

# PROGRAM NOTES

The late choral works of Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) are a pristine musical embodiment of the Enlightenment. Designed for public performance by large forces, they address themselves directly to human beings who are capable of being delighted, and smart enough to want to be so. Anchored by a grasp of musical form possessed by few composers before or since, they convince using structure rather than cheap effect, sense rather than sensibility. For all their capacity to elevate the listener with sublime gestures and ideas, they never lose sight of the fact that it is in serving human intelligence, not in co-opting or dominating it, that art achieves its goal.

Haydn was approached with the idea for *The Creation* in 1796. A triumphant residency in London in the early 1790s had brought the composer fame, fortune and a major sense of accomplishment. Though late in years, he was equal to the challenge: To compose an oratorio based on the creation of the world, based on a libretto culled from Scripture and from John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* that was, as legend would have it, originally intended for Handel. Haydn had been awestruck by the gargantuan Handel Commemoration Festivals he witnessed in Westminster Abbey, in which close to 1,000 performers would join to venerate *Messiah* and the other great oratorios. According to his friend and biographer, Griesinger, "he was struck as if he had been put back to the beginning of his studies and had known nothing up to that moment. He found a whole nation aroused by compositions offered in

monumental performances. He desired intensely to write, as Handel had written, works meant for an entire nation." What emerged from Haydn's interaction with the English oratorio tradition is one of the great works of all time, and the composer's personal favorite—a fresh and original gloss on a topic that has preoccupied every human society from the beginning of time.

What was Haydn's own vision of the Creation? The work bears the undeniable stamp of Freemasonry (a reference to "the sons of God," the ordering of the heavenly bodies—sun, moon, stars). The Deist world view (radically oversimplified) of God as a clock-maker is also at play: "*Händewerk*" (craftsmanship) rather than "*Kunst*" (high art) is used in the work's most famous chorus. Astronomers have remarked on how Herschel's "nebular theory," with which Haydn was familiar, is perfectly captured in the murky, coalescent strains of the Depiction of Chaos. The parallels between Big Bang theory and the C-major explosion on the words "*und es ward Licht*" are equally obvious. But Haydn appears to have been less concerned with why and how the universe was created (God willed it, and it was so) than what this new-created world was for. Far from being a parable of the fall from grace, or brandishing the example of Adam and Eve as the root cause of humanity's guilt, this Creation depicts a perfectly designed, improvable world to which mankind's talents and intellect are to be applied. Nothing in *The Creation* detracts from this humanistic, progressive image.

The first public performance of *The Creation* took place in Vienna's Burgtheater in the spring of 1798, with Haydn directing 120 instrumentalists and 65 singers and Salieri at the keyboard. An eyewitness account best expresses the visceral impact the work had at its premiere: "No one had seen the page of the score wherein the Creation of Light is portrayed. Haydn had the expression of someone who is thinking of biting his tongue, either to hide his embarrassment or to conceal a secret. And in that moment when Light broke forth for the first time, one would have said that light-rays darted from the composer's blazing eyes. The enchantment of the electrified Viennese was so profound that the performers could not proceed for some minutes." The work became instantly famous throughout Europe, and sold-out performances during Lent and Advent were treasured traditions in Vienna for years after. A frail Haydn made his last appearance at such an occasion on his 76th birthday, tears streaming down his face at his final public embrace.

At the same time Haydn began work on *The Creation*, he also embarked on the other major project that was to consume his final years' work. The current head of the Eszterhazy family, with whom Haydn's early career had been closely identified, commissioned the composer to write a high Mass each year for his wife's name day. Haydn responded with an immense and inspiring effort that was to yield six major choral-symphonic works, of which the *Missa in tempore belli* (or "Mass in Time of War"—Haydn's own moniker) was the first. Originally offered in the Bergkirche in the Eszterhazy capital of Eisenstadt on September 13, 1796, the Mass premiered in Vienna in December of that same year. At around the same time, the Austrian forces in Italy were being overrun by

Napoleon's *Grande Armée*, and Vienna itself was feeling the heat of the dictator's approach. A general mobilization decree was issued throughout the Empire in August 1796. It is tempting to visualize Haydn at work on the distant drumbeats of the Agnus Dei chorus when he heard the news that total war was imminent.

