigeons. They were not only his favorite subject but also his commercial trademark. If you happened to live in Málaga and were looking for an oil painting full of pigeons to hang in your living room, Don José was the painter whose wares you bought. Trapped in his own competent level of mediocrity, Don José must have had the same sense of mission (and redemption) that an ex-athlete of no particular renown might feel if his own demonstrated exceptional ability at his father's sport. The father would now have a future.<sup>2</sup>

Picasso's first artistic period (1896-1900) was one of imitation and discovery, for it was at this time that he acquainted himself with the Impressionist, Catalán Gothic and Romanesque styles, as well as intimately studying the works of El Greco. This time served as an artistic foundation, subsequently leading to the development of his own voice.<sup>3</sup>

The Blue Period originated with Picasso's immersion into Parisian culture around 1901.

Towards the end of 1901 Picasso began to use a pervasive blue tone in his paintings, which soon became almost monochrome. Just why Picasso came to use so much blue over so long a period has never been convincingly explained. Many of Cézanne's late paintings were saturated with blue; Matisse had painted several large figure studies in blue just before the turn of the century though these were

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred H. Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), 14.

<sup>2</sup>Norman Mailer, *Picasso* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

probably not known to Picasso; and Carriere, whose work Picasso did admire, used a gloomy monochrome, though it was gray not blue. Some Catalan critics insist upon the influence of Isidre Nonell, whose dejected figures do at times closely resemble Picasso's, but Nonell was in Barcelona during 1901 at the very time Picasso's blue period was maturing in Paris. Whatever its source--and it probably was from within Picasso himself--the lugubrious tone was in harmony with the murky and sometimes heavy-handed pathos of his subject matter--poverty-stricken mothers, wan harlots with femme fatale masks, and beggars.<sup>4</sup>

Picasso made four trips from Barcelona to Paris between October 1900 and April 1904, with the intention of staying in Paris,

. . . but he could not make the visits last, and three times crept back to Barcelona defeated by his inability to maintain an independent life. Only after he had relived his separation problems in reality (the Paris trips) and symbolically (through his art) could he sever the ties binding him to Barcelona, stay in Paris, and become a permanent French resident, though never a naturalized citizen.<sup>5</sup>

The 'Paris life' had an incredible effect on Picasso and his art. During the first visit to Paris in October 1901, Picasso, along with fellow artists Manuel Pallares and Carlos Casagemas, was overcome by the Parisian culture.

The Impressionists, Steinlen, Toulouse-Lautrec, van Gogh, Gauguin, the "Nabis," all had something different to offer him. He also devoured everything he saw in the Louvre. This artistic gorging resulted in a succession of violent oscillations in style and subject (1900-1901). Picasso first lightened his palette, then brightened it and ultimately allowed it to become pervaded by the color blue. He tried Impressionist brushwork, then a divisionist technique and finally composed his pictures out of simplified silhouettes like Gauguin.<sup>6</sup>

Although greatly influenced by the French artists, it was the sexual freedom of Paris that had an even greater effect on his work.

He celebrated his emancipation immediately in a series of portrayals of lovers locked in passionate embraces. In the most intense of these, the lovers seem almost to fuse together in their urgency, and the large size of the man lends a rather brutish air to his sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>John Richardson, *Picasso: An American Tribute, April 25-May 19, 1962* (New York: M. Knoedler, 1962).

<sup>7</sup>Mary Mathews Gedo, *Picasso: Art as Autobiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 32.

Parisian life, although fruitful for Picasso's artistry, was a destructive force on his friend Casagemas, who committed suicide.

He [Casagemas] no longer studied or painted, but only drank, brooded, and muttered about suicide. Picasso grew frightened, most likely because he knew about a previous suicide attempt Casagemas had made in Barcelona. To prevent a repetition, Picasso maintained almost constant vigilance. But nothing helped; Casagemas grew steadily more despondent, and Picasso finally hesitated to leave his side even to visit the Louvre . . . as the holiday season approached, Picasso decided to take Casagemas, via Barcelona, to Malaga, where the Ruiz family planned to spend the Christmas season, in hope that the sunshine and holiday atmosphere of Andalusia would restore him. . . . The holiday in Malaga proved disastrous. Picasso quarreled with his family and relatives, who disapproved of his new Bohemian style of dress and his long unkept hair; furthermore, the change of scenery did Casagemas no good. After following him on a dizzying round of debauchery, Picasso abandoned him and fled to Madrid. Casagemas, freed from his guardian, returned to Paris, where he committed suicide on February 17, 1901.<sup>8</sup>

At first the death of Casagemas seemed to have had little affect on Picasso, however, he soon became absorbed with his friend's death.

In the autumn, Picasso's mood changed abruptly, and his pleasure in Paris vanished. During the months, which followed Casagemas's suicide, there had been no evidence in Picasso's work that he was brooding over this event, even though Casagemas had lived in the same building the painter now occupied and had shot himself in the café a few doors away. Suddenly Picasso grew preoccupied with Casagemas's death. Although he had not attended his friend's funeral or seen the corpse, Picasso did a series of paintings and drawings showing Casagemas in his coffin, the wound in his temple realistically depicted.<sup>9</sup>

Picasso's preoccupation grew into obsession and guilt, which ultimately caused a dramatic change in his style and subject matter. His belief that his thoughts possessed "*magical destructive powers,*" and as a result caused his friend's death, "made him vulnerable to such an obsession."<sup>10</sup>

This tragedy also confirmed another terror, which had haunted Picasso since childhood: to him, separation (from the father) always had seemed like death in miniature. Casagemas's death had demonstrated that such apprehensions could

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

become reality. After all, Casagemas had admired Picasso, had been persuaded to accompany him first to Paris, then to Malaga, where Picasso, disgusted, had abruptly abandoned him to his fate; and Casagemas had killed himself soon after! . . . moreover, that Casagemas's mother had died of shock upon being informed of her son's suicide.<sup>11</sup>

Many reasons have been given for the inception of the Blue Period, material deprivation, poor living conditions and psychological effects associated with the death of Casagemas, however, a definitive explanation for its beginning has never been established. Although his poverty has frequently been cited as a major catalyst for the inception of the Blue Period, Picasso was able to sustain himself quite comfortably in comparison to his contemporaries.

In short, the stories about Picasso's suffering from poverty during these years seem grossly exaggerated. He was not successful, but he was not living a more deprived life than he had during the period just preceding it. Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley suffered far more severe deprivations during the years when they brought Impressionism into being, yet they turned out the sunniest canvases imaginable. Those stories about Picasso's deprivation form another chapter in his personal mythology.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the effect of Casagemas's death cannot be dismissed as a driving force of this emerging style.

The picture showing Casagemas in his coffin marked a transition not only in Picasso's mood, but in his style and subject matter as well. He dropped the free pointillist brushwork he had been using in favor of painting large areas of fused color. The silhouettes of figures received more emphasis, with contours heavily outlined in black. His rich, proto-fauvist palette became muted and gradually replaced by a dominant blue which became more and more pervasive until even the skin tones were rendered in blue. As the fall deepened into winter, Picasso's blues also deepened, and his painted surfaces became thinner and thinner until all traces of rich, van Gogh-like surfaces had disappeared. They were replaced by pensive, solitary Harlequins and Pierrots, by lonely women drinkers, and above all, by sad sentimentalized mothers who clung to their babies.<sup>13</sup>

The prominence of the color blue must not be overlooked, the reasons perhaps lying in its moody connotation and its otherworldly symbolism, which is in accord with his subjects and the expressive forms of his paintings.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>13</sup>Gedo, 39.

<sup>14</sup>Wilhelm Boeck and Jaime Sabartes, *Picasso* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1955), 120.

[The paintings are] characterized by the color blue, a cold rarefied blue. But this blue is not only a color, it created an atmosphere that is in keeping with the subjects, with the human character of these paintings which represent the outcast of society--blind beggars, itinerant musicians, tramps--those who spend their lives in wretched poverty or humble servitude. Picasso paints such characters, a guitar player or an old Jew, with the sympathy and condolence of a man who belongs to the fringe of society. And in order to express their feeling of solitude, abandonment and misery, in order to evoke a world without comfort and without hope, he chose the highest order of symbolism--the sullen and severe blue of an early winter's morning. . . . The choice of the color blue is therefore not arbitrary, nor its limitation to a single tone simply an aesthetic device; the Blue Period is the artist's expression of the human condition seen vis-à-vis his fellow human beings and society. . . .<sup>15</sup>

The monochrome use of color serves to enhance his subjects. These subjects were an undeniable slice of life in Barcelona: beggars, dejected prostitutes, the blind and poor. The first two years of the Blue Period were dominated by his preoccupation with pathetic women; mother figures who seemed to represent the anxiety of separating from his mother and prostitutes who symbolize Picasso's emerging sexual life.<sup>16</sup>

His preoccupation with pathetic female subjects was not out of character for a turn-of-the-century man from Barcelona.

Prostitutes who were not perceived as plainly sensual came across as pathetic. . . . While views of prostitutes might vary from one community to another, there was a remarkable consensus among men of all classes about poor, working women. An innocent female victim was, they agreed, an object of pity, especially if she was a virgin or dedicated mother. . . . Most working women were often only a few weeks' wages away from prostitution, which was the only social security they had when joblessness hit.<sup>17</sup>

In autumn 1903, Picasso changed his female subjects to male.

A group of pitiful new male characters occupied his blue world; their lot seemed even sadder than that of the earlier female figures, because these men were not only indigent, but blind, psychotic, mentally defected, or elderly as well.<sup>18</sup>

There have been many explanations as to why so many of Picasso's male subjects were blind. The overwhelming number of blind subjects during the last two years of the Blue Period is not surprising. The abundance of blind beggars on the streets of Barcelona may

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<sup>15</sup>Hans Jaffe, *Picasso* (London: Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd., 1970), 12.

<sup>16</sup>Gedo, 53.

<sup>17</sup>Temma Kaplan, *Red City, Blue Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 79 and 85.

