

TIPPETT

A Child of Our Time

(Oratorio in Three Parts)

Robinson • Walker • Garrison • Cheek

City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus and Orchestra

Sir Michael Tippett



Sir Michael Tippett (1905–1998)

A Child of Our Time

Michael Tippett was one of the most gifted and most inspiring figures in twentieth-century British musical life. He was born on 2nd January 1905 in London, but grew up in a village in the East Anglian county of Suffolk and at a succession of boarding schools. Because his parents lived most of the time on the Continent, he travelled extensively in Europe, acquiring facility in languages and an unusually international outlook. Childhood piano lessons and concert-going prompted the ambition of becoming a composer, which was furthered by study at the Royal College of Music in London between 1923 and 1928, and later by private lessons with R.O. Morris. During the 1930s Tippett lived in the Surrey countryside south of London, earning a frugal living from teaching, and becoming involved in left-wing politics. He withheld most of his compositions of that period: his earliest published works are his *First String Quartet*, completed in 1935 (and in fact rewritten eight years later), and the first of his four *Piano Sonatas*, composed in 1936–38. Early in the Second World War, Tippett was appointed Director of Music at Morley College, an adult education institute in south London; he was to hold the post until 1951, conducting the Morley Choir in numerous concerts of early and new music. A lifelong pacifist, he was imprisoned for three months in 1943 as a conscientious objector, but his stock as a composer rose gradually, through performances and broadcasts of works including his *Concerto for Double String Orchestra* and *A Child of Our Time*. These established his individual compositional voice, with traditional forms modelled on those of Beethoven filled out in contrapuntal textures – line against line as opposed to chord after chord – and melodies animated by lithe syncopated or irregular rhythms, suggested

equally by Stravinsky, sixteenth-century madrigals and jazz.

After the War Tippett became well known not only as a conductor but also as a broadcaster on musical and cultural topics; meanwhile, he was working for several years on the first of his five operas, *The Midsummer Marriage*, which eventually reached the stage in 1955. This and two satellite works of the 1950s, the *Piano Concerto* and the *Second Symphony*, marked a peak of rich, exuberant invention in his music. In the early 1960s, he adopted more austere textures, complemented by mosaic-like construction, in such works as the opera *King Priam*, the *Concerto for Orchestra* and the short oratorio *The Vision of St Augustine*. Despite turning sixty in 1965, and being knighted the following year, Tippett remained apart from the Establishment, retaining his iconoclastic youthfulness of manner, and delighting in collaborations with young players and performances to young audiences. He became especially popular in the United States: his visits there brought a new swathe of influences, from both American classical music and popular culture, into such works of the 1970s as the operas *The Knot Garden* and *The Ice Break* and the *Third Symphony*; and American commissions or co-commissions in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in his *Fourth* and last *Symphony*, his evening-long choral work *The Mask of Time*, and his last opera *New Year*. Something of Tippett's early lyricism returned in his later works, which also include a *Triple Concerto*, the last of his five *String Quartets*, and his farewell to composition, *The Rose Lake* for orchestra. In his autobiography, *Those Twentieth Century Blues*, Tippett declared with characteristic optimism 'My real hope is to see in the new millennium'; but he died in 1998, six

days after his 93rd birthday.

Tippett wrote his oratorio *A Child of Our Time* between 1939 and 1941; its first performance, at the Royal Adelphi Theatre in London in March 1944, was one of the outstanding artistic events in the capital during the War. As later with all his operas, he wrote his own text; at one stage, he asked the great poet T.S. Eliot to write it, but on seeing his draft outline Eliot advised Tippett to complete it himself, as anything he might write would be so overtly poetic as to get in the way of the music. The work was inspired by an incident which took place in Paris in November 1938: a seventeen-year-old Polish Jew, a refugee whose family had been arrested by the Gestapo and stranded with thousands of others at the Polish frontier, and who was himself being sheltered illegally in France by his uncle and aunt, shot and killed a diplomat at the German Legation. He was tried and imprisoned by the French authorities; and the Nazis, by way of reprisal for the killing, launched one of their most savage pogroms in Germany and Austria, the notorious 'Kristallnacht'. Tippett's libretto does not simply narrate these events, but views them at one remove, from the standpoint of a non-believer, a convinced pacifist, and an admirer of the writings of the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. Its central theme is the need for each individual to come to terms with his or her own evil side, rather than project it on to an enemy – because the two sides of the personality are complementary, and both necessary, like winter and spring, darkness and light. This is stated most clearly in the unexpectedly hopeful passage in Part Three in which the tenor soloist and then the chorus sing: '*I would know my shadow and my light, so shall I at last be whole.*'

