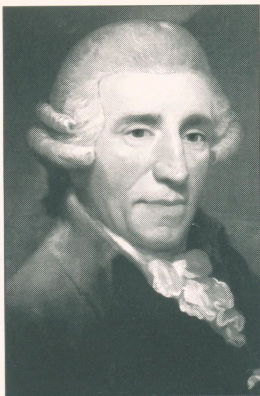


# THE PROGRAM

Saturday, October 17, 2009

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732–1809)



## Scoring:

chorus  
soprano, tenor, and bass soloists  
3 flutes  
2 oboes  
2 clarinets  
3 bassoons  
contrabassoon  
2 horns  
2 trumpets  
3 trombones  
timpani  
harpsichord  
strings

## Performance Time:

approximately 1 hour, 50 minutes

## About the Composer

Joseph Haydn spent the majority of his career in the service of the Esterháza, one of the richest and most important Hungarian noble families. From 1761 to 1790, he directed musical activities at the court, composing symphonies, operas, and a variety of instrumental works, as well as sacred and secular vocal music performed for the pleasure of the prince. For 10 months a year, Haydn was stuck at the palace of Esterházy in the swamplands some 50 kilometers south of Vienna. "Here I sit in my wilderness," he lamented in a letter, "forsaken—like a poor waif—almost without human society—sad." To convince the prince that it was time to quit the country house and return to the capital, Haydn wrote a series of pleading solos in the final movement of his "Farewell" Symphony (1772), each musician falling silent until only two forlorn violins remain. The prince was persuaded, and the entire court soon decamped for Vienna.

Even while at Esterháza, however, Haydn managed to make contacts in the capital, to publish his music throughout Europe, and to fulfill commissions from Paris, Cadiz, and Naples. Haydn composed for hire, but eventually his circumstances changed.

In 1790 the prince died, and the musical establishment was dissolved, leaving Haydn free to pursue an international career. Impresario Johann Peter Salomon arranged a visit to London in 1791; Haydn had never before been outside the vicinity of Vienna. He spent two successful seasons abroad and returned in the summer of 1792 by way of Bonn, where he met Beethoven. Two years later, Haydn was again in England for a second happy visit; perhaps he contemplated resettling there, but in 1795, he went back to Vienna, where he remained until his death in 1809.

Although often considered a forerunner to Mozart (being over 20 years his senior), in fact Haydn composed for over a decade after Mozart's death in 1791. His greatest fame came in his final years with the dramatic oratorios *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, which were modeled on works by George Frideric Handel.

## About *Die Schöpfung* (*The Creation*)

In 1791, Haydn attended the Handel festival at Westminster Abbey, where he heard *The Messiah*. Handel had all but invented the English oratorio, a dramatic work on a sacred subject for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. Haydn followed Handel's example in writing his own English oratorio, *The Creation*. The text came from Salomon, who handed Haydn an old libretto (reportedly once intended for Handel) drawn from the King James Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Once back in Vienna, Haydn found himself struggling with the English, turning to the Baron Gottfried van Swieten for help. The Baron crafted a German translation, which Haydn set; van Swieten then revised the English to suit the music. From the start, *The Creation*—or *Die Schöpfung*—was intended to be performed and disseminated in English and German.

Van Swieten might seem a mere handmaiden in this tale. In fact, he was one of the most politically and culturally powerful men in Vienna. A confidant of Emperor Joseph II, van Swieten was Director of the State Education Commission and Director of the Censorship Commission. He was also a passionate amateur composer (his symphonies, Haydn remarked, were "as stiff as the man himself"), important patron, and connoisseur of "ancient music" who introduced the works of J. S. Bach and Handel to Mozart, as well as to Haydn. He also sponsored performances of Handel's oratorios in Vienna, hence his involvement with Haydn's own efforts in the genre. The two men had previously collaborated in recasting the instrumental suite *The Seven Last Words of Christ* as a choral work, and would work together again on *The Seasons*, Haydn's sequel to *The Creation*.

## Premiere:

Composed in 1796–1798, *Die Schöpfung* received its Carnegie Hall premiere on November 30, 1894, with Lillian Blauvelt, soprano; Charles Herbert Clarke, tenor; Emil Fischer, bass; the Oratorio Society of New York; and the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Damrosch.