<sup>18</sup>Gedo, 52-53.

have struck a chord in Picasso.<sup>19</sup> Other explanations, however, have been given for Picasso's choice of material. One explanation is that Picasso's father was the equivalent of a blinded artist, a painter too incapacitated to work.<sup>20</sup> Another explanation is Picasso's guilt over contracting a venereal disease, a consequence of his association with prostitutes.

Picasso feared blindness as a result of his disease. He imagined this disease destroying the very center of him, and this subjective vision corresponded with the socially induced self-destruction, which he saw all around him.<sup>21</sup>

Despite his fixation with blindness Picasso's subjects were the everyday people he saw in the cafes and streets of Barcelona.

The subject of the Blue Period is often the life of the artist as a Bohemian and an outcast, a man apart, symbolized by the lonely figures of Pierrots and beggars. It was the life Picasso was leading himself. . . . Picasso's men and women inhabit the no-man's land of cafes, too apathetic, too homeless or too preoccupied to move.<sup>22</sup>

Picasso felt a deep compassion for his subjects and made them the focal point of the paintings. The elimination of background and color serve to magnify the subjects' presence.

These wretched figures emaciated by hunger and vice are unthinkable in any other than this sorrowful tonality, which seems to be one of their attributes. The color in no small measure transports these outcasts to an idealized realm in which they are no longer beggars, prostitutes, or mental cases, and are surrounded by an invisible aura of martyrdom that restores their innocence. The painter has evidently been chastened by his own experience: his earlier irrelevant and critical attitude toward society has yielded to one of deep compassion for suffering mankind. For the same reason, large individualized figures now dominate the foreground. The aim is to give heroic stature to a social class that previous art portrayed only realistically.<sup>23</sup>

The posture and shape of his Blue Period subjects seem to have been influenced by previous Spanish painters, mainly El Greco.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Anthony Blunt and Phoebe Pool, *Picasso, the Formative Years* (New York Graphic Society, 1962), 21.

<sup>20</sup>Gedo, 52-53.

<sup>21</sup>John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1965), 43-44.

<sup>22</sup>Blunt and Pool, 18-19.

<sup>23</sup>Boeck and Sabartes, 123.

<sup>24</sup>Blunt and Pool, 21.

Throughout Picasso's career he had again and again used figure styles, which seem closely related to the Mannerist paintings of the 16th century. The elongation, the insistent pathos, the cramped postures or affected gestures of the *Old Guitarist* . . . were probably influenced by the great mannerists Morales and El Greco. Picasso had known El Greco's art probably before 1896.<sup>25</sup>

In the works of El Greco,

Picasso seems to have found encouragement for his distortions, particularly for his emaciated legs, fine fingers, and elongated faces, and for cold colors and chalky lights.<sup>26</sup>

The *Old Guitarist* is typical of Picasso's late Blue Period paintings. The reproductions of the original masterpiece can be found in the "Helen Birch Barlett Memorial Collection," in the Art Institute of Chicago. The rather large oil on wood painting (122.3 x 82.5 cm.) was conceived in 1903 while Picasso was in Barcelona.<sup>27</sup>

Social conditions in Barcelona were deteriorating. Anarchists and conservatives were both on the march; the slums of Barcelona were renowned throughout Europe for their abysmal living conditions; strikes and general strikes had increased; workers had been shot in the street. Picasso joined no socialist or anarchist group, but the slums through which he often wandered offered squalor to intensify the melancholy he brought to his canvases. We must never lose sight of his prophetic sensitivity to the real intimations offered by events. The injustice of social life in Europe at the turn of the century was probably as palpable to him as leprosy or earthquake – a sizeable remark – but then, who has given us more intense portraits of concentration camp victims before half of them were even born? *The Blind Beggar* and *The Old Jew* both painted in 1903, can serve as emblems for 1944 in Auschwitz.<sup>28</sup>

Whether this painting was a statement against the treatment of the destitute on the streets of Barcelona is not known, however, the treatment of this subject is a sympathetic one. The old man with his gaping mouth and tattered clothes conjures pity. The addition of the blindness further complicates his condition, in that his method of begging is playing an instrument. The expression of the old man is one of exhaustion, whether this is a result of playing the instrument, the condition with which he is stricken, homelessness, or life itself, is left for the onlooker to decide.

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<sup>25</sup>Barr, 29.

<sup>26</sup>Blunt and Pool, 21.

<sup>27</sup>Barr, 29.

<sup>28</sup>Mailer, 76.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MAN WITH THE BLUE GUITAR

Wallace Stevens was born October 2, 1879 in Reading, Pennsylvania.<sup>29</sup> Considered one of America's foremost poets of the twentieth century, Stevens was educated at Harvard University and worked in New York City as a journalist. While in New York, he completed a law degree at New York University in 1904 and in 1916 joined the insurance firm of Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, in Hartford, Connecticut. He became the vice-president of the firm in 1934 and despite his increasing success as a poet, remained with the company until his death, August 2, 1955.

Stevens's first works were published in 1914 in *Poetry Magazine*, followed by a collection of poetry published in 1923 under the title *Harmonium*. Even though the latter collection sold fewer than one hundred copies, it contains some of his best-known works. Stevens would not publish again until 1930, whereupon his tone was dramatically different from his earlier works.

Although he seemed to have entered upon a middle period, there is a sense in which Stevens had no middle period. For, from the time he began to publish again in 1930 until the publication of *The Man With the Blue Guitar* in 1937, he appeared to be groping for a way out of the spiritual depression caused by the economic Depression. . . . The tone of his poetry in the 1930's was most of all one of self-conscious meagerness and timidity, a hopeless yearning for transcendence or escape. . . . Stevens tried in vain to accomplish this transformation before the war by bringing his experience to an inner, personal (rather than an outer, social) focus.<sup>30</sup>

In 1937, Stevens attended an art exhibit of Picasso's works, at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut. Among the works presented in the exhibit was *The Old Guitarist*. This exhibition, however, was not merely a showcase for one painting but a retrospective of Picasso's developing views of reality.<sup>31</sup> Included in the exhibit were

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<sup>29</sup>This biography of Stevens is adapted from William Burney, *Wallace Stevens* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1968).

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 62-63.

<sup>31</sup>Judith Rinde Sheridan, *The Picasso Connection: Wallace Stevens 'The Man With the Blue Guitar,' Arizona Quarterly* (Spring 1979); 77-89.

seventy-six other works, which dated from Picasso's earliest works to the Cubist Period. It was *The Old Guitarist* that inspired Stevens to write the thirty-three-stanza poem, *The Man With The Blue Guitar*. In a letter dated March 17, 1937, Stevens wrote,

During the winter I have written something like 30 or 40 short pieces, of which about 25 seem to be coming through. They deal with the relation or balance between imagined things and real things, which, as you know, is a constant source of trouble to me.<sup>32</sup>

The result was a thirty-three-stanza poem published in October 1937. The poem consists of three eleven-stanza sections, with the last three stanzas of each section serving as summaries.<sup>33</sup>

In the first ten stanzas the people command the poet to lift them out of their misery without changing them; and the poet replies that they want a mechanical, sentimental, materialistic composure and not nobility in the face of death, which is what his detached reflective art is concerned with. His art would only satirize them, or make them show how pathetic they are. . . . In the second part, the poet, seeing only the people with their petty desires reflected in his imagination, wonders if he has any identity apart from that reflection, especially if, as pure reflectiveness. . . . he reflects a world that is bare and beastly. His bitterness at this possibility indicates. . . some imagination, though perhaps it is an imagination no less pathetic than the escapist fantasies of the people. . . . In part three, the poet shows how his imagination and his poetry embody the destructive as well as the creative forces of reality itself; therefore, his poetry is not an escape from but an affirmation of *things as they are*. . . .<sup>34</sup>

Years after writing the poem, Stevens rejected a direct connection to Picasso's work. In a letter to Renato Poggioli, who translated the poem into Italian,

(1 July 1953) I had no particular painting of Picasso's in mind and even though it might help sell the book to have one of his paintings on the cover, I don't think we ought to reproduce anything of Picasso's. . . .<sup>35</sup>

This was a characteristic attempt by Stevens "to evade any suggestion that his work is dependent on someone else."<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the poem contradicts the letter and affirms the connection to Picasso,

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<sup>32</sup>Robert Rehder, *The Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), 150.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Burney, 83.

<sup>35</sup>Rehder, 311.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Is this picture of Picasso's, this "hoard  
Of destruction," a picture of ourselves . . . (XV)<sup>37</sup>

The phrase "*hoard of destruction*" is taken from an English translation of a remark Picasso made to the art critic, Christian Zervos,<sup>38</sup>

*Chez moi, un tableau est une somme de destructions.*<sup>39</sup>  
(In my works, a picture is a burden of destructions.)

Using *The Old Guitarist* as his inspiration, Stevens rejected several interpretations of the paintings, which the viewer may be predisposed to accept.

The guitarist's pose recalls the pained suspended figure of Christ on the cross, deliberately inviting allegorical interpretations. Blinded and burdened, is the guitarist meant to stand for the suffering of all men? His pose also suggests the fetal position, postulating that creation, the birth of art, is generated by suffering. Furthermore, the blindness of the guitarist may signify that music, the art of the guitarist, issues from an internal process of the mind. Since the guitarist is blind, his notions of reality differ from the perceptions of those who see and therefore his music will reflect a private vision. Because the guitarist may be a beggar as well, the painting is open to sociological commentary on the human condition as typified by a discarded portion of the population. Aware of all of these potential interpretations, Wallace Stevens's poem finally rejects such imposed theological, artistic, and sociological speculations.<sup>40</sup>

*The Man With the Blue Guitar* was Stevens's first poem that fully explored his "reality-  
imagination complex."<sup>41</sup>

For each individual the imagination comes first and the world afterwards. The baby, with its powerful but underdeveloped and imprecise senses and without any experience or understanding of the world, dwells in a fantasy realm. That is transformed only gradually into reality. This mutually enriching interplay between the imagination and reality is the process that creates the self and art.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>The complete poem is found in Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 133.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Christian Zervos, "Conversation avec Picasso" *Cashiers d'Art* VII 10 (1935), 173.