The music of *A Child of Our Time* similarly reconciles and integrates apparent opposites. The overall

form of the work, the composer himself said, recalls the tripartite arrangement of Handel's *Messiah*, in which the first part consists of 'great but general prophecies', the second of narrative, and the third of 'commentary and judgment'. Within this framework, there are more specific reminiscences of Handel's oratorios and of Bach's Passion settings, in such things as the dual rôles of the soloists as characters in the drama and commentators, the choral 'crowd scenes', among them the double chorus of persecutors and persecuted in Part Two, the frequent use of fugal texture, the constantly varying instrumental colours of successive numbers or sections, and most obviously the familiar first-inversion chords which herald the solo bass's passages of narrative recitative. But the musical language of the work is by no means pastiche: it is Tippett's own, recognisably English, especially in its madrigal-like adherence to the natural stresses of the words against the underlying pulse, and coloured by echoes of jazz and popular music such as the tango rhythm of the tenor's '*I have no money for my bread*'. These go halfway to meet one of the most striking features of the work, the Negro spirituals which are introduced from time to time to comment on the actions and emotions of the drama, in the same way as the Lutheran chorales in Bach's Passions. The spirituals are included as the songs of the victims of oppression in another generation and on another continent, and through their very familiarity they emphasize the relevance to us of the events Tippett describes and comments on: more than sixty years later, the anguished boy is still 'a child of our time'.

Anthony Burton

Faye Robinson

Faye Robinson is a graduate of Bennett College. Her spectacular career has been highlighted by performances in the major musical centres of Europe, North and South America. She has appeared in opera houses in Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Argentina, among other major cities. Equally renowned as a concert artist, she has performed with the Orchestras of Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Boston, London and Berlin. She has become known as a specialist in the interpretation of works by Sir Michael Tippett, whose work she has recorded, with other recordings including Mahler's *Eighth Symphony* and *Kindertotenlieder* and Schoenberg's *String Quartet No. 2*.

Sarah Walker

Sarah Walker began her musical life as a violinist at the Royal College of Music and subsequently studied singing with Vera Rozsa, with whom she has built up a wide repertoire ranging from Bach and Monteverdi to twentieth-century works by composers such as Berio, Boulez, Cage, Henze, Ligeti, Copland and Ives. She is much in demand on the concert platform worldwide, where she has worked with Ozawa, Davis, Mackerras, Solti, Norrington, Boulez, Rozhdestvensky, Tilson-Thomas, Masur, Harnoncourt and Rattle, and appears regularly with the major British orchestras, and at the major British and European festivals. Sarah Walker is closely associated with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where she has performed Baba the Turk (*The Rake's Progress*), Charlotte (*Werther*), Mrs Sedley (*Peter Grimes*) Sallinen's *The King Goes Forth To France*, Maxwell-Davies' *Taverner*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Handel's *Samson*. With English National Opera her many rôles include Mary Stuart, Charlotte, the Countess (*The Queen of Spades*), Cornelia (*Julius Caesar*), Britten's *Gloriana* and Katisha in *The Mikado*. She has sung Dido (*Les Troyens*) at the Vienna State Opera, Cornelia in Geneva, Ottavia and Cornelia in San Francisco, Magdalene in Chicago and Cornelia and Micah at the Metropolitan Opera. Her Glyndebourne début was as Diana in Cavalli's *La Calisto* and she has since sung Monteverdi's Ottavia, Penelope and Poppea. Sarah Walker has perhaps received the greatest critical acclaim for her recitals. Since the overwhelming success of her Wigmore Hall début she has visited all the major European cities and Festivals, the United States, Australia and New Zealand and has made numerous recordings. Sarah Walker was made a C.B.E in the 1991 Queen's Birthday Honours.

