

this volume, and the completion of this erosion will make the next volumes of *Letters from a Life* considerably different from their predecessors.

But the picture of Britten in these first volumes is quite different to that drawn by Godfrey, and this difference lies mainly with Britten's sexuality or, perhaps more precisely, his sensuality. The conflict is not so much the *existence* of sensuality, but rather the degree and importance of it in Britten's life and music. *Letters from a Life* presents Britten's music as the result of potent genius; Godfrey suggests that the sensual aspects of Britten's personality dominated his artistic drive. There must be a balance between the two, but those seeing the editorial omissions in *Letters from a Life* as a blatant editorial policy of mis-information and repression of information about Britten's sexuality will be disappointed: the original diaries themselves hold very little of importance that is not included by Mitchell and Reed. This in itself is vital: the constant cross-referencing of biographical details, and the omission of any truly personal thoughts in Britten's original diaries suggests that he saw them in terms of being read by others, perhaps an indication of an early belief in his own eventual success. Donald Mitchell disputes this in his introduction to the series, explaining the detail

in the diaries as a manifestation of Britten's personality rather than a self-conscious documentation of his life for posterity. This is entirely consistent with Britten's personality, but does not help us explain the almost total lack of personal commitment in the diaries.

Mitchell's introduction tells us much about Britten, including an explanation of the confusing chronology surrounding Britten's and Pears's relationship. The background to Britten's relationship with his mother is also detailed, and the psychology is mostly illuminating. However, Mitchell's exploration of Britten's and Pears's relationship as an extension of that between Britten and his mother undermines the insights presented in the rest of the introduction. Curiously reliant upon a supposed similarity between the singing voices of Pears and Britten's mother, Mitchell concludes that Britten's choice of Pears as a life-long companion was intricately linked with the fact that Pears was a *singer*, and thus represented the security of his childhood. But this is a minor quibble; a better document of British music history in the 1930s and 1940s is unlikely to be produced.

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Michael Tippett, *Those Twentieth Century Blues: An Autobiography*. London: Hutchinson, 1991. \$55, pp. 290

### *Dreams and the Man*

As a baby Tippett had a dream of a 'Biting Lady' knocking on the front door. This dream was of such significance that it is recorded on the first page of his autobiography, and there are fifty more pages of dreams further on in the book. Tippett himself describes the volume as 'an account of my struggles to understand the chaotic inner world of dreams in such a way that I could create music of all kinds'. Often such records suggest not only a selective memory but a revisionist bent (Stravinsky comes to mind). While Tippett ceremoniously begins with his date of birth and earliest memories, almost twice as much space is given to his first forty years as to the latter forty. Themes seem to be more important than dates but this does not adequately explain the wandering chronology.

This, compounded by occasional grammatical infelicities, suggests a hurried editing. The original publishers withdrew from the contract with Tippett at the last moment - were they wary of including all those dreams?

Much of the first half of the book has been covered elsewhere, notably in Ian Kemp's *Tippett: The Composer and His Music*. Kemp described Tippett's family life (or lack of it, for his parents emigrated when he was 14) and his unpleasant experience at a famous public school. While Tippett himself admits he had only a vague notion of what it meant to be a composer he enrolled at the Royal College of Music and, in addition to studies in piano and composition, took the opportunity to stand next to Boult's rostrum every Friday after-

noon for three years (or four, according to Kemp) while Boult conducted the First Orchestra. Later he was able to earn his keep conducting choirs and orchestras and as music director at Morley College until 1951, when the final stages of his first opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*, left him no time for anything else.

Tippett's intellectual pretensions were evident early on. As a child he read a book about ambidexterity which persuaded him to become ambidextrous, and he embarked on prep school with a tract denying the existence of God. At College his friends were working class advocates of a communist revolution (Tippett himself was a Trotsky supporter) and he attended the theatre—plays by Toller, Barrie, Shaw, Eliot and Fry—as much as the concert hall. Unlike Britten, who accepted every composition request which came to hand, Tippett sedulously avoided any activity which might hinder his composer's inspiration. This meant that when he refused conscription he preferred to go to prison rather than become librarian to an RAF orchestra, reasoning that he would be free to compose in prison. Unfortunately he spent a greater proportion of his time sewing mail bags.

The second half of the book is the more interesting to scholars of Tippett's life and works. Here we find recollections of his friendship with the Swiss conductor, Paul Sacher, his collaboration with Edith Sitwell, and tales of the extraordinary rivalry between Walton and Britten. These are interspersed with details of the trials of living with his septuagenarian mother (who secretly put laxa-

tives in their food) and of turbulence and subterfuge in his personal relationships. Since his first visit to the United States in 1965, Tippett has travelled widely. While he had toured Europe, particularly Germany, before the war, since the late 1960s Tippett and Meirion Bowen have managed to take holidays driving around Mexico without a map, climbing a temple in Borobodur in Indonesia and getting lost on foot near Ayer's Rock. Perhaps he was still affected by the latter escapade when he met the Prime Minister of South Australia (sic) on a visit to the Adelaide Festival.

Some aspects of Tippett's creative life have been left to a future biographer. Little has been said about his childhood and school life and there remains no record of his earliest experiments in composition. There are few details of his early political activities, nor of those since the war, and no mention is made of his involvement with the Peace Pledge Union or Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The book is disjointed and too obviously filled out by the descriptions of dreams. It is nevertheless invaluable in providing the background to the major compositions of the 1970s and 1980s. While the book was expedited by 'intimations of mortality', at the age of 87 he has begun a new orchestral work entitled *The Rose Lake*, and it seems that, as suggested by the title of the last movement of *The Mask of Time* (1984), 'the singing will never be done'.

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