

THE CREATION by Joseph Haydn



In 1796, when he was already an elderly man by 18th-century standards, Haydn embarked on a project unlike anything he had done before. Inspired by the music of Handel he had heard during his visits to London, Haydn sought to compose a large work for chorus, orchestra, and solo singers—an oratorio—that would tell the story of the creation of the world in poetry and music.

The project was first suggested by Johann Peter Salomon, the impresario who brought Haydn to London for two visits in the 1790s. Salomon presented Haydn with an oratorio text that has since been lost. Haydn took it home to Vienna, where his friend Gottfried van Swieten translated it into German so that Haydn, whose English was rather basic, could set it to music. Van Swieten then adapted the original English text to fit the music Haydn composed.

A much-anticipated open rehearsal of *The Creation* took place in Vienna on April 29, 1798 (exactly 218 years before the ASU performance!). The premiere, for an invited audience, took place the next day, and the work was instantly hailed as an innovative masterpiece. It has been performed continuously since then all over the world in a variety of languages.

The Creation is an exuberant musical pageant celebrating the abundance and variety of Nature. The music, by turns magnificent, dramatic, and playful, expresses an almost childlike wonder at the immensity, complexity, and diversity of the natural world. The text of the work combines the creation narrative from Genesis I with poetry inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a few selections from the Psalms. In typical 18th-century fashion, the work presents the Creator as a genius of prodigious intellect and reason, capable of infinite invention, whose ultimate and greatest achievement is the creation of that most rational of creatures, humans.

ASU's Performance of THE CREATION



The 18th-century oratorio was a grand concert work for an ensemble of singers and instrumentalists. Though oratorios were typically dramatizations of stories from the Bible, they were performed without scenery or stage movement. Performers wore concert clothes, not costumes such as those singers in an opera might have worn. Some version of that mode of presentation has persisted to this day. While the music is dramatic, there is usually little visual interest.

At ASU, we seek to change that. In our production of *The Creation*, digitally generated and enhanced images combine with the live performance of the music to create a total experience for the listener: one that appeals on multiple levels and helps a modern-day audience connect with greater immediacy to this grand and splendid work, playing with both tensions and confluences between the Biblical, scientific, and artistic acts of creation large and small – from the universe to the individual cell to an idea. The performance will be introduced by noted physicist and cosmologist [Lawrence Krauss](#) of ASU's Origins Project.

Musicians



The ASU [Chamber Singers](#), [Concert Choir](#), [Choral Union](#), and [Barrett Choir](#) (some 300 singers in all) combine to form the chorus for this performance. There are undergraduate students from all over the university (in the Barrett Choir), community members (in the Choral Union) and undergraduate and graduate students in music (in the Concert Choir and Chamber Singers). Soloists are graduate students in ASU's vocal and opera performance programs. The singers join with the ASU Symphony Orchestra, undergraduate and graduate students in music, to present *The Creation* under the direction of ASU Director of Choral Activities [David Schildkret](#).

Digital Media



A team led by [Jake Pinholster](#), Director of ASU's [School of Film, Dance and Theatre](#), and [Boyd Branch](#) are developing a combination of composed digital animation, live-action footage drawn from existing imagery and shot anew, and dynamically created content drawing on the frequency and amplitude of the music as it happens live. These images will be projected both onto screens and throughout Gammage auditorium, creating an active field of sound and image that responds in real time to the performance. The visual element combines images from nature, space, microscopy, works of fine art, and data visualization with shifting visual fields of nebula-like clouds composed of patterns generated by the music. The music creates a field of potential from which CREATION occurs, like light being called forth from darkness, or order being composed from chaos. Many of the images

used in these compositions come from the research and creative activity of ASU faculty and research centers, including the Origins Project, the Biodesign Institute, the School of Art, the Beyond Center, the Institute of Human Origins, and the Mars Rover Laboratory among others.

Edition

ASU's performance of *The Creation* will use an entirely new edition of the work by David Schildkret prepared especially for this production. The edition features an English libretto (the sung words) that largely restores the original English text. In addition, it takes into account all recent scholarship on *The Creation*.