Jon Garrison

The gifted American tenor, Jon Garrison, is a favourite of many of the world's distinguished conductors. At the Metropolitan Opera he was Cassio in *Otello*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Romeo in *Roméo et Juliette*, von Eisenstein in Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, and Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*. His European engagements have included the title rôle in *Idomeneo* with the Garsington Opera in Surrey, Adolar in Weber's *Euryanthe* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in London, and Birtwistle's *Mask of Orpheus* and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and with von Dohnanyi and the Cleveland Orchestra. Other important engagements have explored his extensive, varied repertoire in a busy schedule of international appearances in opera and in the concert hall. Jon Garrison sang in the world premières of Stewart Copeland's *Holy Blood, Crescent Moon* for Cleveland Opera, Jay Reise's *Rasputin* with New York City Opera, and Hugo Weisgall's *The Gardens of Adonis* for Opera Omaha. He participated in a tribute to Gian Carlo Menotti with the Little Orchestra Society at Lincoln Center and appeared in Claude Baker's *Into the Sun* with Leonard Slatkin and the National Symphony. He performed Henze's *Elegy for Young Lovers* with the London Sinfonietta and his *Kammermusik* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Sheng's *Songs of Majnun* for New York Chamber Symphony, and Britten's *War Requiem* with several orchestras. On the occasion of the farewell performances of Zubin Mehta's tenure with the New York Philharmonic, he sang and recorded Schönberg's *Gurre-Lieder*. He has recorded Szymanowski's *Symphony No. 3* under the baton of Simon Rattle and the Evangelist in the *St Matthew Passion* with Raymond Leppard. Other recordings include *The Rake's Progress* and *Oedipus Rex*, and Handel's *Roman Vespers*.

John Cheek

Born in Greenville, South Carolina, John Cheek grew up in Wilmington, North Carolina and attended the North Carolina School for the Arts. It was there that Cheek first studied voice, and after graduating he furthered his studies in Siena, Italy and at the Manhattan School of Music. He made his Metropolitan Opera début in 1977 and has been a member of that company ever since, singing many of the leading bass-baritone rôles in *Don Giovanni*, *La Bohème*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, *Aida*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Faust* and *La clemenza di Tito*. He has appeared with almost all of the major orchestras in North America, in an astounding variety of oratorios and symphonic works, and has sung repeatedly with such distinguished conductors as Leonard Bernstein, Andrew Davis, Sir Colin Davis, Charles Dutoit, Erich Leinsdorf, James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Leonard Slatkin and Sir Georg Solti. He also appears regularly in recital and, on two notable occasions, his pianist-collaborator was James Levine in New York and again at the Ravinia Festival. He has also been recognised as a star bass in such European Centres as London, Paris, Berlin and Zurich. His recordings include Stravinsky's *Renard* with the St Paul Chamber Orchestra and Bernstein's *Songfest* with the St Louis Symphony, *The Rake's Progress* with the Orchestra of St Luke's, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* with the New Jersey Symphony, Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, and Haydn's *Creation* with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony and Chamber Chorus.