<sup>40</sup>Sheridan, 81.

<sup>41</sup>Rehder, 150.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 133.

Picasso's influence was felt upon Stevens's development of the "reality-  
imagination complex," for it was Picasso who originally dealt with the perceptions of  
"reality and imagination."

Picasso and his fellow Cubist theoreticians probed the difficult problem of the  
character of reality and the way in which art captures that reality. . . . The work of  
art becomes a reality apart from its source of inspiration.<sup>43</sup>

Picasso concluded that the belief in one reality is fallacy.<sup>44</sup> The artist must free himself  
from the web of tradition; a freedom Picasso found in Cubism. Like his artistic  
counterpart, Stevens was interested in releasing himself from his prior influences and  
belief systems. His freedom was realized through his "reality-imagination complex."

Both men announce through their chosen medium that reality is dynamic, as  
constantly changing as man's perceptions constantly change, thus all notions of an  
ultimate truth, a static form of reality, or final representation of the nature of  
things, are rejected, self and art.<sup>45</sup>

In connection with his "reality-imagination complex," Stevens states

while, of course, I come down from the past, the past is my own and not  
something marked Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc. I know of no one who has been  
particularly important to me. My reality-imagination complex is entirely my own  
even though I see it in others.<sup>46</sup>

From the onset of the poem, Stevens establishes the conflict between the two  
concepts, which effectuates the power of art to alter reality. The opening stanza of the  
poem presents the conflict between reality and imagination.

The man bent over his guitar  
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They say, 'You have a blue guitar,  
You do not play things as they are.'

The man replied, 'Things as they are  
Are changed upon the blue guitar.'  
(Stanza I)

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<sup>43</sup>Sheridan, 77-78.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>45</sup>Sheridan, 77.

<sup>46</sup>D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin  
Books Ltd., 1964), 64.

The man with the blue guitar sits in the cross-legged posture of Picasso's *'The Old Guitarist,'* trying to fit reality to his instrument as the tailor ('shearsman') tries to fit reality to his pattern. The simplicity of the scene is deliberate, the 'green' [reality] of things as they are and the 'blue' [imagination] of things imagined standing distinct and without subtlety. . . .<sup>47</sup>

The line "Things as they are" is a cornerstone motive which becomes more relevant as the poem develops. In the first stanza alone, Stevens states this motive three times.

The simplicity of the debate between guitarist and audience is reinforced by the almost childish rhymes. "*Things as they are*" and "*things as they are . . . upon the blue guitar*" seem to require no definition, until the audience demands "*a tune beyond us, yet ourselves.*" It is this demand that poetry must not detach itself from reality, but present a credible version of it. . . .<sup>48</sup>

The quagmire of presenting a viable reality, however, may be out of reach for the artist.

The poem's most significant question is implied, "Is it possible for an artist to create things exactly as they are?" The poem will come to parody the very notion that "*things exactly as they are*" can ever be known and to assert that reality is a function of a single or many moments. Reality can never be located and exists in the realm of the imagination between the object itself, the artist's perception of that object, and then the artist's representation of what he perceives.<sup>49</sup>

The Cubists, aware of the impracticality of only one perspective of reality, advocated the artist was responsible for presenting his own.

There is nothing real outside ourselves; there is nothing real except the coincidence of a sensation and an individual mental tendency. . . . An object has not one absolute form: it has many: it has as many as are planes in the region of perception.<sup>50</sup>

Picasso agreed that true reality was unattainable. The artist is trained to reproduce images that his predecessors painted and assumes these images to be true. Yet, there is "no assurance that this image is truer than other images created in other epochs."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>A. Walton Litz, *Introspective Voyager* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 239.

<sup>48</sup>Litz, 239.

<sup>49</sup>Sheridan, 78.

<sup>50</sup>Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, 'Cubism,' in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artist and Critics*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 214.

<sup>51</sup>Dore Ashton, *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 18-19.

Once it is understood that at best an artistic replication of nature is not the thing itself but a sign, an image accepted by the viewer as the object, then the sign can assume many forms to embody the dynamism of man's perceptions of objects. For example, a guitar need not meet the traditional expectations of the viewer, since a guitar, no matter how it is conceived and executed in an artistic medium, is only an imagined reflection of a dynamic reality. In other words, while an object exists, it is perceived by man in many different ways. Any sign of that object is only one reflection of the way the object is viewed, so an artist or different artists would each time attempt to signify that object differently.<sup>52</sup>

The artist's perception of an object or idea, bestows upon him the authority to interpret his reality. Stevens's parallel of Picasso's subject as the poet, is an essential key towards understanding the power of the artist to interpret reality.

And the color, the overcast blue  
Of the air, in which the blue guitar

Is a form, described but difficult,  
And am I merely a shadow hunched

Above the arrowy, still strings,  
The maker of a thing yet to be made;

The color like a thought that grows  
Out of a mood, the tragic robe

Of the actor, half his gesture, half  
His speech, the dress of his meaning, silk

Sodden with his melancholy words,  
The weather of his stage, himself.

(Stanza IX)

The figure of the poet emerges from the drab landscape dressed in its weather, its '*tragic robe*,' and becomes its spokesman.<sup>53</sup>

Stevens insists that art is only a transformation of reality.

... the elements of *The Old Guitarist* are a likeness. He isolates the function of the color blue and insists that it is a form which is "*like a thought that grows out of a mood*," and nothing more.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Sheridan, 79.

<sup>53</sup> Litz, 242.

<sup>54</sup>Sheridan, 81-82.

He compares the guitarist (poet) to an actor who utilizes masquerade and gesture to arouse melancholia, one of the four humors which on the Elizabethan stage was portrayed by stilted conventions in stance and attire. Such postures are clearly pantomimic, humorously imitative of human actions. The sentimentality of the painting is emphasized by the use of “sodden” to describe the pervasive melancholy. The actor’s performance is like “the weather of his stage,” a wind which blows hot air.<sup>55</sup>

No statement is more important for the understanding of Stevens’s work than his declaration, “Poetry is the subject of the poem.”

Poetry is the subject of the poem  
From this the poem issues and

To this returns. Between the two,  
Between issue and return, there is

An absence in reality,  
Things as they are. Or so we say.

But are these separate? Is it  
An absence for the poem, which acquires

Its true appearances there, sun’s green,  
Cloud’s red, earth feeling, sky that thinks?

From there it takes. Perhaps it gives,  
In the universal intercourse.

(Stanza XXII)

Because “Poetry is the subject of the poem,” Stevens allows the reader the freedom of multiple interpretations.

The description emphasizes the degree to which we inhabit the imagination. The world is conceived as somewhere other and at a remove from us. The phrase ‘absence in reality’ endows the poem with a life of its own separate from the poet and appears to reverse the ordinary values of absence and presence. The poem fills with reality when it is absent so that it can be said to come into existence when it is not there. This paradox causes the poet to question his formulation: ‘Is it an absence for the poem . . .?’<sup>56</sup>

It is a difficult task to place Stevens’s poem in any one category, due to its unique structure and language.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Rehder, 174.

Stevens's *The Man with the Blue Guitar* defies exact explication, perhaps because critical language relies on the traditional referential quality of words, while Stevens's poetry does not. Instead, Stevens's poem is a layering of poetic theory and application. Like Cubists who explored the use of paint, color, and geometric form, the poem investigates the artistic medium of language and the ways in which reality is transformed in the imagination and then projected in verse. At times words capture the images of Cubism, "the expansion and diffusion" of forms. In other moments the sounds of words generate the verse; one sound leads to another and meaning is totally abandoned. Aware that poetry is not the reaction of "things exactly as they are" Stevens is freed from the need to organize language logically. Often pronouns cannot be traced to antecedents and personae become confused. While subject, verb, and object seem always to be present, grammar does not necessarily elucidate<sup>57</sup>

The thirty-three stanzas of the poem are characterized by their independence from one another. Stevens's *The Man with the Blue Guitar* is not bound by any traditional rules of language or composition. The visible lack of structure creates the sensation that the poem might be indefinite and any conclusion is subjective. Certainly the end that Stevens provides (Stanza XXXIII) is no more conclusive or final than many of the others. The emphasis of the continuing activity of the guitarist-poet is of a man improvising a world in which to live. The short lines, terse, epigrammatic statements, the independence of the individual sections and the repeated words balance this looseness. They are all part of the poet's insistent concentration on his subject and it is *this* concentration, the effort to make a definitive statement in every section, which makes Stevens's point: that every conclusion is temporary because interrelations of the imagination and reality are beyond words. . . . The guitar and its music are our only stability.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 154.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MICHAEL TIPPETT

Michael Tippett was born January 2, 1905, in London; the second child born to Henry Tippett and Isabel Kemp.<sup>59</sup>

His father, of Cornish descent, was a lawyer, land investor and, ultimately, a hotelier in the south of France--an enterprising businessman, free thinker and liberal humanist. His mother was a trained nurse and, at various times in her life, novelist, playwright, painter, and public speaker. That she was a person of strong social ideals can be seen in her activities as a Labor Party sympathizer, suffragette (once imprisoned), and pacifist. She played piano and sang, though like her husband she was not particularly musical.<sup>60</sup>

In 1909, the family hired a nursery governess, to serve as nanny and tutor for the children. Their schooling included end of term examinations and holiday vacations, which coincided with the British public schools. Also included in the boy's scholastic regimen were piano lessons. In 1914, he enrolled at Brookfield Preparatory, beginning his conventional schooling.

In 1913 my brother was sent to Brookfield Preparatory School in Dorset, and I followed a year later. I arrived, indeed, in September 1914, just at the outbreak of the war. Leaving home like this was in itself frightening but I was determined to succeed. I became good at Greek and Latin, and even better at French. I continued piano lessons until they were stopped. Like all other 'inessential' subjects, such as horse-riding, music was dropped from the curriculum as 'un-patriotic' during wartime.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and His Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 2-4.

