

Sunday 17 May 2026 / 3pm

Haydn's Creation

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

The Creation

In June 1792, Joseph Haydn encountered one of the scientific wonders of the age. He recorded the occasion in his personal notebook:

On 15th June I went from Windsor to Doctor Herschel, where I saw the great telescope. It is 40 feet long and 5 feet in diameter. The machinery is very big, but so ingenious that a single man can put it in motion with the greatest ease.

When Haydn had arrived in England, 18 months earlier, he'd started noting down his reactions to everything from Royal Navy warships to Cockney slang. William Herschel's telescope (actually, it seems likely that Haydn was welcomed and shown around by Herschel's sister and fellow-astronomer Caroline) clearly made an impression upon him. Not, perhaps, one that struck as close to his personal interests as the massive Handel Commemoration Festival at Westminster Abbey in May 1791, at which an orchestra and chorus of over 1000 performed *Israel in Egypt* and *Messiah* to a huge and receptive audience. But it was an experience that clearly excited the imagination of a composer with a lively and receptive mind.

Before leaving England in 1795, Haydn acquired an English libretto, of unknown authorship, for an oratorio based on Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Modest about his grasp of English, he enlisted the Viennese polymath Baron Gottfried van Swieten "to clothe the poem in German garb". Van Swieten's translation is the text that Haydn set as *The Creation* – and which Haydn, aware of his huge English-speaking fanbase, had translated back into English as *The Creation*. Completed in the autumn of 1797, *Die Schöpfung / The Creation* became the first work in musical history to be published bilingually, though the actual premiere took place on 30th April 1798, at the Palais Schwarzenberg in Vienna. The reaction was ecstatic.

The subject could hardly have suited Haydn better. His overwhelming impulse in *The Creation* was to communicate – and to do so as vividly and directly as possible. There's something simultaneously touching and sublime about his musical portrayals of the weather; the sun and moon; the tiger, the whale and (of course) the humble earthworm. The tonally-ambiguous prelude, depicting a chaotic universe before the divine Word (or if you prefer, the Big Bang) is a radical masterpiece in its own right. But Haydn planned it as part of a greater design. Chaos is defeated by a dazzling affirmation of tonality - a mighty burst of C major as God creates light. And throughout *The Creation*, passages of relaxation and playful humour are balanced by music of visionary grandeur, and choruses of a scale and impact unheard since Handel.

Haydn's contemporaries felt it then, as we feel it today. Haydn's final public appearance was at a performance of *The Creation* at the University of Vienna in honour of his 76th birthday, on 27th March 1808. At the words *And There Was Light* the entire audience erupted into spontaneous applause. Haydn, no longer able to stand unaided, raised his arms to heaven and declared, "Not from me – it all comes from above".

Dinis Sousa conductor

Dinis Sousa is Music Director of Royal Northern Sinfonia, and Founder and Artistic Director of Orquestra XXI, an award-winning orchestra that brings together some of the finest young Portuguese musicians from around the world. He is the winner of the Critics' Circle Young Talent (Conductor) Award for 2023.

With Royal Northern Sinfonia he led a complete Schumann symphony cycle in 2023/4, in addition to a performance of Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* which received a 5-star review from *The Times*. Other highlights with RNS have included a world premiere by Cassandra Miller, a UK tour, a return visit to the BBC Proms, and collaborations with soloists including Christian Tetzlaff, Steven Isserlis, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Víkingur Ólafsson, Stephen Hough and Kristian Bezuidenhout.

Sousa's work with the Monteverdi Choirs and Orchestras has earned him the highest critical acclaim, most recently for a complete Beethoven symphony cycle in London and at the Philharmonie de Paris in May 2024. Among many 5* reviews, Hugh Canning (*Operalogue*) described the cycle as "an unforgettable performance". In 2023, he won widespread praise (and further 5* reviews) for Berlioz's *Les Troyens* at the Salzburg Festival, Berlin Musikfest and the BBC Proms, with *The Guardian* noting that "Sousa was electrifying in moments of grandeur, high drama, and emotional intensity." In the autumn of 2023, he also

made his Carnegie Hall debut conducting the Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists in two programs of Bach and Handel.

As a guest conductor, Sousa made debuts in 2023/4 with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Brahms' *German Requiem* with Christian Gerhaher, Lenneke Ruiten and the Monteverdi Choir) and Swedish Radio Symphony. In the 2024/25 season he makes debuts with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Québec, National Symphony Orchestra (Dublin) and Royal Danish Opera Orchestra; and makes return visits to the Euskadiko (Basque National) Orchestra and the Ulster Orchestra.

His operatic experience includes Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and in 2025 he leads a new production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* for Graz Opera.

