

Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra shines in Haydn's Creation
Review by Robin Gregory

The Creation is one of Haydn's most enigmatic works. It manages to be not only sublime but also somehow 'jokey'. The impresario Saloman suggested that the composer, who had become highly regarded in London, should set English words which had been cobbled together from Milton. He did so, and a somewhat more serious-seeming German version swiftly followed.

Haydn was inspired to compose some of his finest music, demanding large choral and orchestral forces, and at least three top soloists. Many conductors have recorded memorable versions, some in one language, and some in the other. The list of singers on disc sounds like a who's-who of the greatest vocal treasures. Fritz Wunderlich, possibly the finest of the recorded tenors, died in a fall at his hunting-lodge while in the process of recording under Karajan. Werner Krenn, himself a superb singer, filled in the gaps.

At St Saviour's Church in Eastbourne on Sunday 19 April, the Eastbourne Symphony Chorus, the Eastbournian Society Chorus, and the ESO certainly looked the part: handsomely turned-out and oozing confidence. The orchestra, led by Lisa Wigmore, tuned up with similar aplomb. The conductor Graham Jones reminded me of a man who had just taken control of a new BMW. His soloists would not have looked out of place at the Albert Hall: soprano Elizabeth Roberts elegantly dressed; bass Jozik Kotz and tenor Andrew Mackenzie-Wicks wearing their DJs as to the manner born.

From the first note I felt that I was in for something amazing; and I was not wrong. The orchestra and choir were bang in tune and responsive to Graham's clear beat from the first note. And as we swiftly reached the blazing C major chord (representing light) which had astounded the listeners at the first performance, it became clear that Eastbourne had an orchestra and choir that rightly deserved the full house to which they were playing.

There were solo high-spots a-plenty, and many subtleties. I especially enjoyed Andrew's heady performance of the music as God created the moon; and Jozik's description of such living creatures as 'the tawny lion', 'the flexible tiger' and 'the sinuous worm'.

At the end, the thunderous applause was surely for a worthy overall performance of a work that sets so many problems but which had passed unnoticed because they had been overcome. Graham looked pleased; so did Lisa. This was certainly one of the finest achievements of the ESO's 35-year history. Soloists, choir, orchestra, conductor: it had all come together. If Haydn had been listening (and who's to say he wasn't?), he'd have clapped too.

A final word should go to the compiler of the printed programme. It was generous, full of information, carried the text, and named every single performer. Could one ask more?