<sup>60</sup>Gordon Theil, *Michael Tippett: A Bio-Bibliography* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>61</sup>Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth-Century Blues: An Autobiography* (London: Random Century Group Ltd., 1991), 7.

In 1918, his father wanted to hire a private tutor for the younger Tippett, but his mother's desire to have him attend public school prevailed. That summer he was awarded a scholarship and began attending Fettes College in September.

I won a classics scholarship to Fettes College. . . . Fettes had its strong point. I was able to pursue my love of classics, and my piano lessons were resumed. But there were many disagreeable aspects of traditional public school life. I hated the system whereby the boys in each year bullied those in the year below, so I decided to persuade my fellow pupils not to observe this ritual - and succeeded. .

<sup>62</sup>

Fettes was a typical British school, where, as Kemp states,

Bullying and sadism were commonplace and regarded as tacitly necessary stages in the tempering of young gentleman. The aging headmaster, a distant and awesome figure, left the running of the school to the prefects and housemasters, who zealously upheld the principle that the younger boys were the property of the older.<sup>63</sup>

A sexual scandal involving the headmaster and certain boys (one of whom was Tippett himself), forced Tippett to break the unwritten law of schoolboy confidence.

My naive confessions on the subject in a letter to my mother brought my parents immediately over from France: they threatened to publicize the goings-on unless the headmaster was removed.<sup>64</sup>

Tippett spent one more unpleasant semester at Fettes College before entering Stamford Grammar School in Lincolnshire, in April 1920.

In comparison to his previous school, Stamford was completely different in character; the tuition was as much as only the extracurricular activities at Fettes College. It was here that he decided to pursue a future in music.

If I was inclined to be negative about Stamford School generally, I did at the time make a positive decision to go into music. There was a piano teacher in the town, Mrs. Tinkler, who had previously taught Malcolm Sargent: she took me through some of Bach's 48 preludes and fugues, some Beethoven sonatas, Schubert and Chopin, and I used to practice every morning while the rest of the school did PT.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>63</sup>Kemp, 8.

<sup>64</sup>Tippett, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Tippett, 11.

Although his musical skills won him favor at school (playing for assemblies and hymn singing), Tippett's atheism and political views began his reputation of a "subversive character who needed taming."<sup>66</sup> In 1922, due to his boycott of house-prayers, the headmaster at Stamford notified his parents that Tippett's scholarship would be withdrawn.

Tippett was now seventeen-and-a-half and his parents initially planned to send their gifted but wayward son to Oxford or Cambridge, where he could obtain the qualifications necessary for a secure and well paid job. But by this time Tippett himself was determined to study music and become a composer. Even though he still had no clearer conception than did his parents on what being a composer meant, he firmly rejected all proposals for an alternative. His father wrote for advice from the headmaster, who replied that the idea was absurd, and from Malcolm Sargent, who thought the same. It was then decided that the only thing to do was for Tippett to train as a concert pianist. So he was put in lodgings in Stamford in order to study with Mrs. Tinkler.<sup>67</sup>

It was during this period Tippett embarked on teaching himself composition.

I decided that if one could buy books on how to make furniture or do plumbing, one ought to be able to buy one on how to compose. So I went to a bookshop in the town, where in their catalogues, they found the title, *Musical Composition*, by Charles Stanford. This was ordered, and when it arrived I began my compositional studies.<sup>68</sup>

As Ian Kemp explains,

In the second chapter, headed "Technique," he found examples of the differences between harmony and counterpoint which settled the matter. He was going to write contrapuntal music.<sup>69</sup>

According to Tippett,

My artistic life has been full of accidents of this sort; for Stanford's book led me straight away into the world of contrapuntal music - and that became the basis of all my compositional efforts for decades to come.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Kemp, 12.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>68</sup>Tippett, 11.

<sup>69</sup>Kemp, 12.

<sup>70</sup>Tippett, 11.

His piano teacher, Mrs. Tinkler, introduced him to the organist at St. Mary's Church, who agreed to teach him 'species' counterpoint in return for singing in the church choir.<sup>71</sup> Tippett enrolled at the Royal College of Music six months later.

My father, meanwhile, had a chance meeting with a Doctor of Music on a train. He told my parents of the existence of the Royal College of Music in London, of which they were entirely ignorant. On condition that I too would become a Doctor of Music, they agreed to support me at college. My interview with Sir Hugh Allen, the principal, revealed only the extent of my ignorance. Nevertheless, I was accepted as a student and moved to London in time for the summer term of 1923.<sup>72</sup>

At the RCM<sup>73</sup> he studied counterpoint, harmony and composition with Charles Wood.

At the RCM, composition was my first study: everything else was subordinate. I was assigned to Charles Wood, who was then, as I subsequently discovered, dying from cancer and had often to absent himself because of ill-health. Wood admired Beethoven as much as I did; especially the string quartets and piano sonatas. In the two-year period he taught me, I learned a tremendous amount about classic techniques of musical construction.<sup>74</sup>

His second area of study was the piano with Aubin Raymar; however, Tippett's lack of practice assured he would never materialize into a performer.

I studied piano-playing with Aubin Raymar, who was a good teacher and keen on new music. He tried to teach me to play recently published works like Ravel's *Sonatine* and Bartok's *Allegro Barbaro*. Sadly, I didn't practice enough. I acquired just enough piano technique to play in a peculiar way for myself as a composer.<sup>75</sup>

With the death of Wood, Tippett realized he could not depend on any teacher to supply him with the knowledge necessary to achieve his compositional goals. He undertook his own program of study beginning with the works of Palestrina and other Renaissance polyphonic composers and set out toward the twentieth-century repertoire in slow increments.

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<sup>71</sup>Theil, 4.

<sup>72</sup>Tippett, 11.

<sup>73</sup>"RCM" is the abbreviation commonly used for the Royal College of Music, in London.

<sup>74</sup>Tippett, 13.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 14.

I decided I could at least pursue my interest in contrapuntal music by finding out which sixteenth-century motet or mass would be sung in services at Westminster Cathedral, copying out the score in the RCM library and taking it along to follow in performance. This was much more illuminating than doing theoretical exercises in so-called ‘species’ counterpoint.<sup>76</sup>

As Ian Kemp states,

There could be no hurry in this matter and Tippett was satisfied with his calculation that he would be forty before he could, as it were, belong to his own period.<sup>77</sup>

In order to fulfill the promise of earning a Doctor of Music degree, he needed to continue with a qualified composition teacher. He had the choice of studying with Ralph Vaughan Williams, but opted for C. H. Kitson.

From my earliest school days and on into adolescence, I had nurtured a genuine curiosity about ideas and intellectual things. . . . But at RCM and subsequently, in English musical life in general, I found an anti-intellectualism, which disturbed and irritated me. The Vaughan Williams school was part of this, which is another reason I did not wish to study with him.<sup>78</sup>

Tippett’s early schooling showed no signs of a genius waiting to be discovered, nevertheless, his studies at RCM gave him the necessary foundation needed to realize his goal of becoming a composer.

The academic record of Tippett’s RCM years does not give the impression of a major talent nicely poised at the start of a promising career. But neither does it suggest a slow decline into respectable mediocrity. He knew exactly what he wanted.<sup>79</sup>

In the summer of 1928, Tippett failed the Bachelor of Music examination but later passed in December of the same year. Although he had promised his parents to stay at RCM until he earned a Doctorate of Music, he left school and focused his attention on filling the gaps in his compositional knowledge.

At the end of my RCM days, . . . I wanted to leave London. I realized that maturing as a composer would be a long process and could only take place away from the whirl of London life. My specific needs were simply time, peace and

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Kemp, 14.

<sup>78</sup>Tippett, 15-16.

<sup>79</sup>Kemp, 15.

quiet, I was prepared to live on next to nothing and I knew this was more feasible away from the distractions of the city. I had managed to obtain a job conducting a small choir in Oxted, Surrey and this had gone extremely well - both for them and for me. They liked working with me; for my part, I had the opportunity to try out more of the contrapuntal repertoire that I regarded as my main musical focus - Elizabethan madrigals in particular.<sup>80</sup>

As stated by White:

The original Oxted choir had wanted to work in a conventional way, by entering the local East Kent and West Sussex Music Festival and winning prizes. Tippett found that the repertory demanded by this event was not to his taste, so he disregarded competitive work and concentrated on the music he liked. Instead of Stanford's *Songs of the Fleet* or Elgar's *The Spirit of England* the choir was asked to purchase Byrd's *Though Amaryllis dance in green*. Music by madrigalists was added, and his lively and serious approach brought an unexpected quality and ambition to the choir's work. It increased in size, broadened its scope, gave concerts (one of which included the *Songs of the Fleet* plus Tippett's own early unpublished *Piano Sonata* played by Cyril Smith) and in general made its mark in a community eager to welcome it.<sup>81</sup>

Soon Tippett had composed enough works to organize a concert of his music.

By 1930 I had enough works written, and enough confidence, to organize the first ever concert of my own music, which took place on 5 April that year. The performers were a mixture of Oxted singers and some professional soloists and orchestra. . . . Taking responsibility for designing the programme, I absentmindedly omitted my own name as composer!<sup>82</sup>

Despite his modest achievement, he realized his compositional skills were underdeveloped.

A critic from *The Daily Telegraph* reviewed the concert and, while enthusiastic, suggested that 'Michael Tippett will probably prefer to put all behind him and go on to fresh ideas.' He was correct. What the concert revealed to me was my lack of an individual voice. . . . But I knew I had a lot to learn and decided I needed further tuition. I now remembered that on one of the occasions when Charles Wood had been absent from the RCM through illness, I was taught by R. O. Morris, one of the leading authorities on sixteenth-century contrapuntal music. In my headstrong way, I had declared that only Beethoven's string quartets mattered,

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<sup>80</sup>Tippett, 20-21.

