

Academy of Ancient Music: Haydn's Creation

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate running time: 120 minutes, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Programme

Joseph Haydn *The Creation*

Richard Bratby speaks to the Nina Dunn Studio team about the aspects of Haydn's choral work that inspired tonight's visuals.

In June 1792, Joseph Haydn encountered one of the scientific wonders of the age. He recorded the occasion in his personal notebook:

On 15th June I went from Windsor to Doctor Herschel, where I saw the great telescope. It is 40 feet long and 5 feet in diameter. The machinery is very big, but so ingenious that a single man can put it in motion with the greatest ease.

When Haydn had arrived in England, 18 months earlier, he'd started noting down his reactions to everything from Royal Navy warships to Cockney slang. William Herschel's telescope (actually, it seems likely that Haydn was welcomed and shown around by Herschel's sister and fellow-astronomer Caroline) clearly made an impression upon him. Not, perhaps, one that struck as close to his personal interests as the massive Handel Commemoration Festival at Westminster Abbey in May 1791, at which an orchestra and chorus of over 1000 performed Israel in Egypt and Messiah to a huge and receptive audience. But it was an experience that clearly excited the imagination of a composer with a lively and receptive mind.

It's wholly appropriate, then, to present *The Creation* in a performance that incorporates the latest in digital visuals. 'We've thought a lot about nature's process of creation: where things start, and how an artwork evolves' says Nina Dunn. 'When Haydn was working, he would have looked at layering of the orchestra, how the voices come in and out, and the richness and detail of what he was creating. So we've sought out the richness of the technology available to us: 3D scan technology, reactive visuals, and also footage and hand-drawn work. It's like an orchestra of techniques that come together, and allow us to respond. But our orchestra is a little bit different from the 1790s!'

It seems clear that Haydn's overwhelming impulse in *The Creation* was to communicate – and to do so as vividly and directly as possible. Before leaving England for the last time in 1795, he acquired an English libretto, of unknown authorship, for an oratorio based on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Modest about his grasp of English, he enlisted the Viennese polymath Baron Gottfried van Swieten who 'resolved to clothe the poem in German garb'. Van Swieten's translation is the text that Haydn set as *Die Schöpfung* – and which Haydn, aware of his huge English-speaking fanbase, had translated back into English as *The Creation*. Completed in the autumn of 1797, *Die Schöpfung / The Creation* became the first work in musical history to be published bilingually, though the actual premiere took place on 30th April 1798, at the Palais Schwarzenberg in Vienna. The reaction was ecstatic.

The subject could hardly have suited Haydn better. There's something simultaneously touching and sublime about his musical portrayals of the weather; the sun and moon; the tiger, the whale and (of course) the earthworm. The tonally-ambiguous prelude, the 'Representation of Chaos', is a radical masterpiece in its own right. But Haydn planned it as part of a greater design. Chaos is defeated by a dazzling affirmation of tonality – a mighty burst of C major as God creates light. And throughout *The Creation*, passages of relaxation (the radiant soprano aria 'With Verdure Clad', the rosy dawn that opens Part Three) and playful humour are balanced by music of visionary grandeur, and choruses of a scale and impact unheard since Handel.

Dunn and her colleagues have also taken their cues from the sheer beauty of nature, as represented (often before it's described in the libretto) in Haydn's music. 'Each of the graphics is based on the essence of what's described in the music: the essence of chaos, the essence of water, the essence of beasts - the lion's roar, for example' she says. 'So, that's one layer. And then on a more tangible layer, we're interrogating plant detail, feathers; the physical details that we, as human beings, often step over. There's a great beauty in fish scales'. But what of the religious – or if you prefer, the philosophical – element of a work by a devout Roman Catholic: a vision that frames the universe (at least, until Uriel's brief final warning) in wholly optimistic terms?

barbican

‘We discussed it a lot at the beginning’ says Dunn. ‘We asked whether we should have a warning in there. *The Creation* is a celebration - that is clear from the music and the libretto. But for us, there's quite an undertone of danger, in terms of the risk that nature faces from our actions. Sometimes the best approach is to remind an audience of the beauty of nature, rather than reading the riot act. We need hope; we need to be reminded of that beauty. But, at the end, we hope to highlight to the audience – literally by lighting them - that it's over to them, for better or for worse.’

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Performers

Laurence Cummings conductor
Nina Dunn video and projection designer
Mary Bevan Gabriel
Stuart Jackson Uriel
Matthew Brook Raphael
Rachel Redmond Eve
Ashley Riches Adam

Academy of Ancient Music

violin I

Bojan Čičić
Liz MacCarthy
Agata Darashaite
Sijie Chen
Iona Davies
Gabriella Jones
Oliver Cave
Conor Gricmanis

violin II

Persephone Gibbs
Davina Clarke
Sarah Moffatt
William Thorp
Abel Cziczor Balzacs
Naomi Burrell

viola

Jane Rogers
Jane Norman
Heather Birt
Joanna Patrick
Julia Black

soprano

Nina Bennet
Emma Brain-Gabbott
Emily Owen
Eloise Irving
Dani May
Philippa Murray
Danni O'Neill
Amy Wood

bass

Neil Bellingham
Adrian Horsewood
Richard Latham
Jon Stainsby
Philip Tebb
Reuben Thomas

cello

Sarah McMahon
Imogen Seth-Smith
Andrew Skidmore
Gavin Kibble
George Ross

double bass

Judith Evans
Timothy Amherst
Carina Cosgrave

flute

Rachel Brown
Marta Goncalves
Beth Stone

Oboe

Leo Duarte
Lars Henriksson

clarinet

Katherine Spencer
Emily Worthington

alto

Cathy Bell
Lucy Goddard
Elisabeth Irvine
Clara Kanter
Ruth Kiang
Martha McLorinan

Matt Brown video designer for Nina Dunn Studio

Laura Salmi visual dramaturgy for video

Adam Lansberry NOTCH artist

Luigi Sardi video programmer

Harrison Cooke production video engineer

Matt Somerville video engineer

Universal Pixels video equipment supplier

horn

Gavin Edwards
David Bentley

trumpet

David Blackadder
Philip Bainbridge

trombone

Sue Addison
Stephanie Dyer
Stephen Saunders

timpani

Benedict Hoffnung

fortepiano

Alastair Ross

tenor

William Balkwill
James Geer
Jack Granby
Samuel Jenkins
Tim Lacy
Rory Carver

Co-produced by the Barbican and Academy of Ancient Music

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