The *Mass* itself is highly original, and though it is meant to be for a time of war, it is not remotely warlike in its outlook. Several distinctive characteristics of Haydn's late Masses are all given their first airings in this work: For one thing, the chorus tends to dominate the soloists. In earlier choral-orchestral settings of the Mass ordinary, of which Bach's *Mass in B minor* and Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor* are the preeminent examples, composers tended to follow the Baroque "numbers Mass" format, splitting the text between choruses and arias in serial format. Here, each major section of the Mass is a free-standing movement, sometimes following a tripartite structure (as in the Gloria and the Credo), sometimes using a dramatic, slow introduction to set up a brighter conclusion (as in the Kyrie, Sanctus and Agnus Dei), and the soloists (except for the famous Qui tollis bass solo) are all but incidental.

The *Mass's* treatment of the orchestra is as original as its overall structure, and in this regard Haydn paved the way for generations of choral-orchestral composers that followed. The players are increasingly emancipated from their typical role of doubling the voice parts: Wildly free decoration from the violins, prominent woodwind solos, even a major episode for solo timpani (this earned the work its alternate title, "*Paukenmesse*") all add to the texture and richness of the design, and give the work added structural unity. Daring gestures—the high E given to the

bass section on the word “miserere” (have mercy), the opposition of the men’s and women’s voices in the Agnus Dei, the sudden dynamic shifts from soft to loud in the Et incarnatus est section of the Credo—all these *chiaroscuro* touches lend the work a boldness and self-assurance that would profoundly influence and inspire Beethoven in the writing of his two choral symphonies, the Missa Solemnis and the supremely confident *Ode to Joy*.

It was Haydn’s sense of self that was to propel music, firmly and irrevocably, into a new age. In a prior age, serious music was to serve various purposes that were somehow private, compartmentalized, exclusive—chanting monks hidden from view behind a choir screen, a command performance in the palace of a great nobleman, a sectarian celebration of one sort or another. After Haydn, music would be unabashedly public and communal in character, and there was to be no turning back. It was in this spirit that Haydn himself said his compositions were “writ large.” But though he was intent on perfecting musical form and structure, he was never so formalistic as to ignore the fact that his audience also wanted, and needed, to be delighted and entertained. Likewise, though he was said to be able to “move and govern the passions at will,” he never dissipated this power in the service of needless emotionality or bombast. It is perhaps because Haydn never became drunk with self-importance that we cherish him the most. For all of his music’s brilliance and sincerity, wit and good humor remain, and thereby foster an intelligent conversation between artist and audience.

—John Maclay

# BIOGRAPHIES

**John Maclay**, conductor, joined the Choral Society in 1994, became its assistant conductor in 1997 and has been its conductor since 1999. Having studied piano from the age of four, his initiation to choral singing came in middle school, with a performance of Haydn's *Mass in Time of War*. He accompanied and directed numerous choral groups at Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges, where he co-founded a musical theater troupe. While at law school, John was the assistant conductor of the Harvard Glee Club, the country's oldest collegiate chorus. As conductor of the Choral Society and Orchestra, he has created original orchestrations of Mozart's *Kyrie in D minor*, Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, and sections of the Monteverdi *Vespers*, and program notes for over a dozen concerts. John practices corporate law at Société Générale, one of the largest European commercial and investment banks.

**Dylan Chan** has been the associate conductor and principal accompanist of the Choral Society of Grace Church for two years. Previously, he was assistant conductor of the Yale Glee Club and studied piano at the Yale School of Music with Elizabeth Parisot. In college, he majored in both music and molecular biophysics and biochemistry. He is currently a student in the Cornell/Rockefeller/Sloan-Kettering Tri-Institutional M.D./Ph.D. program, where he studies the physiology of hearing and deafness in Jim Hudspeth's laboratory, permitting him finally to explore the intersection between his primary interests—music and science. Several

of his recent choral compositions will be premiered by the Choral Society on May 20, 2005.