<sup>81</sup>Kemp, 18.

<sup>82</sup>Tippett, 25.

and that there was little of interest in Mozart's. Morris took out a score of a Mozart quartet and gave me a lesson there and then on the subtleties of texture etc. in these masterworks, and I was lost in admiration. It was to Morris that I now went. I couldn't afford to pay him, so he very kindly arranged for me to enroll again at the RCM, receive a grant and simply come to him for lessons. For four whole terms, he concentrated my mind on fugue after the manner of Bach, extolling the virtues of stylistic consistency and formal discipline: and only after that did I return to original composition.<sup>83</sup>

After his studies Tippett's compositional career was unsettled, for he possessed substantial technique to compose, yet had not produced anything that satisfied him.<sup>84</sup> He continued composing and working with the Oxted choir; however, he did not confine himself solely to these tasks.

During these apprentice years Tippett's energies were naturally concentrated on composing, studying, and performing. But being a composer did not limit him to that alone. Another essential part of a composer's equipment was, in his view, simply being receptive to what life had to offer - friendships, ideas, places, books: he organized his routine so that he could respond to the enthusiasm and preoccupations which were developing in him.<sup>85</sup>

His acquaintances included: David Ayerst, Wilfred Franks, W. H. Auden and T. S. Eliot.

The evolution of major works using my own texts has always entailed consultation with sympathetic friends and colleagues, especially those outside the musical domain. By accident, at this time, I had met the most influential of them, T. S. Eliot. He was to become my spiritual and artistic mentor and his advice in the early stages of writing *A Child of Our Time* proved absolutely crucial.<sup>86</sup>

As stated by Kemp,

Tippett had read Eliot's poetry from his student days and had been deeply impressed by Eliot's critical thinking ever since the first publication, in 1932, of his *Selected Essays*. . . . Their meeting began in 1937, in unusual circumstances. The six-year-old son of F. V. Morley, one of Eliot's co-directors at the publishing firm of Faber and Faber, suffered from speech difficulties. He also had a remarkable musical gift. Knowing of Tippett's interest in education through music, Auden suggested that Tippett, whose Oxted cottage was within cycling distance of Morley's Surrey home, might be able to help the boy communicate.

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>84</sup>Kemp, 18.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 21

<sup>86</sup>Tippett, 50.

Tippett duly visited the Morley's twice a week - and not only because he wanted to help the boy: he also wanted to become part of a family again. Eliot, for roughly the same reasons, was a regular visitor at that time and the two met there, playing endless games of Monopoly with the boy and generally contributing to household activities. Tippett and Eliot subsequently had a number of short conversations together in Eliot's office at Faber and Faber, at first about drama and later about wider and more general subjects. It would be more accurate to describe these conversations as tutorials. Although Eliot's second love was music and although he liked Tippett and respected his intelligence, Tippett himself was not particularly interested in exchanging views about music. He wanted to learn. He went to Eliot for advice. Eliot told him what to read, and having read the book recommended Tippett would return and ask what to read next.<sup>87</sup>

His relationship with Eliot influenced his artistic output as well as his views on art, poetry, drama and music.

When I needed a text for *A Child of Our Time*, I plucked up courage and asked him if he would like to write it. Eliot said he would consider the matter, as long as I provided him with a precise scheme of musical sections, and an exact indication of the numbers and kind of words I felt were necessary at each stage. I did so immediately, returning to him a "Sketch for a Modern Oratorio," as I called it, which he took away for some weeks. He then surprised me by telling me it would be better to write the words myself, as any words he might write would be of such greater *poetic* quality, they would 'stick out a mile' and impede the music. This I did; and although thereafter I occasionally toyed with the notation of a collaboration with a writer or dramatist, ultimately, for good or ill, I have always written my own text.<sup>88</sup>

Tippett's compositions were becoming more mature and worthy of publication, however, the BBC showed no interest in his compositions and he faced difficulty finding a publisher willing to print any of his works.

. . . Tippett submitted his *Piano Sonata* and *Double Concerto* to Oxford University Press, who rejected them (OUP's chief editor, Hubert Foss, had heard *A Song of Liberty* in 1937 and presumably decided there and then not to publish Tippett). He was also rejected by Boosey and Hawkes. In the same year the *Double Concerto* was rejected by the British Section of the ISCM, and by the reading panel of the BBC.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Kemp, 23.

<sup>88</sup>Tippett, 51.

<sup>89</sup>Kemp, 51.

During the first performance of Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* in England, Tippett met Willy Strecker of the B. Schott Söhne Publishing Company in Mainz.<sup>90</sup>

Back in 1938, at a concert performance by the BBC Symphony Orchestra of Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*, I had been introduced to a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman in tails - Willy Strecker of B. Schott Söhne, the German music publishers. He had given me his card and asked me to send him scores of my compositions to date - including immature ones, so that he could observe my development over a period. I was taken aback: for works like the *Concerto for Double Strings Orchestra* had been turned down by the BBC and Boult, by Boosey & Hawkes and Oxford University Press, the International Society for Contemporary Music, and so on. I had sent Strecker a number of pieces, which reached Mainz a few weeks before war was declared. . . .<sup>91</sup>

Shortly after the outbreak of war in Europe, Tippett was notified that the Schott Company was interested in publishing his *Double Concerto* and possibly his *Piano Sonata*; however, the publications were to be delayed for quite some time.

Tippett was at first prepared to wait until after the war was over. But he soon grew dissatisfied with the state of affairs. Through Remington, Van Wyck Ltd, a private record company whose discs were made by Decca . . . he negotiated a recording of the *Sonata*, played by Phyllis Sellick, hoping to promote a marketing venture by which record company and publisher work together.<sup>92</sup>

This strategy worked; in 1942, Schott published his *Piano Sonata* under the title *Fantasy Sonata*.<sup>93</sup>

With the changing political climate of the 1930's, Tippett's views on politics were changing and leading him to become more vocal with his discontent. The political unrest in Europe persuaded Tippett to the left of the political spectrum. Tippett, along with his cousin Phyllis Kemp, joined the Communist Party in 1935.

In the mid-1930s I was persuaded by Phyl to read Marx, but found Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* more in tune with my thinking. Another book, John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World* - an eyewitness account of the October Revolution by an American, which Trotsky approved - drew me in the direction of Trotskyism. I found Stalin antipathetic, inherently a tyrant . . . . The Stalinist purges and show trials, and the intimidation of Soviet artists and

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Tippett, 114.

<sup>92</sup>Kemp, 51.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 52.

composers, following Stalin's attack on Shostakovich in 1936, were incompatible with my own humane beliefs.<sup>94</sup>

Although his party membership did not last long, Tippett's evolving political views were influencing his work.

Some indications of the restlessness of these years can be gauged from a summary of Tippett's work with choirs during the 1930's. In the spring of 1934, while adjudicating at an annual London Labour Choral Union competition, he expressed disapproval of the test piece, *April is in my mistress face* by Morley, explaining to the participant that the English madrigal arose when the bourgeois, now capitalist class, was looking for some amusement in its homes. In October he provided his South London Orchestra for a large-scale historical pageant, part of that year's centenary celebrations of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, which depicted the struggles of a working-class family from the industrial revolution until the present day. . . . In that same autumn he was chairman of a "concert demonstration" of workers' songs at Morley College, himself teaching the audience phrase by phrase a newly written song, and at the end of the concert making some closing remarks about the class war with such emotion that he was unable to finish.<sup>95</sup>

With the outbreak of World War II, all adult education was suspended.

He was not particularly sorry about losing jobs that had become increasingly uncongenial, but his situation was precarious and accordingly he began looking for a new post.<sup>96</sup>

To support himself, he taught Latin at the Hazelwood School and when adult education was restored in July 1940, he accepted a post at Morley College and subsequently served as the Director of Music for eleven years.<sup>97</sup>

. . . Tippett had deeply admired Morley's principal, Eva Hubback, from the start of his association with the college, and when she asked him whether he would take over a virtually non-existent choir (only eight voices) and build up musical life again, he did not hesitate. . . . The tradition of music at Morley dated back to the early years of the century when Holst had been the director. This Tippett continued with immense skill and energy. He was astute enough to delegate extensively and give his full support to those he appointed. . . . He undertook no teaching himself and, apart from overall control of musical policy, simply

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<sup>94</sup>Tippett, 46-47.

<sup>95</sup>Kemp, 33.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

conducted the choir. He enlarged it from the initial eight voices to thirty by the 1941/42 season and to over seventy by the end of the war.<sup>98</sup>

As Director at Morley, he was able to attract a stellar faculty.

The accident of war brought me into contact, meanwhile, with a number of distinguished refugee musicians. Some I managed to attract on the staff at Morley: others I persuaded to participate in the Morley concerts. Chief amongst them were Walter Goehr (a Schoenberg pupil), who took over the conducting of the orchestra, and Matyas Seiber, widely versed in everything from dodecaphony to jazz, who came to teach composition.<sup>99</sup>

In November 1940, Tippett joined the Peace Pledge Union,<sup>100</sup> an organization with a “commitment to pacifism.”

Back in 1935, I had been one of a 100,000 or so people who responded to the letter sent to the press by the Revd. Dick Sheppard - a pacifist in the First World War - inviting anyone who was opposed to war to send him a postcard, with the pledge, “I renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will I support or sanction another.” Out of that came the Peace Pledge Union, in which I was an active member, and its newspaper, *Peace News*.<sup>43</sup>

When his age group was called to serve in the military, Tippett applied for provisional registration as a conscientious objector.<sup>44</sup>

The official procedure for conscientious objectors was well-organized and, compared with the notorious ‘cat and mouse’ tactics pursued in the 1914-18 war, remarkably humane. As a first step, an objector was required to apply for provisional registration. This meant that he could not be called up for military service until his case had been heard by a tribunal-consisting of five well-known local citizens of proved standing and impartiality. The objector himself was represented by counsel, a solicitor and one other person, who could be a trade union official, relative or friend. Four courses of action were open to these tribunals. They could award unconditional registration, which meant the objector was free to do as he wished; conditional registration, the objector being registered on condition that he undertook some approved occupation, such as farm or

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>99</sup>Tippett, 114.

