

Haydn's *The Creation*

“A secret voice whispered to me: ‘There are in this world so few happy and contented people; sorrow and grief follow them everywhere; perhaps your labour will become a source in which the man bowed down by care, or burdened by business matters, will find peace and rest.’”--Haydn, 1802

Franz Joseph Haydn remains now, in the Twenty-first century, one of the most prolific composers of all time. He composed over 750 works and arranged over 330 songs and his above sentiment explains only a part of his creative motivation. It is difficult to pin down somebody's reasons for doing something so magnificent as conceiving and completing a massive work like *The Creation* two hundred years after the fact. However, one can certainly argue a few of those reasons effectively and such is the activity that will take place herein. Likewise, the beauty of form and structure contained within the movements of Haydn's magnum opus will be examined.

To truly comprehend the greatness of one man's actions, it is necessary to understand the man himself. The life of Franz Joseph Haydn is no more complicated than that of any other man. Every life is filled with toil and torture, though Haydn's destiny as a musician of phenomenal ability and influence was recognized early enough to have him sent to school in Hainburg in his Austrian homeland at the tender age of six. The eldest boy of the twelve children of Mathias and Anna Maria Haydn, Joseph excelled in vocal performance. His talent was widely praised thanks to his musically-oriented,

wheelwright father's innumerable local family concerts. This exceptional potential justified his parents' sending him out of Rohrau so early in life. His inevitable success as a pupil prompted his schoolmaster's desire to take him to learn at the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna.

The future "father of the symphony" began composing at St. Stephen's, with rough beginnings. One account notes that Reutter, the kapellmeister in charge of the choir boys, found a young Haydn writing a *Salve Regina* in twelve parts. Reutter laughed mockingly at the boy and shouted "Oh, you silly child, aren't two parts enough for you?" Haydn had apparently believed that writing good music meant merely filling a page with notes. He later confessed regretfully that Reutter only ever gave him two lessons in all the many years he stayed with him. (Geiringer 20) Reutter's ridicule and indifference may have provided the fuel for Haydn's ambition. Because he had no proper teachers, he learned to understand by listening, attending various Catholic festivities, programs, and choral services (including two he performed in daily). He would observe the chords and melodies of a great quantity of music. "I listened attentively and tried to turn to good account what most impressed me. Thus little by little my knowledge and ability were developed." (Geiringer 21)

At thirteen, Joseph's voice began changing and deteriorating. Around this time, his younger brother, Michael, began his stint at St. Stephen's, outshining his own vocal successes. Michael would later find early achievements at the age of twenty, the very same age Joseph struggled through poverty and the fear of failure. Until then, Joseph dealt with the shame brought on by his new voice and the problems it gave him. The Empress Maria Theresa reportedly told Reutter "Joseph Haydn doesn't sing any more: he

crows.“ (Landon 37) By seventeen years old, his sense of humor emerged in the form of a childish prank. Legend has it he took some sheers and cut off the pigtail braid of a fellow chorister. For this reason (and his faltering soprano voice), he received a caning from Reutter and was expelled from the choir, left to face a world for which he had not been prepared.

Haydn was soon making a meager living by singing in the streets, playing dance music in taverns, and giving lessons. A stroke of luck landed him the position of valet to the then famous composer, Nicolo Porpora. In return for shining shoes and other menial work, Haydn received theory lessons and made many connections. This was the beginning of the upswing in Haydn’s career. He received an appointment as music director to Prince Anton Esterhazy in 1761 and served the Esterhazy family for almost 30 years. Under this patronage, he composed almost every conceivable variety of vocal and instrumental music.

With the approval of the Prince, Haydn experimented in his vast outpouring of music. Haydn added his own touches to the techniques of the Viennese Classic School. Despite his growing sense of musical sophistication, he managed to keep a child-like simplicity in his music. Even his masses and other sacred pieces displayed an atypical measure of good humor. This caused many critics who were accustomed to traditionally bland church music to disapprove of him. Haydn responded "At the thought of God my heart leaps for joy and I cannot help my music doing the same."

