

Tippett work finely sung

A CHILD of Our Time, Sir Michael Tippett's great cry against oppression and persecution, encompasses and expresses sentiments of monumental proportions that demand from performers of this work a deep sense of conviction to text and notes.

Such a sense came across in Saturday's performance, given in Guildford Cathedral by Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir and the Goldsmiths' Choral Union, under Sir Charles Groves' baton.

The directness of Tippett's writing — helped in this oratorio by both text and music flowing from the mind of a man on a crusade against inhumanity — does make it abundantly clear exactly what the

composer wants in terms of expression and effect, but this should take nothing away from the credit due to all the performers in conveying the sense of the piece.

Such examples as the almost frenetic nature of the choral fugue, *Burn Down their Houses*, the anger so vividly expressed in the chorus *The Cold Deepens* and the thrilling effect of the soprano voices, in echoing the words *The Trumpet Sound* in the negro spiritual *Steal Away*; these are just a few impressions which come to mind from the fine choral singing.

Turning to the soloists, it is a pleasure to recall the luscious sound of Jo Ann Pickens, a coloured American soprano with the ability to float a beautiful legato line combined with a rare richness of timbre and tone.

It is nowhere demonstrated better than in the delicate so-

prano glissando which provides such a magical bridge to the *Steal Away* spiritual.

Linda Strachan (contralto) and Ian Caley (tenor) both brought an impressive intensity of feeling to their narrative and also to the more pungent of the text, but the bass, Matthew Best, while bringing an appropriately compassionate approach to his interpretation, was occasionally in danger of sounding a little too detached from the strong sentiments so central to a convincing performance.

The orchestra, led by Hugh Bean, played most impressively, the sound as strong and, when needed, as sweet as any they have produced this season, as they reacted to Sir Charles Groves' ever-sensitive approach to the work.

The concert opened with as good a performance of Beethoven's Symphony No.1 as one could expect in a building which swallows up semi-quavers all too easily. "Too many notes," said the Emperor of Austria to Mozart on one occasion and so it is with early Beethoven in Guildford Cathedral.

Whether one should be paying a supplement for the notes one hears twice or asking for a refund for the ones which disappear into the plaster is difficult to decide.

But the orchestra did its best, which came, not suprisingly, in the circumspectly taken slow movement which contained all the cantabile qualities sought by the composer.

Robert Benjafield.