<sup>100</sup>Tippett was nominated as PPU’s president in 1956 and held the position in title only until his death.

<sup>43</sup>Tippett, 119.

<sup>44</sup>Kemp, 40.

hospital work; non-combatant service duties; and finally he could be struck off the register and be obliged to join the services as ordered. If, after appeal, an objector failed to comply with the decision of the tribunal, he would then be prosecuted by the police on a criminal charge.<sup>45</sup>

Although his application was received in November 1940, his case did not come before the tribunal until February 1942. The South-East London Tribunal granted him non-combatant military status consisting of full-time work with Air Raid Precautions, the National Fire Service or land. He refused to comply with the order of the Appellate Tribunal resulting in a three-months prison sentence beginning in June 1943.

Refusing to comply with the condition laid down by the tribunal, I was summoned the following year (1943) to appear at Oxted Police Court. . . . The magistrate asked me, “Are you really trying to say that you are worth so much that you shouldn’t go to prison?” I felt unable to answer. His only option was to sentence me to imprisonment for the minimum period, three months.<sup>46</sup>

By conforming to the ruling, he qualified for a one-third reduction and was released in August. His brief imprisonment was an example of his commitment to pacifism and the PPU.

Even though he had the moral support of several well-known figures in the musical world (Arnold Bax, Adrian Boult, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears among others), he was not given to heroics and he could have agreed to the urgings of friends. To compromise and accept one of the many alternative jobs they arranged for him to be offered after the Appellate Tribunal: music organizer for ENSA in Northern Ireland Command, librarian for the RAF Orchestra, choir-training with the National Fire Service, social work in London. But Tippett was determined not to betray his convictions, nor to betray the thousands of young.<sup>47</sup>

After the war Tippett’s

growing reputation as a composer and as an astute observer of the social and political scene brought him closer to the public eye and ear. He began to play a major role in PPU affairs,<sup>48</sup> along with such names as Benjamin Britten and Alex Comfort, acting as a “sponsor” (a kind of vice-president whose name adds lustre) and speaking at several public meetings. In December 1946 he was a member of a deputation to the Labour Government protesting against their intention of removing unconditional registration in their post-war plans to extend conscription.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>46</sup>Tippett, 121.

<sup>47</sup>Kemp, 41.

<sup>48</sup>Tippett was nominated as PPU’s president in 1956 held the position in title only until his death.

Partly as a result of this, unconditional registration was retained in the National Service Act of 1947.<sup>49</sup>

In 1946 Tippett resigned from his post at Morley College leaving him with ample time to begin work on his first opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*, which was completed six years later. Other works of this period include: *Suite for the Birthday of Prince Charles*, *The Heart's Assurance*, *Dance*, *Clarion Air* and *A Garland for the Queen*.<sup>50</sup> Despite his increasing productivity, he faced problems in the performance of his works.

Throughout the fifties problems in performances and with performers continued to hinder Tippett's full acceptance as a professional composer. He found it necessary to replace a publicly critical Malcolm Sargent as conductor for the premiere of the *Fantasia Concertante on a Theme of Corelli* (1953), a work whose lyricism and contrapuntal exuberance derived in part from *The Midsummer Marriage*, and which was considered by Sargent overly intellectual. Julius Katchen, the original soloist for the first performance of the *Concerto for Piano* (1953-55), considered the piano part unplayable and so bowed out, replaced by Louis Kentner who was in fact able to perform the work from memory (and with the approval of the critics). Considering the range of the *Sonata for Four Horns* (1955) too high, the Dennis Brain Wind Ensemble would not play the work at pitch at the premiere. Finally, the first performance of the *Symphony No. 2* (1956-7) by the BBC Symphony Orchestra broke down in the first movement, requiring Adrian Boult to gallantly accept the blame and repeat the work from the beginning. These situations understood an attitude held by most that Tippett was an (admittedly gifted) amateur.<sup>51</sup>

The performance of Tippett's *Symphony No. 2* was especially detrimental. When Boult turned to the audience and stated, "Entirely my fault, ladies and gentlemen," the blame of the disastrous performance was taken away from Tippett for a moment; however, shortly after, Tippett became the center of criticism.<sup>52</sup> In a letter that appeared in *The Times* written by R. J. F. Howgill, the Controller of Music at the BBC, the blame was squarely placed on Tippett's compositional style.

May I bespeak the neutrality of your columns to uphold the technical proficiency of the BBC Symphony Orchestra? The music critics of at least three journals have implied that it was unequal to the correct performance of certain passages in Mr. Michael Tippett's new symphony. In spite of Sir Adrian Boult's public admission that he misdirected them the blame has been ascribed to the players. One critic, who at the hearing seems to have a more intimate acquaintance with

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Theil, 8.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Kemp, 54.

the work than the players themselves, claims that he detected another ‘false entry’ at the second performance. This is categorically denied by conductor and players. In music, practicability of text may not be the concern of the critics; to orchestral players in the mass it may mean the difference between confidence and doubt. The comprehensive technique of the BBC Symphony Orchestra is equal to all reasonable demands.<sup>53</sup>

To his own defense Tippett states that,

like many composers, from Berlioz to Gershwin, I have found myself stretching performers in ways they hadn’t imagined. Already with first performance of my *String Quartet No 1* in 1935, the Brosa Quartet were in a state of great agitation over the irregular (so-called ‘additive’) rhythms which they had to execute. Even in the early performances of *A Child of Our Time*, a work which I deliberately made as direct and as simply as I could, stylistically, there were upheavals. . . . Older-generation conductors were rarely happy with anything I wrote. Sargent and Boult, for instance, treated my music with scepticism. I think they lack the knowledge of pre-classical music from which I derived so many of my ideas; and they even missed the clear relationships with classical precedent, which were equally strong. David Webster, the manager of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra after the war, wanted the first performance of my recently completed Symphony No.1, and engaged Sargent to conduct it. As ever, Sargent liked to have the composer by the rostrum to answer queries from the players, since he had not really studied the score. During the rehearsal, a trombonist asked about a clash between two notes a semi-note apart which seemed to him a possible inaccuracy. “We will ask the composer” said Sargent, as usual. Without hesitation I confirmed that the clash was correct and said under my breath to Sargent, ‘It’s the same as the opening of Montverdi’s *Lasciatemi morire*’ but he had no idea what I was talking about - such music was outside his experience. In the furore that erupted over my Second Symphony, several years later, Boult moaned to me, “I don’t understand this modern music.” I replied, “There’s hardly anything here you wouldn’t find in Brahms!”<sup>54</sup>

Despite the public criticism, he would later be vindicated with the first performance of his second opera, *King Priam*, in 1962, and a BBC-studio performance of *The Midsummer Marriage* conducted by Norman Del Mar, in 1963.<sup>55</sup>

The performance under the direction of Del Mar revealed the full magnificence of the score. No one who heard that performance could have doubted that here was one of the masterpieces of the twentieth-century music. . . . The performance led

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Tippett, 205-206.

<sup>55</sup>Theil, 8.

to a new stage production in 1968 and revival in 1970, both conducted by Colin Davis.<sup>56</sup>

In 1965 Tippett visited the United States for the first time.

As luck would have it, the countertenor Alfred Deller had recently been touring the States . . . and it was he who persuaded Jim Cain, manager of the Aspen Summer School and Festival in Colorado, that he should present *A Child of Our Time* there and invite me out. Cain issued an invitation against the wishes of Aspen's composer-in residence, Darius Milhaud, who appeared to regard me as a rival!<sup>57</sup>

His breakthrough opportunity came while serving as guest-conductor for the St. Louis Symphony.

Through Copland, I was introduced to a New York agent - Herbert Barrett - and quickly became close personal friends with him. . . . I received a call from Herbert. . . . It appeared that Stravinsky was ill and had cancelled a conducting engagement with the St. Louis Symphony. The orchestra did not want Stravinsky's assistant, Robert Craft, but another composer-conductor: here was my chance. . . . From that point onwards, the invitations blossomed.<sup>58</sup>

The numerous musical engagements that followed permitted him to travel the world, impacting him and his music. On a visit to Java and Bali,

The restrained Buddhist drama, the more extrovert Hindu dancing, and the various styles of gamelan orchestra made a profound impression on him. He had attempted to re-create the sounds of the gamelan gongs in his *Piano Sonata No. 1* some forty years earlier. With the actual sounds in his ears his earlier enthusiasm was revived and it has borne fruit on his recent *Triple Concerto* for violin, viola, cello and orchestra.<sup>59</sup>

His significance has continued to increase both in England and abroad since his rise to prominence in the sixties.

. . . he has long now been considered one of England's most significant contemporary composers, on par with Benjamin Britten. (Indeed, of the two men,

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<sup>56</sup>According to Kemp, Davis "became Tippett's most persuasive interpreter . . . ,54.

<sup>57</sup>Tippett, 250.

<sup>58</sup>Tippett, 252-253.

<sup>59</sup>Kemp, 57.

there are many who consider Tippett to have made the more profound contributions).<sup>60</sup>

Tippett not only reached his dream of becoming a composer, but his works have become staples of the twentieth-century literature.

My music itself seemed now to be spreading across the world. . . . It is probably every composer's dream that something he or she has written will reach an audience in the world at large. In my case, *A Child of Our Time* really does seem to have spoken its message in most parts of the globe.<sup>61</sup>

Throughout his eighties, Tippett remained active as a composer and conductor. During this period he composed *Byzantium*, for soprano and orchestra, the *Fifth String Quartet*, and his fifth opera *New Year* that was jointly commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera, Glyndbourne, and the BBC. In 1995, the BBC Music Magazine issued a CD of *Symphonies Nos. 2 and 4*, performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Tippett. His last major composition, *The Rose Lake*, premiered by the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Colin Davis, was performed eleven times, during a two-month tour of the United States and Canada. In 1996, the third production of his opera *The Midsummer Marriage* was performed at the Royal Opera House. The following year, the largest retrospective ever of Tippett's concert music was realized in Stockholm. While in Stockholm, Tippett fell ill with pneumonia and although recovered sufficiently to return to London, died upon his return, on January 8, 1998.