Soprano **Mara Bonde**, critically acclaimed for an electric stage presence and sweet purity of tone, has performed throughout the United States and Europe. Ms. Bonde made her Boston Pops debut under the direction of Keith Lockhart in "Brush Up Your Shakespeare," which was nationally televised on PBS's *Evening at Pops* and since then, has become a frequent guest artist with that orchestra. On the concert stage, she has sung with the Utah, San Diego, Charlotte, New Haven, Stamford, Syracuse, Nashua, and Cape Symphony Orchestras; the Handel & Haydn Society; Boston Baroque Orchestra; and the OPUS Chamber Orchestra. She appears as soloist in Ravel's *Trois Beaux Oiseaux du Paradis* on Robert Shaw's Telarc recording *Appear and Inspire* and is also the featured soloist on *Music for Voices* by Allen Brings, newly released on Capstone Records. Ms. Bonde has sung with Glimmerglass Opera, Utah Opera, Opera Company of North Carolina, National Opera Company (Raleigh), and the Lake George Opera Festival in works ranging from Mozart to Mollicone and Sullivan to Sondheim. Next October, Ms. Bonde makes her debut with Opera Omaha singing *Tiny* in Benjamin Britten's *Paul Bunyan*. She is thrilled to be making her second appearance with the Choral Society.

**Désirée Halac**, described by the *New York Times* as “a mezzo with a round warm voice,” is a versatile singer of the classical and contemporary opera and recital repertory. Most recently, Ms. Halac made her Teatro Colón debut in Buenos Aires as Dido in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. New York solo appearances include performances in Avery Fisher Hall with the American Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Leon Botstein, as well as performances of Bach’s *Mass in B minor*, Mozart’s *Requiem*, and the Rachmaninoff *Vespers* with the Choral Society. She has sung lead roles with the opera companies of the Aspen Festival under the baton of David Zinman, the Virginia Opera, Washington Concert Opera, and Kloster Opera (Frankfurt), and performed the role of Carmen in Baton Rouge opposite tenor Paul Groves. An active recitalist and chamber musician, Ms. Halac was also a regular soloist with the late Jupiter Symphony Orchestra under conductor and mentor Jens Nygaard, where her work included the *Seven Spanish Songs* of Manuel de Falla, and has made extensive recital tours in Spain and Argentina. Her recording credits include the role of the Sorceress in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* for the Vox Label, and songs of the Argentinean composer Carlos Guastavino with pianist Dalton Baldwin, for release in spring 2005.

**Justin Vickers** was cited by the *New York Times* as “a fine young tenor” for his recent portrayal of Tavannes in *Les Huguenots* for the Opera Orchestra of New York. A former young artist with Opera Orchestra, he has also performed with them as Comino in *Adelia* and Rustighello in *Lucrezia Borgia*. Elsewhere, he has been featured by the Tampa Opera as Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus*, the Washington Opera as

the Ballad Singer in *Of Mice and Men*, the Minnesota Opera as the Italian Singer in *Der Rosenkavalier*, and in critically acclaimed performances with the Wolf Trap Opera in the title role in *Idomeneo* and Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, the Festival Internacional de Moia de Bages in Barcelona, and in China at Shenyang’s Grande Theatre and in concert with the Liaoning Symphony Orchestra and in the Concert Hall of Beijing’s Forbidden City.

Bass **Philip Cokorinos** returns to Grace Church after singing in the Mozart *Requiem* last season. Currently in his seventeenth season with the Metropolitan Opera, he has appeared there in numerous productions, including telecasts of *Don Giovanni* and the world premiere of *The Ghosts of Versailles*. He has performed in more than sixty leading roles with opera companies throughout North America; most recently as Leporello in Atlanta Opera’s *Don Giovanni*, Mephistopheles in *Faust* with Chautauqua Opera, and Capellio in *I Capuletti e I Montecchi* with the Spoleto Festival USA. On the concert stage Mr. Cokorinos’ recent credits include Haydn’s *Creation* in Carnegie Hall, Rossini’s *Missa di Gloria* with the Little Orchestra Society of New York, and both Berlioz’ *La Damnation de Faust* and Verdi’s *Requiem* with the Spokane Symphony. He appeared in a telecast of Berlioz’s *L’Enfance du Christ* with the NHK Symphony in Japan, and he has recorded that work as well as Berlioz’s *Huit Scenes de Faust* for Decca with the Montreal Symphony led by Charles Dutoit.