**The whole of *The Creation* is divided into three parts. The first covers the first through fourth days; the second spans days five and six; and the third is cast in the Garden of Eden.**



## DID YOU KNOW?

Haydn was a Catholic but also a Freemason, and his faith was described by a contemporary as “not of the gloomy, always suffering sort, but rather cheerful and reconciled.”

Working with van Swieten’s German text, Haydn began composing *The Creation* in the autumn of 1796 and continued writing through the winter. Three private performances occurred in April and May 1798; the public premiere followed a year later on March 19, 1799, the Feast of St. Joseph, with Haydn conducting. *The Creation* quickly spread across Europe, with successful performances in Paris, London, Prague, Berlin, Amsterdam, and St. Petersburg. It was Haydn’s greatest triumph.

### A Closer Listen

In the program for the first public performance of *The Creation*, Haydn asked the audience to hold its applause between movements, “because otherwise the exact connection between the separate parts, from whose unbroken succession the effect of the whole should stem, would necessarily be destroyed, and thus the pleasure received would become noticeably diminished.” According to one critic, however, “at the end of each piece and each section there was enthusiastic applause.”

The whole of *The Creation* is divided into three parts. The first covers the first through fourth days, from chaos to the birth of the planets; the second spans days five and six, ending with the creation of mankind. The third part is cast in the Garden of Eden and features an amorous duet for Adam and Eve. Each concludes with a celebratory chorus.

The most thrilling (and most remarked upon) unbroken succession is the remarkable passage between the first and second movements—from darkness to light, chaos to cosmos, irrationality to divine logic. Audiences and musicians are always stunned by the glorious pronouncement, “Let there be light.”

But before the light, there was darkness. And before the Word, there was sound that was not yet music. Haydn imagines chaos as a sonic cloud that obscures melody, harmony, and rhythm—even timbre, the various instruments being difficult to identify in the swirling mass. But this music does not depict nothingness or even chaos. Instead, it enacts

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enlightenment. There’s a momentum, an incipient order that is realized. This sound moves inescapably toward music. The aural atmosphere is akin to the mental fog we might feel when searching for the right word (the Word) to express a meaning already known but not yet articulated.

Musical phrases reach toward concluding cadences, which are averted; chords coalesce but fail to fit together. Everything hangs suspended in the moment “before language and reason recognize one another,” as musicologist Richard Kramer explains. “The music, as it unfolds, suggests an effort to put notes together, intuitively, guided by some natural sense, and prior to the codification into rules that would govern how notes, under prescribed conditions, must follow one another.” Ultimately, as Kramer concludes, Haydn offers “a hard-nosed, ironical view of the proposition that Enlightenment comes only after a certain mucking about in the empirical forest.” The story of creation is the struggle to compose.

Word and music then proceed hand in glove throughout the 90-minute oratorio. Fearsome interjections from the strings punctuate the recitative “And God made the firmament . . .,” depicting the mighty storm Raphael describes. His aria, “Rolling in frothy waves . . .,” is likewise tumultuous at the outset, but then quiets; the strings murmur softly, and the aria concludes calmly and contentedly. Gabriel celebrates the verdant meadows in a lilting, triple-meter aria; vocal ornaments are born aloft as if by a gentle breeze. Haydn has the most fun portraying the animals in No. 21, including lion (whose roar is heard in the trombone and contrabassoon), tigers, horses, oxen, buzzing insects, and woolly sheep.

Haydn moves seamlessly from heaven to earth in part three. Some critics have found the “low” style of Adam and Eve’s duet (No. 30) a little too lustful, its dance rhythms and rustic woodwinds evoking purely human pleasures. But who would deny them their happiness?

—Elizabeth Bergman

**“The Creation has always been considered the sublimest and most awe-inspiring image for mankind,” Haydn wrote of his own oratorio. “To accompany this great work with appropriate music could certainly have no other result than to heighten these sacred emotions in the listener’s heart, and to make him highly receptive to the goodness and omnipotence of the Creator.”**