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra is the resident orchestra of Symphony Hall, Birmingham, and is one of the world's leading symphonic ensembles, having worked with many leading international conductors since its inaugural concert in 1920, conducted by Sir Edward Elgar. The orchestra established itself as a major force during its eighteen-year association with Sir Simon Rattle, and has continued to prosper under the Finnish conductor Sakari Oramo, who was appointed Principal Conductor in 1998 and Music Director in 1999. Under Oramo the orchestra has made a number of award-winning recordings, including the accolade of 2002 Gramophone Record of the Year for the Saint-Saëns *Piano Concertos* with the pianist Stephen Hough. The CBSO plays to over 300,000 people each year, in the United Kingdom and overseas, and reaches many millions more through its regular radio and television appearances, and its large discography. The orchestra also has a busy education department which co-ordinates an extensive programme of work with schools and in the local community, working directly with over 25,000 people each year. It also plays a leading rôle in amateur music-making in the Midlands, running four 'unpaid professional' choruses, one for adults, two for children, and an unauditioned youth choir, all regularly in demand to perform with the CBSO and other leading orchestras and musical groups. The CBSO recently founded a youth orchestra, which has recruited the best young musicians aged 14 - 21 from the East and West Midlands regions. This will meet twice a year for a week-long intensive course, culminating in performances under leading conductors, including Sakari Oramo.

City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus

Chorus Director: Simon Halsey

Since its début in 1974, the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus, a body of unpaid professionals, has become one of the finest of its kind, performing regularly with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. It has been heard in all the major British concert venues and has toured extensively across Europe, North America and Australia. The Chorus is one of the four choruses of the CBSO, along with two symphony youth choruses and a community-based choir for young people, an arrangement that is unique in Great Britain. As an important cultural ambassador, both for the CBSO and for Birmingham, the chorus has collaborated with other distinguished orchestras, including the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras. With more than a score of recordings to its credit, the chorus has won a number of awards, notably for recordings of Mahler's *Second Symphony* and Szymanowski's *King Roger* under Simon Rattle, of the music of Lili Boulanger under Yan Pascal Tortelier, and of Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* under the composer.

PART ONE

1 Chorus

The world turns on its dark side.
It is winter.

THE ARGUMENT

2 Alto Solo

Man has measured the heavens with a telescope,
driven the gods from their thrones.
But the soul, watching the chaotic mirror,
knows that the gods return.
Truly, the living god consumes within
and turns the flesh to cancer.

INTERLUDIUM – SCENA

3 Chorus & Alto Solo

Chorus

Is evil then good?
Is reason untrue?

Alto

Reason is true to itself;
But pity breaks open the heart.

Chorus

We are lost.
We are as seed before the wind.
We are carried to a great slaughter.

4 *The Narrator:*

Bass solo

Now in each nation there were some cast out
by authority and tormented,

made to suffer for the general wrong.
Pogroms in the east, lynching in the west;
Europe brooding on a war of starvation,
And a great cry went up from the people.

5 Chorus of the Oppressed

When shall the usurers' city cease,
And famine depart from the fruitful land?

6 Tenor Solo

I have no money for my bread;
I have no gift for my love.
I am caught between my desires and their
frustration as between the hammer and the anvil.
How can I grow to a man's stature?

7 Soprano Solo

How can I cherish my man in such days,
or become a mother in a world of destruction?
How shall I feed my children on so small a wage?
How can I comfort them when I am dead?

8 A SPIRITUAL

Chorus & Soli

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus;
Steal away, steal away home—
I han't got long to stay here.

My Lord, He calls me, He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I han't got long to stay here.

Green trees a-bending, poor sinner stand
a-trembling,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I han't got long to stay here.

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus;
Steal away, steal away home—
I han't got long to stay here.

PART TWO

9 Chorus

A star rises in mid-winter.
Behold the man! The scape-goat!
The child of our time.

10 *The Narrator:*

Bass solo

And a time came when in the continual
persecution one race stood for all.

11 **Double Chorus of Persecutors and Persecuted**

Away with them!
Curse them! Kill them!
They infect the state.

Where? How? Why?
We have no refuge.

12 *The Narrator:*

Bass Solo

Where they could, they fled from the terror,
And among them a boy escaped secretly,
and was kept in hiding in a great city.

13 **Chorus of the Self-righteous**

We cannot have them in our Empire.
They shall not work, nor beg a dole.
Let them starve in No-Man's-Land!

