

### ***A Spiritual Experience***

'This is not our core repertoire' said conductor Paul Spicer at the opening of the Birmingham Bach Choir concert in the CBSO centre, and indeed it looked at first sight as though it might have been somewhat limited in its musical range. It was, however, a delight in many respects. The choir was in especially good form in the five spirituals from Michael Tippett's *A Child of our time*, where the great variety of texture was captured admirably, from the full-blooded *Steal Away* with its excellent chording to the musical and intelligent vocal textures achieved in *Nobody knows the trouble I've seen* and the drama of *Go Down, Moses*.

Paul Spicer's own setting of *Steal Away* was receiving its premiere performance, celebrating the centenary of the Choir. Its complex and unexpected harmonies marked it out fully as a 21<sup>st</sup> century reading of the traditional words while remaining true to the spiritual genre, with a transcendental ending on a simple G-major chord.

Martin Rawles, the choir's superb accompanist, provided two fascinating pieces by Coleridge Taylor and was very much in evidence in John Rutter's *Feel the Spirit*. If you can forgive some of the Rutteresque cheesy moments (especially the key shifts between verses) there was much here that entertained and indeed moved the audience in its most soulful moments. Both here and in the Tippett, there were some very effective solo contributions from members of the choir, especially that of Hilda Webb in *Sometimes I feel like a motherless child*.

The spirituals by Will Todd and Moses Hogan were perhaps less well communicated, as the choir rather buried themselves in their copies and didn't connect nearly so immediately with their audience. Nevertheless, the final Moses Hogan work *Elijah Rock* provided a full-on and rumbustious ending to the concert.