It is true that Haydn’s idea of God was that of a happy deity. It is evident in all of his religious works, most notably, *The Creation*. Haydn was a faithful man, who even went as far as habitually writing “In nomine Domini” at the beginnings of his scores and

either “*Laus Deo*” or “*Soli Deo Gloria*” at the ends. His numerous religiously themed works point to his faith. His motivation to create them was both self-induced and humanitarian. Haydn liked the idea of making music that could bring people to enjoy worship and experience a musical representation of God. He felt so moved by Handel’s oratorios during his London visits in the early 1790s, witnessing firsthand how they appealed to not only the upper classes but large groups of mainly middle-class citizens.

When Haydn left England, he was handed a new libretto entitled “*The Creation of the World*.” In Vienna, Haydn’s friend, Gottfried van Swieten, recognized that the work could be used to show the entire range of Haydn’s abilities and express the full potency of his genius. He decided to set it in both German and English, and began composing in 1796. By 1798 the great work was ready. It was the first large-scale work in musical history to be published with bilingual text. At the public premiere, public reception was overwhelming. *The Creation* was performed over 40 times during the following decade in Vienna alone. It was soon performed all over Europe and premiered in 1819 in America.

Haydn’s *The Creation* is a vivid portrait of the seven days of Creation depicted in the Bible and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. It contains striking images of the world as it was created. Scored for full Classical orchestra, chorus, and soloists, the work begins with a depiction of chaos in the time before the world was formed. As the days of Creation progress, he finds beautiful ways of representing various creatures of the world, from whales to humans. The defining work of Haydn’s career, *The Creation* expresses its composer’s intense faith and skill. The techniques Haydn uses to combine various styles

and moods and recreate the grandeur of the first days of existence are numerous and magnificent, as can be seen in each of the three parts of the oratorio.

Part One of the oratorio contains the events of the first four Days of the six Days of Creation. The First Day opens in c minor with a musical representation of chaos,



dissipated by a “quietly confident chorus” representing God’s creation of heaven, earth and light. The Second Day has a more brilliant chorus representing the separation of the waters on earth. The Third Day contains a fugue for the chorus to represent the formation of the earthly terrain. The sun, moon, and stars are created on the Fourth Day, which holds the climactic chorus “The heavens are telling” in C major. (Temperley 47)

Part Two of the oratorio contains the events of the Fifth and Sixth Days of Creation. On the Fifth Day, God made the birds and fish and ordered them to multiply. Haydn chose to accent this triumph with the longest bit of text and music thus far into the piece. This event is highlighted by a trio of angel soloists. The Sixth Day brings the land animals and humans to Creation, illustrated in the music by two brilliant choruses, the second containing a full double fugue in B flat Major. (Temperley 48)

Each of the Days in Parts One and Two contain at least one secco recitative performed by the angels Gabriel, Raphael, and/or Uriel. The dialogue is taken straight from the Bible and describes the action taking place. Haydn could not base his composition of these recitatives on Italian principles of recitative because they did not allow for the variable rhythm needed to convey biblical prose. Thus, he was forced to

essentially create new non-conventional cadences and phrases to accommodate the



unusual text. (Temperley 65)

Days One, Two and Four each contain what could only be described as “accompanied recitative” in which there is an instrumental line behind the vocal, though usually only for a few bars. Accompanied recitative was a fairly new technique in Haydn’s time, and he used it to illustrate text that was particularly poetic (and more reminiscent of Milton than the Bible). For instance, in movement three, the text reads: “And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and it was so.” Here the music illustrates the liquid elements, like clouds, storms, snow, and rain. In movement twelve, the text reads:

“In splendor bright is rising now the sun and darts his rays; an amorous joyful happy spouse, a giant proud and glad to his measured course. With softer beams and milder light steps on the silver moon through silent night.”