14 *The Narrator:*

Bass Solo

And the boy's mother wrote a letter, saying:

SCENA

15 **Solo Quartet**

Mother (Soprano)

O my son! In the dread terror they have
brought me near to death.

Boy (Tenor)

Mother! Mother!

Though men hunt me like an animal,
I will defy the world to reach you.

Aunt (Alto)

Have patience.

Throw not your life away in futile sacrifice.

Uncle (Bass)

You are as one against all.

Accept the impotence of your humanity.

Boy

No! I must save her.

16 **A SPIRITUAL**

Chorus & Soli:

Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord,
Nobody knows like Jesus.

O brothers, pray for me,

O brothers, pray for me,

And help me to drive old Satan away.

O mothers, pray for me,
O mothers, pray for me,
And help me to drive old Satan away.

Nobody knows the trouble I see, Lord,
Nobody knows like Jesus.

SCENA

17 Bass & Alto Duet

Bass (*Narrator*)

The boy becomes desperate in his agony.

Alto

A curse is born.
The dark forces threaten him.

Bass

He goes to authority.
He is met with hostility.

Alto

His other self rises in him,
demonic and destructive.

Bass

He shoots the official—

Alto

But he shoots only his dark brother—
And see—he is dead.

18 *The Narrator:*

Bass Solo

They took a terrible vengeance.

19 *The Terror*

Chorus

Burn down their houses!
Beat in their heads!
Break them in pieces on the wheel!

20 *The Narrator:*

Bass Solo

Men were ashamed of what was done.
There was bitterness and horror.

21 A SPIRITUAL OF ANGER

Chorus & Bass Solo

Go down, Moses, 'way down in Egypt land;
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

When Israel was in Egypt's land,
Let my people go.
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go.

"Thus spake the Lord," bold Moses said,
"Let my people go.
If not, I'll smite your first-born dead,
Let my people go."

Go down, Moses, 'way down in Egypt land;
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

22 *The boy sings in his Prison*

Tenor Solo

My dreams are all shattered in a ghastly reality.
The wild beating of my heart is stilled: day by day.
Earth and sky are not for those in prison.
Mother! Mother!

23 *The Mother:*

Soprano Solo

What have I done to you, my son?
What will become of us now?
The springs of hope are dried up.
My heart aches in unending pain.

24 **Alto Solo**

The dark forces rise like a flood.
Men's hearts are heavy: they cry for peace.

25 **A SPIRITUAL**

Chorus & Soprano Solo

O, by and by, by and by,
I'm going to lay down my heavy load.

I know my robe's going to fit me well,
I tried it on at the gates of hell.

O, hell is deep and a dark despair,
O, stop, poor sinner, and don't go there!

O, by and by, by and by,
I'm going to lay down my heavy load.

PART THREE

26 **Chorus**

The cold deepens.
The world descends into the icy waters
where lies the jewel of great price.

27 **Alto Solo**

The soul of man is impassioned like a woman.
She is old as the earth, beyond good and evil,
the sensual garments.

Her face will be illumined like the sun.
Then is the time of his deliverance.

SCENA

28 **Bass Solo**

The words of wisdom are these:
Winter cold means inner warmth,
the secret nursery of the seed.

Chorus

How shall we have patience for the
consummation of the mystery?
Who will comfort us in the going through?

Bass

Patience is born in the tension of loneliness.
The garden lies beyond the desert.

Chorus

Is the man of destiny master of us all?
Shall those cast out be unavenged?

Bass

The man of destiny is cut off from fellowship.
Healing springs from the womb of time.
The simple-hearted shall exult in the end.

Chorus

What of the boy, then? What of him?

Bass

He, too, is outcast,
his manhood broken in the clash of powers.
God overpowered him—the child of our time.

29 Chorus & Soli

Tenor

I would know my shadow and my light,
so shall I at last be whole.

Bass

Then courage, brother, dare the grave passage.

Soprano

Here is no final grieving, but an abiding hope.

Alto

The moving waters renew the earth.
It is spring.