Why a new edition?

Although *The Creation* is one of the most-performed works in the choral-orchestra repertory, reliable scores that fully take into account what is known about the piece are hard to come by. Part of the problem is that the original score in Haydn's handwriting is lost. Sources include the printed first edition, which Haydn himself corrected, and various sets of performing parts. (You can look at the first edition [here](#)) The first edition, however, is highly problematic. There are many inconsistencies and irregularities. Moreover, no currently available edition includes all of the information from the performing parts. In particular, there are recent discoveries about the parts played by the contrabassoon and bass trombone that are not included in most scores.

The libretto

Perhaps the biggest challenge in performing Haydn's *The Creation* concerns the words that the performers will sing (the libretto). This is partly due to the compositional process: Haydn received an original libretto in English that is now lost. Gottfried van Swieten, a highly influential intellectual and friend of Haydn, translated the libretto into German; Haydn wrote his music to these German words. But because Haydn always intended the work for London, he wanted to include English words. (The first edition of *The Creation* is thought to be the first choral-orchestral work published with a libretto in two languages, a common practice today.) So van Swieten re-translated the German back to English (and possibly included a good deal of the original English libretto). This is the text that appears in the first edition.

But there are problems. Some are relatively minor. For example, the score treats "eagle" as a one-syllable word and considers "stately" to have three syllables. Others are more aesthetic: while the German libretto is fairly coherent, the English one awkwardly alternates past and present tense, sometimes within the same sentence: "Now Heaven in fullest glory *shone*; earth *smiles* in all her rich attire..." [emphasis added] There are some outright mistakes and mistranslations that render the English all but incomprehensible. The biggest problem occurs in the choral movements, where the English is only fitted--sometimes awkwardly--to the soprano part. When the other parts sing at different times, it is difficult to tell how the words should fit.

The problem is apparent from the first time the chorus sings. They enter on the words, "And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." This line has fifteen syllables in English, but the corresponding German text has only fourteen: "*Und der Geist Gottes schwebte auf der Fläche der Wasser.*" The score provides an alternate rhythm for the soprano line that accommodates the additional English syllable, but does not show how the other parts should be adjusted. The chorus that ends Day Five, "The Lord is great," has even bigger and more complex problems. No matter what happens, if we want to perform *The Creation* in English for an English-speaking audience, as Haydn intended, we must make amendments and alterations to fit the English libretto.

There have been several attempts to address this. The most familiar to audiences in the United States is the edition prepared in the nineteenth century by Vincent Novello. This corrects many of the faults of the original English but introduces some new problems: some of Novello's rhythmic adjustments are awkward, and in some cases the modified English changes or obscures the original meaning of the text in a way that weakens the overall themes of the work. Some recent editions have attempted to be closer to the original English, but these have been prepared by scholars who often favored fidelity to the libretto over musicality, resulting in some awkward, mis-stressed lines. This new edition makes use of the original English where possible, uses some of Novello's changes where they are successful, and comes up with new solutions where neither of those sources seems entirely satisfactory. (So how does this edition solve the problem of the first chorus entrance mentioned above? By changing the word "upon" to "on" in the alto, tenor, and bass parts. Removing one syllable from the English gives the line natural stress without introducing any awkward changes to the rhythm.)

Other changes

This new edition includes a fresh look at all the articulation marks, including bowings for the strings. These are highly inconsistent in the first edition. Occasionally the performing parts provide some insights, but even here there are issues. It is important to have good articulations and bowings to achieve a proper sense of Haydn's style, but a wholly faithful reproduction of what is in the sources yields confusing results bordering on the chaotic--the same passage, played at the same time by two different instruments, is quite frequently rendered in two different ways in the score. This edition reconciles those inconsistencies where it seems appropriate while retaining differences that seem to serve a musical purpose (earlier editions either adjust everything to make it the same every time, which is not consistent with Haydn's practice, or simply try to show what is in the sources without making any corrections--even where there are obvious inaccuracies).

While making use of more recent scholarship, this edition relies primarily on the original publication, the one source that is closest to Haydn and that has the least possibility of intervention by later hands.