Here the music accompanying the text cleverly and smoothly imitates the sun and the moon’s creation on the Fourth Day. (Temperley 67)

Another stylistic element present within Part One (and Part Two) of *The Creation* is the aria. Haydn’s aria style involved altering the typical da capo form common in the Eighteenth Century when he felt the text needed certain musical reinforcements, and the

arias within this oratorio are no exception. (Temperley 72) He often chooses not to repeat themes in the recapitulation, or he transforms them extensively. Haydn felt a strong compulsion to tie the music to the text, since it was biblical text and thus the very word of God. Never is there a better excuse to emphasize and decorate the text with music than with biblical passages. To the religious Haydn, these were the most important words in the history of mankind. Part Three of *The Creation* tells the story of Adam and Eve in great length, detail and passion. The orchestral introduction, unlike its counterpart in the beginning of Part One (resembling chaos) is tonally stable and rather simple, containing three flutes, a continuo part and pizzicato strings. This orchestral portion describes God in repose after 6 rather busy days. It is then the angel, Uriel, who foreshadows the love between Adam and Eve through an accompanied recitative, which moves from E major to G major:

“In rosy mantle appears, by tunes sweet awaked, the morning young and fair. From the celestial vaults pure harmony descends on ravished earth. Behold the blissful pair, where hand in hand they go! Their flaming looks express what feels the grateful heart. A louder praise of God their lips shall utter soon. Then let our voices ring, united with their song!”

With Uriel’s invitation to join in a song of praise of the Creator, the last new stylistic element Haydn injects into this masterpiece is found to be the hymn, sung first by Adam and Eve together, then alternating from the Chorus to Adam to Eve and then reuniting all three. This is considered to be the most significant movement of the entire work. In the hymn, Adam and Eve review all the events that have taken place thus far,

stopping to invite each item God has created to rejoice with them in His glory.

Another interesting element in Part Three is the “love duet” between Adam and Eve. This duet, movement thirty-two, is a rondo in its general character, lacking a tonic recapitulation near the end of the slow section, unlike typical rondos of the Classical period. Here again, Haydn takes the rules and bends them for his own purpose, with Adam singing in the tonic and Eve in the dominant, symbolizing their complements. In the end, Uriel comments on Adam and Eve’s love, turning a monstrously elaborate work into a sweet, “happily-ever-after” romance. It should be noted that this final section, with Uriel’s secco recitative and the ensuing chorus bring the entire oratorio to a close in B flat major, which is considered unusual for a piece that begins in C minor (but quickly moves to C major) since B flat and C are not related keys. One critic, by the name of Siegmund Levarie, asserted that starting in C and falling to B flat symbolically expressed the Fall of Man, though many argue to this day that it was simply a motion Haydn felt necessary to convey the story. (Temperley 17) Once again, the words were more significant than any musical rules.

The Creation has been called “a masterwork in the special sense that it has no weak point, nothing that could be changed or omitted...everything seems to be an indispensable part of the whole.” (Larsen 118) It challenged and eventually altered the guidelines and limitations of what music can do. All of this from a simple man with an ambitious goal: to express the glory of God through music. Haydn’s faith played such an immense role in his motivation to complete *The Creation*. “Every day I fell to my knees and prayed God to grant me the strength for a happy completion of this work.” (Gotwals 55)

As a person, Haydn's life was complicated. He was forced into his studies, tossed into the streets, topped by his little brother, discouraged by his own parents, virtually imprisoned by his employers for nearly three decades, and under-appreciated until his final years. One could liken the story of *The Creation* to be less about the beginnings of time and more an hour-and-forty-minutes-long metaphor of Franz Joseph Haydn's life. The opening is a mixture of genius and chaos, the end a glorious triumph for the ages. Throughout the middle, there are high points and low points, but no single event can be removed from the whole entity without diminishing the overall value of the work. Without every single note, the finale would mean that much less to the audience and the composer. From humble beginnings to an enormous end, Haydn had the best choice of words: "... Young people can see from my example that something can come from nothing..."

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