

Creative Genius

On Saturday evening, in spite of rain and gales, Guildford Cathedral rang to the glorious sound of Haydn's "Creation".

This work, written at the end of the eighteenth century, has not always had the popularity it deserves in Britain, but over the last hundred years it has enjoyed a renaissance and now justly takes its place in the top rank of oratorios. It is the story of the creation of the world, taking its texts from the bible and Milton's "Paradise Lost". Haydn took the libretto back to Austria after a visit to England and had it translated into German, but the first published score included the text in both languages.

The Vivace chorus and the Brandenburg Sinfonia were joined by three soloists: Soprano, Tenor and Bass. The contrast between the dark bass of Mark Wildman and the fresh, lyrical voice of young Nicholas Scott were ideally suited to this work, where Haydn uses the different vocal timbres and ranges to depict light and darkness, the heavens and the depths of the ocean, the birds flying free and the beasts of the earth with heavy tread or sinuous trace.

The immaculate diction of Mr. Wildman was a joy to hear as was his connection to the story and obvious enjoyment in telling it.

I expect great things of the tenor, whose voice, as yet, is not of a size for such a large venue, but as maturity fills out the lower range and age adds a little more power, there should be a great future for this singer. He had great elegance of phrasing, and his clarity of diction is quite a rarity in young singers nowadays..

The strong, bright voice of Rebecca Goulden soared over the orchestra and up into the vaults of heaven just as Haydn must have intended. Here was some excellent coloratura as well as more tender moments, but a tendency to flatness on occasions in the middle voice and even, a couple of times, some very suspect notes need to be addressed.

The orchestra played with all their usual verve and sensitivity. The creation story as Haydn brings it to us is told first by the orchestra and then by the voices. Haydn plays a musical guessing game with his audience.....asking us to listen to the orchestration which paints a picture in sound of what is being created. Only then does a soloist or the chorus affirm it in words. The Brandenburg Sinfonia rose to every challenge, as, indeed, did the Vivace Chorus, and this is a challenging work. From the beautifully soft beginning when the Spirit of God first begins its creative work, through the downfall of the hosts of darkness and the glorious fugal hymns of praise, to the final resounding Amens, the choir were responsive to the conductor and produced a wonderful choral sound.

Only once was I disappointed, when, during the chorus "The Heavens are telling", the solo trio sing 'ever, ever, ever understood'. The onward sweep of the music suddenly stops in a rare moment of silence, marked with a pause. The following notes, also marked with pauses, drop into the silence before once more sweeping forward. In the whole of the oratorio this is a purely operatic moment, and we mustn't forget that Haydn was also an operatic composer. I wanted time to savour the pauses as much as I was savouring the voices.

That said, I must congratulate the Vivace Chorus on their musical director. Jeremy Backhouse held all the forces under his baton together to bring us a performance of an

exceptionally high standard. The rehearsal on the day of the performance is usually the only one with the orchestra, and the director, understandably, must give them a great percentage of his attention, often to the detriment of the chorus. In performance Jeremy never lets his chorus down. He is helped in this of course by the sheer professionalism of this orchestra, but the communication between musical director and choir is exceptional. Thankyou, Vivace Chorus, for a wonderful evening.

Gillian Ramsden