

Eastbourne's 'Creation' in Chichester Cathedral Robin Gregory reviews

Haydn's huge musical picture of the Creation received a grand performance under Graham Jones's baton on Saturday 2 May. The Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra which he has developed for many years were in great form, while the combined forces of Eastbourne College Choral Society and Eastbourne Choral Society celebrated their collaboration with outstanding attack and precision.

The composer chose to present the story of God's creation of the Earth and all things in it in music of great drama and occasional delicate beauty. All too often performers fail to convey his vision by failures in one department or another; but on this occasion the evening was worthy of the composer, of the venue (one of the most welcoming of cathedrals), and of the awesome subject. From the first devastating orchestral outburst depicting Chaos to the final rapturous Amen, we were aware that the conductor and his huge forces would never let us down.

Outstanding moments were many: the chorus, for example, in 'The Heavens are telling', or the instrumental solos depicting various birds. But it was the over-arching sweep of the well-rehearsed instruments and singers which made for so thrilling an evening. The three soloists were, individually and together, as good as one might ever hope to hear. Soprano Kishani Jayasinghe has already won hearts in Sussex: her rich upper register and her evident delight in all she does contributed to the most telling interpretation of her part that I have heard. John Hancorn, taking time off from conducting the Eastbourne Choral Society, told the Creation story with dramatic and emotional command, his baritone blending well with Kishani in the Love Duet. Young Canadian tenor Pascal Charbonneau was a real find: a lyric singer with soaring high notes allied to a musical insight beyond his years.

The printed programme was handsome and informative, presenting not only profiles of the performers and a description of the way Haydn came to tackle the subject, but also the words of the oratorio. At the end of the performance leader Lisa Wigmore, conductor, soloists and both choirs, along with the additional singers from Junior King's School, Canterbury (numbering some 240 performers all together), were given a well-deserved ovation.