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<sup>60</sup>Theil, 10.

<sup>61</sup>Tippett, 258-261.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BLUE GUITAR

*The Blue Guitar* by Michael Tippett (1905 - ) was composed between 1982-83 for the British guitarist, Julian Bream, and dedicated “to the memory of Calvin Simmons.”

. . . I was due to conduct *A Child of Our Time* with the (London) Philharmonic. All of us became close friends with the young conductor Calvin Simmons, who was Zubin Mehta’s assistant at the Philharmonic. Calvin was an incomparable talent. When he later came to stay with me at Nocketts, he sang and played the piano from morning to midnight. I recall him taking a volume of Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen* from my shelves and putting it on the piano, to sing and play through it: “*This is my music,*” said this black, quarter-Cherokee Indian. His boating accident on Lake Placid in 1981 was a tragedy of the first order.<sup>101</sup>

The three-movement work was composed between *The Mask of Time* (a work for SATB soloists, chorus and orchestra, 1980-82) and *Festal Brass with Blues* (for brass band, 1983). It was conceived in his late period and like most of his works for this era, it is hard to categorize.

The eventual content of Tippett’s late period can only be guessed at . . . demanding of its commentator that he stand back a little, takes a look at it and attempts some final assessment of its status.<sup>102</sup>

The piece was inspired by Tippett’s reading of Wallace Stevens’s *The Man With the Blue Guitar*, which also served as inspiration for artist David Hockney’s publication of thirty-three sketches titled *The Blue Guitar*.

Hockney produced a series of etchings to illustrate the text, entitled *The Blue Guitar* (Petersburg Press, 1977). As Hockney himself explains, the illustrations are not intended to be literal; they are, rather, interpretations of the main theme of the poem, in visual terms. In this, he is following Stevens himself, for whom the

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<sup>101</sup>Tippett, 260.

<sup>102</sup>Kemp, 481.

original painting was merely a stimulus, albeit a powerful one. Like the poem, Hockney stresses the etchings are about *transformations* within art, as well as about the relation between so-called *reality* and *the imagination*. And now, in what is almost a chain reaction, Tippett has done the same thing, in terms that are aural. I do not know whether he was aware of the Hockney publication, but we are told by Meirion Bowen that during the compositions of *The Mask of Time* (1980-82, and thus the work that immediately preceded the composition of the Guitar Sonata) he was instructed to send Tippett a copy of a certain poem by Stevens, a friend of his having whetted his appetite by describing its contents.<sup>103</sup>

Despite using the poem as an inspirational source, like Hockney, Tippett warns against a literal comparison.

Reading the poem acted for me roughly as the sight of Picasso's picture did for the poet. But of course, all the words and concepts have disappeared and this piece for guitar is essentially music. All that remained from the poet were three moods, or gestures, which suggest the titles for the movements.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, Tippett, like Stevens, was preoccupied by the relationship between reality and the imagination.

Of his poem - which is in effect a series of thirty-three poems in couplets - Stevens wrote that it deals with "*the relation and balance between imagined things and real things.*" In 1945 (presumably long before he had read the Stevens poem) Tippett wrote of the tension in our lives '*the world of imagination*' and '*the world of mechanics.*' "*What sort of world do we live in?*" This, he asserts, has been his "*central preoccupation.*"<sup>105</sup>

Tippett's work uses three specific quotes from the poem, which create the '*moods*' for the movements.

The poem therefore created a natural sympathetic resonance in his mind. He chose three quotations from Stevens as a launching pad for the three movements and to which he gave suitably descriptive titles:

*Transforming* 'Being the lion in the lute  
Before the lion locked in the stone.'

*Juggling* ' . . . the old fantoche  
Hanging his shawl upon the wind'

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<sup>103</sup>Michael Donley, "Tippett's The Blue Guitar," *Classical Guitar VI* (November 1988), 35.

<sup>104</sup>Michael Tippett, *The Blue Guitar* (London: Schott & Co., 1983), preface.

<sup>105</sup>Donley, 35.

*Dreaming* ‘Morning is not sun,  
It is this posture of the nerves,  
As if a blunted player clutched  
The nuances of the blue guitar’<sup>106</sup>

It is important to note that the published order of the movements was not the order that Tippett intended. Julian Bream persuaded him to reverse the order of the second and third movements before the premiere and that is how it was performed and indeed published. But although this might have been more superficially effective in public performance, there is no question that Tippett’s original intention is far more musically satisfying both structurally and emotionally.<sup>107</sup>

### I. “TRANSFORMING”

The first movement can be broken down into two large sections: mm. 1-56 and mm. 57-146, with mm. 1-16 serving as an introduction. Although considered a sonata form, Tippett does not utilize the form in its traditional sense, but uses elements of the fantasia, creating an almost improvised feel. The sonata opens with an eight-bar phrase in a moderately slow tempo, which reaches a melodic climax in m. 5. This theme repeats from mm. 9-16, with the climax note of m. 5 raised one half-step higher in m. 13.



Example 1: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” m. 5 and m. 13

After the opening theme and its repetition, a three-measure homophonic motive follows (mm. 17-19), ending on C7.



Example 2: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” mm. 17-19

<sup>106</sup>Geraint Lewis, booklet notes in *Tippett: The Blue Guitar*, Nimbus Records, NI 5390, 1995, CD.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

The three-measure motive repeats with slight changes, ending with an E7 chord with an added ninth on the last beat of m. 22. This is intensified with increasing dynamics, from *forte* to *fortissimo*. Tippett uses the material of m. 17 to introduce one of the dominating features of this movement: the conflict between “*dark*” and “*light*.”

. . . [Tippett’s] own work passes to and fro between “*the dark*” and “*the light*.” Man’s predicament - his split-ness or broken-ness - is, we recall, what concerned Stevens too. *Shadow* and *Light*: is it by chance that the words “*dark*” and “*light*” appear in the score of this Sonata? We may further note that the “*dark*” sections tend to be chordal whereas the; “*bright*” ones are full of movement.<sup>108</sup>

The concept of opposing temperaments is not only appropriate for the subject matter, but demonstrates Tippett’s knowledge of Renaissance forms, particularly those employed by the guitar’s predecessor, the vihuela. It was Luis Milan (b c1500 - d after 1560) who first used this technique in his fantasias for vihuela.

Milan is credited with providing the earliest tempo indications. These occur in the section devoted to *tañer de gala*, which is concerned with alternating fast and slow passages. Chordal sections (*consonancias*) are to be played slowly and the scale movements (*redobles*) quickly.<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, it is possible to analyze the movement according to *dark* chordal sections and *brilliant* moving ones.<sup>110</sup>

ARREST dark; strong an (ambivalent) feeling of repose, stasis which is also compression.	MOVEMENT brilliant; mostly non-chordal, flowing, dancing two-part passages.
17-22	23-56
57-68	69-74
75-76	77-79
(79) 80	81-84
85	86-88
93-97	90-92
101	98-100
105-108	102-104
143-146	109-142

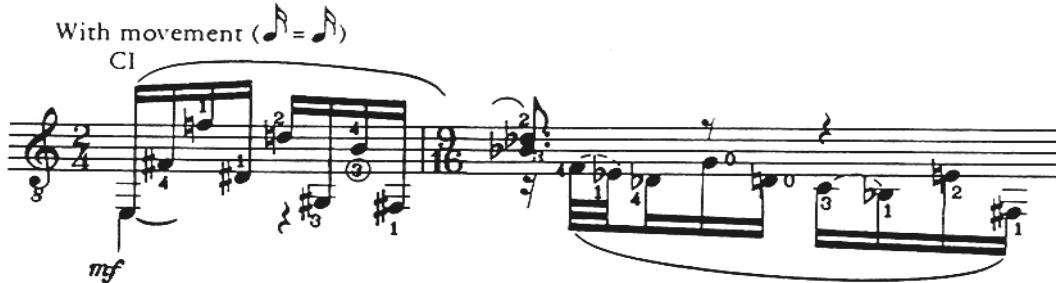
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<sup>108</sup>Donley, 38.

<sup>109</sup>Donley, 38.

<sup>110</sup>Harvey Turnbull, *The Guitar: from Renaissance to the Present Day* (Westport: The Bold Strummer Ltd., 1991), 26.

In m. 23, a new section (“*With movement*”) consisting of two-measure cells is introduced, alternating meters between 2/4 and 9/16 (2/4 upper register, 9/16 lower register), with the prevailing pulse equaling the sixteenth note of each section.



Example 3: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” m. 23 and m. 24

At m. 31, a triplet figure is presented, which produces an underlying rhythmic acceleration. The first six notes are C triads in second inversion with alternating thirds, E-flat and E-natural. The use of both the major and minor tonalities is perhaps another reference to the conflict between *light* and *dark*, this time portrayed with tonality.



Example 4: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” m. 31

The triplet figure continues until its culmination in m. 36, when the texture becomes two-voice polyphony (*singing top, ringing below*). Measure 39 presents the melody an octave lower, after which the voices exchange roles (m. 45 and again in m. 50), with the lower voice carrying the leading melody (*ringing top, singing below*).

with more movement: singing top, ringing below      ringing top, singing below

mark the bass

Example 5: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” m. 36 and m. 45

After the long climb of the melody (which spans almost two octaves, mm. 50-53), both voices unite on A-flat in m. 54, which is further emphasized with an implied II-V-I cadence in mm. 54-55. Tippett restates the A-flat as an artificial harmonic and subsequently accentuates the feeling of repose with a measure of rest in m. 56.

easing a little      art.harm.

