

## **Five spirituals**

**Michael Tippett (1905-1998)**

Steal away  
Nobody knows  
Go down Moses  
By and by  
Deep river

Like Vaughan Williams, Tippett was a late developer as a composer, and did not achieve any significant recognition until he was well into his thirties. It was the first performance of his oratorio, *A Child of Our Time* (1944), that finally confirmed his arrival as a major composer. In a true moment of inspiration, Tippett used five spirituals in the oratorio, placed at key moments in the unfolding narrative and functioning as a contemporary equivalent of the Lutheran chorales used by Bach in his St Matthew and St John Passions. The emotional power of spirituals as universal songs of human suffering is quite extraordinary, in whatever form or context they are heard, but in Tippett's oratorio they achieve an exceptional intensity. He later produced these unaccompanied arrangements, which have become a standard favourite with choirs and audiences.

*programme notes by John Bawden*

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