With Orquestra XXI, recent highlights have included opening the Gulbenkian Foundation's season, and a critically acclaimed tour of Mahler's Symphony No 5 to celebrate the orchestra's 10th anniversary. In recognition of his work with Orquestra XXI, he was awarded the title of Knight of the Order of Prince Henry in Portugal.

Carolyn Sampson soprano

Equally at home on the concert and opera stages, Carolyn Sampson has enjoyed notable successes in the UK as well as throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

The 23/24 season marked an incredible achievement for Carolyn as she celebrated her recording legacy with the release of her 100th album as a featured solo artist. Over the last twenty-five years of her career, she has sung with countless world-class musicians and these recordings serve as testament to both her versatility as an artist and the scope of her repertoire. In 2024 she was awarded an OBE in the King's New Year Honours, was elected an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music and was the winner of the Gramophone Artist of the Year Award.

On the opera stage she has appeared with English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Berlin Staatsoper, Scottish Opera and Opéra de Paris, amongst others, and she regularly performs at the BBC Proms and with orchestras including the Bach Collegium Japan, Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony Orchestra and with numerous orchestras in the UK & USA. A recent highlight was her debut at Berlin Staatsoper singing Créuse in a new Peter Sellers production of Charpentier's *Medée* conducted by Sir Simon Rattle.

A consummate recitalist, Carolyn Sampson appears regularly at the Wigmore Hall and has given recitals at the Oxford International Song Festival, Leeds Lieder, Saintes and Aldeburgh Festivals as well as at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Barcelona, Freiburg, Oper Frankfurt, Pierre Boulez Saal Berlin, Vienna Konzerthaus, Carnegie Hall and on tour in Japan.

Carolyn has an extensive discography appearing on the Harmonia Mundi, BIS, Hyperion, Virgin Classics, DG Archiv, Linn Records, BIS and Vivat labels. Her recording with Ex Cathedra, 'A French Baroque Diva' won the recital award in the 2015 Gramophone Awards, and her disc of Bach Cantatas with Freiburger Barockorchester was awarded a Diapason D'or. The past seasons have seen the release of many acclaimed recordings, notably Carolyn's first solo orchestra CD, Canteloube 'Chants d'Auvergne' with Tapiola Sinfonietta and Pascal Rophé and the acclaimed album Trennung: Songs of Separation with Kristian Bezuidenhout, both under the BIS label.

This season includes Berlioz *Hermine* with Kammerakademie Potsdam, Stravinsky *Pulcinella* with Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana under Charles Dutoit, Mahler's *2nd Symphony* under Osmo Vänskä and Bach *St Matthew Passion* under Laurence Cummings both with Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Bach *Christmas Oratorio* with Netherlands Kammerkoor, and a programme of Mozart and Telemann with Handel & Haydn Society of Boston.

Laurence Kilsby tenor

"A young singer to watch" (*The Times*), British tenor Laurence Kilsby is rapidly gaining international recognition for his vivid stage presence, expressive musicianship, and wide-ranging repertoire.

In the 2025/26 season, Laurence makes his Glyndebourne Festival debut as the Novice in *Billy Budd*, sings Lurcanio in *Ariodante* at Opéra de Versailles, and returns to the BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony

Orchestra under Sakari Oramo. He performs the *Matthäus-Passion* with the Concertgebouworkest and Klaus Mäkelä, tours the UK with Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* alongside Sinfonia of London and John Wilson, and makes his US concert debut with the Orchestra of St. Luke's in Beethoven Symphony No. 9 conducted by Raphaël Pichon.

Continuing his regular collaboration with Pichon and Ensemble Pygmalion, Laurence joins them for a tour of the *Matthäus-Passion* and performances at the Adelaide Festival. He also tours Handel's *Theodora* with Jupiter Ensemble, and appears in recital with pianist Ella O'Neill at both Madrid's Fundación Juan March and the Théâtre de l'Athénée in Paris. His debut album with O'Neill, *AWAKENINGS*, was released last season.

Recent highlights include appearances at the Opéra national de Paris, Opéra national du Rhin, Opéra Comique, and the Aix-en-Provence and Innsbruck Early Music Festivals, as well as performances with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, and RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra.

A graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and ABRSM Vocal Scholar at the Royal College of Music, Laurence was a member of the Opéra national de Paris studio in 2022/23. He won First Prize at both the Wigmore Hall / Bollinger International Song Competition (2022) and the Cesti Competition (Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik), and was earlier awarded the Kathleen Ferrier Society Bursary for Young Singers.

Will Thomas bass

British bass William Thomas is fast making a name for himself as one of today's most promising young singers.