(2+3+3)      CIV      art.harm.      long

*f*      *mf*      *sub. p*

Example 6: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” mm. 54-56

The opening tempo resumes in m. 57 (“*Medium Slow*”) with a poly-chord; the lower chord built on fourths from F-sharp and the second a first inversion F-sharp major chord (this poly-chord will also appear in “*Juggling*,” m. 34 and m. 38). Tippett immediately introduces an A, which alters the tonality of the upper chord from major (*light*) to minor (*dark*).

*f strong*

Example 7: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” m. 57

After repeating the same chord in m. 59, Tippett moves the chord up a major second in m. 61, and repeats this sequence in m. 65 and m. 67.

At first glance the new motive presented in mm. 69-71 “free, faster flowing,” simply introduces acceleration in eighth-notes, triplets and dotted sixteenth-notes, however, the melodic material derives from m. 1 (E-natural, F-sharp, D-sharp) and rhythmic material (m. 71) from m. 3.

Example 8: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “Transforming,” m. 1 and m. 69

Example 9: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “Transforming,” m. 3 and m. 71

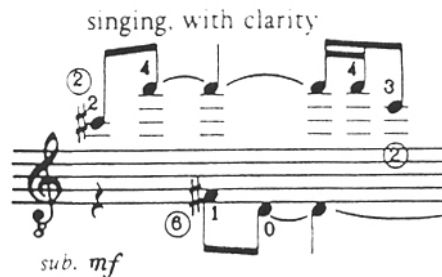
The material opening the next section, mm. 75-83 (*radiant with stillness*) constructs of four-measure cells and foreshadows the final conflict between the ideas of “dark” and “light.” The first two notes of the motive (E-flat and G-natural) are an inversion of the beginning notes in m. 17.

Example 10: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “Transforming,” m. 17 and m. 75

Measures 77 and 81 consist of two layers: repeated tetra-chords in sixteenth note in the upper voice and an arpeggio in second inversion in the lower voice (D major and A major), which will be used as the thematic material for the two-voice canon beginning in m. 109.



Example 11: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “Transforming,” m. 77 and m. 81



Example 12: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “Transforming,” m. 109

Measure 85 brings to climax the conflict between “dark” and “light.” The “dark” chordal measures 17-22 are repeated. After each chordal measure, a “brilliant” three-measure passage is interposed.



Example 13: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “Transforming,” m. 17

brilliant

Example 14: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” mm. 85-88

This conflict, restated six times, gives way to the first of two canons organized in consistent imitation; the first at the lower perfect fifth and the second at the lower perfect fourth, respectively. The second canon is introduced two more times; a major third lower in m. 135 and a perfect fourth lower in m. 139.

Example 15: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Transforming*,” m. 120, m. 135 and m. 139

The cadence begins with an enharmonically spelled Phrygian chord in m. 142 and concludes with an authentic cadence (V-i) in f minor, over a tonic pedal.

## II. “JUGGLING”

“... the old fantoche  
Hanging his shawl upon the wind.”

This scherzo-like movement can be divided into two large sections, mm. 1-50 and mm. 51-93. The movement opens with a tremolo-like motive on F-sharp, in a “fast” tempo, which repeats in the second measure a perfect fifth above (*juggling*). Simple in character, the motive is used as the basis of the entire movement.



Example 16: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Juggling*,” m. 1 and m. 2

In the fifth and sixth measures the motive expands from seven to eight notes, always beginning on F-sharp. The odd-number grouping creates a poly-rhythmic feel, which increases the intensity and forward motion of the phrase until its cadence on a chord built on perfect fourths.



Example 17: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Juggling*,” mm. 5-8

In m. 9 Tippett introduces the glissandi, which he later employs in the movement (m. 46, m. 53, m. 54, m. 64 and m. 65), as well as in the beginning of the third movement “*Dreaming*” (m. 1, m. 2, m. 5 and m. 6). The opening theme, mm. 1-11, repeats a perfect fourth higher, mm. 12-22.

Beginning in m. 22 the material of the opening theme’s seven-note motive (m. 5) is further developed until m. 34, when the motion stops on the same poly-chord used in m. 57 of the first movement (refer to Example 7). The rising/falling arpeggio beginning in m. 36 continues sequentially by ascending half-steps (m. 40, m. 42, m. 44 and m. 45).

Example 18: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Juggling*,” m. 40, m. 42, m. 44 and m. 45

The first section of the movement cadences with a series of *rasgueados*.

Example 19: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Juggling*,” m. 49 and m. 50

The second section of the movement, mm. 51-93 (“*with energy and panache*”), opens with an arpeggio triplet figure reminiscent of m. 6 of the first movement.



Example 20: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Juggling*,” m. 51 and m. 52

Tippett uses large glissandi that cover almost the entire neck of the guitar (m. 54), which leads to the introduction of the *golpe*, a percussive strike on the body of the guitar.

At bar 55, there is more additive rhythm, but this time with an effect new to this sonata; a percussive effect on the wood of the guitar. Such passages (Bars 58, 66, 73, 75, 80, and 82) containing an effect that can so quickly sound dated might prove to be the weak spot of the Sonata. We should, however, say in their defense Tippett is generally fond of percussive effects (*Symphony No. 2*). There is a “*juggling*” context that can be taken into account. Finally, we should note that the poem itself contains an admonition to “*roll a drum on the blue guitar.*” (Stanza X).<sup>111</sup>

In mm. 62-72, the triplet figure that opened the second section is transposed a half-step lower to B-flat and later used in m. 77 (A-natural) and m. 84 (G-natural). There is a pull toward the end and now the percussive effects are interjected with rising and falling figures.



Example 21: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Juggling*,” mm. 82-85

At m. 87, a cascading arpeggio starting on B-natural (repeated on A-natural in m. 89 and A-flat in m. 91) reaches the bottom E, which serves as the closing note of the movement.

<sup>111</sup> Donley, 38.



Example 22: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Juggling*,” m. 87, m. 89 and m. 91

### III. “*DREAMING*”

“ . . . Morning is not sun,  
It is this posture of the nerves

As if a blunted player clutched  
The nuances of the blue guitar.”

This movement is equally divided in two parts; mm. 1-32, characterized by four-measure phrases and mm. 33-64, predominantly in 3/4 meter as a contrast to the 2/4 meter of the first section. The movement opens in a “*Very slow*” tempo, with a four-measure phrase, repeated from mm. 5-8 with a harmonic change in m. 8. The opening arpeggio consists of two major neighbor chords played in succession, E-flat and D-flat, respectively. After the arpeggio, the D-flat chord is restated homophonically and connected to the opening E-flat chord by a descending glissando.



Example 23: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Dreaming*,” m. 1 and m. 2

The D9 chord ending m. 8, serves as the dominant chord for the upcoming “*rhetorical recitative*” (mm. 9-12) in G.



Example 24: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “*Dreaming,*” m. 8 and m. 9

The “*rhetorical recitative*” is followed by its repetition (mm. 13-16) a minor third above and closes with a cadence on E, which serves as the dominant note of the repeated opening theme, this time in A.



Example 25: Tippett, The Blue Guitar, “*Dreaming,*” m. 16 and m. 17

In mm. 25-29 the recitative appears transposed a perfect fourth higher and once again in mm. 29-32 a minor sixth higher.

The second section of the movement, “*very tranquil,*” begins with an arpeggio, ascending almost three octaves, ranging from *pianissimo* to *forte*. The predominantly “*dark*” minor chords are at times interrupted by “*bright*” major chords (F7 in m. 39 and C in m. 43). From mm. 36-38, the arpeggio along with the dynamic markings is reversed. The sections marked “*slightly faster*” introduced in m. 44 and m. 46 are comprised of sextuplets and reminiscent of the “*brilliant*” sections of the first movement (mm. 86-88, mm. 90-92, mm. 98-100 and mm. 102-104). The movement ends with a repetition of the sextuplets.



Example 26: Tippett, *The Blue Guitar*, “*Dreaming*,” mm. 62-64

Michael Tippett’s *The Blue Guitar* is the outcome of an idea, originated in Picasso’s painting and conveyed through Stevens’s words. The evolution of the ‘blue guitar’ subject through the eyes of these three different artists has resulted in major contributions in the fields of art, literature and music. It is my hope that this study will assist performing artists in further evolution of this subject, birthed almost a century ago.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mr. Roman began to play guitar at the age of five. He attended *Stetson University* where he graduated *Cum Laude* and *The Peabody Conservatory* where he received a *Masters of Music* degree in guitar performance.

Mr. Roman is a first-prize winner of the *Appalachian State University Guitar Competition* held in North Carolina, the *Rising Star Recital Competition* held in McLean, Virginia, and the *Boston Classical Guitar Society Competition* held in Boston, Massachusetts. He is a recipient of the *National Merit Award*, *Selma Levine Professional Development Grant*, two-time recipient of the *Peabody Conservatory Career Development Grant*, two-time recipient of the *Maryland State Arts Council Grant* and a three-time recipient of the *New York Curran Award* for music. In 2002, he was awarded a prestigious Fulbright Grant to Spain, for research of the complete guitar works of Joaquín Turina.

Besides busy performing engagements, Mr. Roman has an intensive teaching career. He has been on the faculty of the *Tallahassee Community College* in Florida, *Darton College* and *Bainbridge College* in Georgia, *Levine School of Music* in Washington DC, and was a teaching assistant for classical guitar instruction and guitar literature for guitar majors at *Florida State University*. Currently, he is on the guitar and theory faculty of the *Sudbrook Academy of Arts* in Pikesville, Maryland, *Academy of Music* in Gaithersburg, Maryland, *St. Mary's College* in St. Mary's, Maryland, *Baltimore School for the Arts* in Baltimore, Maryland, and *The Peabody Conservatory of Music 'Outreach'* in Baltimore, Maryland.

Mr. Roman's numerous performances throughout the United States, Mexico, Spain, Germany and Eastern Europe were praised for their virtuosity, exceptional musicality and "sensitivity to details."