(Chorus repeats the words of the soloists)

30 A SPIRITUAL

Chorus & Soli

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord,
I want to cross over into camp-ground.

O, chillun! O, don't you want to go,
To that gospel feast,
That promised land,
That land where all is peace?
Walk into heaven, and take my seat,
And cast my crown at Jesus' feet.

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
I want to cross over into camp-ground,
Lord!

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PART ONE

- | | | | | | |
|----------|--|-------------|-----------|---|-------------|
| 1 | The world turns... (Chorus) | 4:05 | 16 | A Spiritual - Nobody knows...
(Chorus and Soli) | 1:36 |
| 2 | The Argument - Man has measured...
(Alto) | 2:14 | 17 | Scena - The boy becomes desperate...
(Bass / Alto) | 1:30 |
| 3 | Interludium - Scena
Is evil then good... (Chorus and Alto) | 4:13 | 18 | The Narrator - They took a
terrible vengeance... (Bass) | 0:29 |
| 4 | The Narrator - Now in each nation...
(Bass) | 1:18 | 19 | The Terror - Burn down their houses...
(Chorus) | 1:06 |
| 5 | Chorus of the Oppressed
When shall... | 2:21 | 20 | The Narrator - Men were ashamed...
(Bass) | 0:39 |
| 6 | I have no money... (Tenor) | 3:25 | 21 | A Spiritual of Anger -
Go down Moses... (Chorus and Bass) | 3:08 |
| 7 | How can I cherish... (Soprano) | 3:33 | 22 | The boy sings in his prison
My dreams... (Tenor) | 3:45 |
| 8 | A Spiritual - Steal away...
(Chorus and Soli) | 2:32 | 23 | The Mother - What have I done...
(Soprano) | 1:36 |

PART TWO

- | | | | | | |
|-----------|--|-------------|-------------------|---|-------------|
| 9 | A star rises... (Chorus) | 3:27 | 24 | The dark forces... (Alto) | 0:52 |
| 10 | The Narrator - And a time came...
(Bass) | 0:19 | 25 | A Spiritual - O, by and by...
(Chorus and Soprano) | 1:28 |
| 11 | Chorus of Persecutors and Persecuted
Away with them... (Double Chorus) | 1:00 | PART THREE | | |
| 12 | The Narrator - Where they could...
(Bass) | 0:29 | 26 | The cold deepens... (Chorus) | 4:20 |
| 13 | Chorus of the Self-righteous
We cannot have them... | 0:48 | 27 | The soul of man... (Alto) | 2:28 |
| 14 | The Narrator - And the boy's mother...
(Bass) | 0:16 | 28 | Scena - The words of wisdom...
(Chorus and Bass) | 4:55 |
| 15 | Scena - O my son...
(Soloists) | 1:23 | 29 | Preludium - I would know
my shadow... (Chorus and Soli) | 6:32 |
| | | | 30 | A Spiritual - Deep river...
(Chorus and Soli) | 3:31 |



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Playing Time
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Michael Tippett was one of the most gifted and most inspiring figures in twentieth-century British musical life. Tippett's oratorio and choral masterpiece, *A Child of Our Time*, written at the beginning of the second world war as an expression of 'man's inhumanity to man', has become one of his most widely known works and one which is seen to symbolise the composer's extra-musical concerns, both political and psychological. Modelled on Handel's *Messiah*, the emotional and dramatic core of the work is found in the five *Spirituals*, in which the suffering of oppressed peoples throughout history – from the Israelites in Egypt, via black American slaves, to the Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe – is given universal resonance. This unique recording was conducted by the composer himself when he was 85.

Sir Michael
TIPPETT
(1905–1998)

A Child of Our Time (1939–41)

1-8	Part One	23:41
9-25	Part Two	23:52
26-30	Part Three	21:43

Faye Robinson, Soprano • Sarah Walker, Mezzo-Soprano
Jon Garrison, Tenor • John Cheek, Bass

City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus (Simon Halsey, Chorus Director)
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (Peter Thomas, Leader)

Sir Michael Tippett

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