

## Summit Choral Society Masterworks Chorale to perform Haydn's *The Creation* November 6

by Daniel Hathaway



“It has sublime solos, jubilant choruses, and wonderful textures. And it’s very user-friendly,” Summit Choral Society music director Maria Bucoy-Calavan said in a recent telephone conversation. The subject was Joseph Haydn’s oratorio *The Creation*, to be performed by the Masterworks Chorale and

Orchestra on Sunday, November 6 at 3:00 pm in Akron’s First Congregational Church (tickets available [online](#)). “It’s wonderful how Haydn is able to paint the creation story through music.”

According to the Scriptures, it took God only seven days to achieve that “glorious work.” It took Haydn a bit longer, but his efforts resulted in one of the most popular oratorios in circulation. The work was inspired by the composer’s visits to London in the early 1790s, where he heard George Frideric Handel’s oratorios for the first time, performed on a grand scale by large choruses. Haydn seemed to be particularly impressed by *Israel in Egypt*, with its graphic musical representations of the plagues visited on the Egyptians.

“In *The Creation*, Haydn’s recitatives depict nimble stags rearing up, spots of hail, fluffy snow, and sinuous worms,” Bucoy-Calavan said. “You hear all of those ideas represented in the orchestra before the bass soloist identifies them, then you hear them again. They’re genius pictures beautifully written into the music.”

So is the opening of the oratorio, where Haydn represents Chaos with striking orchestral gestures, then announces the creation of light with a glorious, C-major chord. “I have to explain to my singers — a third of them are now thirty and under — that Haydn’s audiences didn’t have Bose speakers and surround sound, outburst before,” Bucoy-Calavan said. so we have to sing this as if the audience had never experienced such a sonic

*The Creation* is based on the biblical books of *Genesis* and *Psalms*, as well as on John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. One of the remarkable features of Haydn's oratorio is that it was originally published as a bilingual piece. Working from an anonymous libretto that Haydn brought back to Vienna — after Handel had rejected it — the diplomat and musical patron Baron Gottfried van Swieten translated it into German so that the composer would have a text to work with. For the English text that would be published along with the German, the Baron closely followed the King James language beloved by the British public, but some linguistic infelicities have always posed problems for performers.



Some conductors avoid those issues by performing *The Creation* in German (*Die Schöpfung*), but the Masterworks Chorale will sing the oratorio in English. “We looked at different translations,” Bucoy-Calavan said, “but we’re mostly using the version by Paul McCreesh, because some of van Swieten’s English sounds a bit archaic.”

Soloists for Sunday’s performance include soprano Allison Tyler, tenor Timothy Culver, and baritone Elijah Blaisdell. “One of my objectives is to lift up the millennial generation,” Bucoy-Calavan said, “and Alison and Elijah are up-and-coming young artists in their mid-twenties. Alison, who’s from California, is classically-trained, but also sings pop and jazz. Elijah is from Boston, I met him at Chorus America last summer in Cincinnati, where he was singing, very lyrically, the title role in Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*.”

Adding a bit of theater, the conductor has suggested that Tyler and Blaisdell, who appear as angels in the first two parts of the oratorio, come back in different costume for part three, where the soloists play Adam and Eve.

Marie Bucoy-Calavan, now in her second season with the Summit Choral Society, is happy with the progress her singers have made. “The chorus has advanced by leaps and bounds, and we’ve changed the culture of work ethic and musicality, and the structure that it takes to prepare large works like *The Creation* in the way they should be presented.”

And though some conductors trim parts of Haydn’s work, Bucoy-Calavan is adamant about performing every note of the oratorio. “We’re doing *The Creation* with no cuts. As

my mentor Bob Porco says, “you can’t alter something that’s perfect, and you can’t cut a day out of Creation.”

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 3, 2016.*

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