His operatic roles in the 2025/26 season include Hebrew *Samson et Dalilah* and Sparafucile *Rigoletto* for the Royal Ballet and Opera, Colline *La bohème* for Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Mr Flint *Billy Budd* for the Glyndebourne Festival and Ormonte *Partenope* for the English National Opera. Appearances on the concert stage include Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* with Robin Ticciati and Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Hérode *L'enfance du Christ* at Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia, a tour of *Johannes-Passion* with Il Pomo d'Oro, *Messiah* and Mozart's *Requiem* with the Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra, and *The Dream of Gerontius* with the London Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Sir Antonio Pappano.

Other recent appearances include a debut at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich as Colline *La bohème*, Sparafucile *Rigoletto* in a return to the English National Opera, his Carnegie Hall debut in Bach's *Johannes-Passion* with the Orchestra of St Luke's/Bernard Labadie, Second Soldier in *Salome* with the London Symphony Orchestra/Sir Antonio Pappano, and a return to the Salzburg Festival for Bruckner *Mass no. 3 in F Minor* with Vienna Philharmonic/Riccardo Muti. William has also performed at Wiener Staatsoper; Opéra national de Paris; La Scala, Milan; the BBC Proms and the Glyndebourne, Edinburgh and Seiji Ozawa Matsumoto Festivals.

A graduate of the opera course at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, William has been awarded a number of major prizes, including winning the Kathleen Ferrier Award, John Christie Award, and Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition.

Tim Burke chorus director

Born in Kingston upon Thames, Tim learned violin and piano from an early age and sang as a Choral Scholar at HM Chapel Royal, Hampton Court Palace, and read Music at Exeter College, Oxford, before training as a répétiteur at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and winning the Sir Henry Richardson Scholarship to study at the National Opera Studio.

He went on to join the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme in 2006, working as a répétiteur for Sir Colin Davis and Sir Charles Mackerras amongst others, and from 2008 until 2013 was Chorus Master at Opera North, where he worked with conductors including Sir Richard Armstrong, Richard Farnes and David Parry.

A passionate believer in the importance of new writing, he has, since 2013, been the Music Director at Tête à Tête, producer of the world's largest festival of new opera, where he has premiered eleven new commissions, including Kerry Andrew's *Dart's Love*, winner of the Stage Works category of the British Composer Awards 2014.

His recent engagements have included Jules Maxwell's *The Lost Thing* for the Royal Opera, London, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for Lyric Opera, Dublin, *Pierrot Lunaire* for the Manchester Collective, *The Gondoliers* and *The Yeomen of the Guard* for the National Gilbert and Sullivan Company, Will Todd's *Wonderland Restored* for Opera North's Big Sing, *The Emperor of Atlantis* for Bold Tendencies and *Façade* with Royal Northern Sinfonia.

Chorus of Royal Northern Sinfonia

Chorus of Royal Northern Sinfonia is a vital part of the Royal Northern Sinfonia musical family, based at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music in Gateshead. They shine in the great choral masterpieces by Handel, Haydn and Mozart, excel with contemporary classical music by today's brightest composers, and bring film scores to life at live screenings of Hollywood blockbusters such as *Home Alone*, *Hocus Pocus* and *Star Wars*.

They perform with Royal Northern Sinfonia several times a year and classic choral masterpieces like Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *Magnificat* are the foundation of their exciting, vibrant programme.

The Chorus also enjoy new contemporary music, giving the world premiere of *All My Ships Are White* by Sarah Lianne Lewis in July 2022, commissioning *A blue and tender flower* by Kerensa Briggs to mark their 50th anniversary in October 2023 and including Eleanor Cully-Boehringer's *Snow on Snow* in festive concert tour *A Choral Nativity*.

Beyond the concert hall, they regularly perform on their own across the North East and Cumbria, and collaborate with other local musicians, such as Gateshead Care Home Choir. Through the difficult COVID-19 lockdowns, they kept on singing at home and created the award-winning digital experience *The World How Wide* – a beautiful choral reworking of Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*.

Founded in 1973 by Royal Northern Sinfonia's timpanist Alan Fearon, the Chorus currently has over 80 members from all walks of life and all across the North East. New members are welcome to join at any time, email chorusrns@theglasshouseicm.org to find out more and arrange to come to a rehearsal or two before auditioning with Chorus Director Tim Burke.

Royal Northern Sinfonia

Internationally renowned, calling Gateshead home.

37 musicians at the top of their game. Electrifying music, old and new. All the talent, determination, and creativity of the North East on a worldwide stage. From their home at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Royal Northern Sinfonia share the joy and wonder of orchestral music with thousands of people across the North of England - and beyond - every year.

From symphonies to string quartets, film soundtracks to choral masses, and original performances with awesome artists from Sheku Kanneh-Mason to Self Esteem, the orchestra's members have got one of the most varied jobs there is. They're always looking for fresh new sounds from up-and-coming composers, inviting local communities to share a stage, and doing everything they can to inspire and prepare the musicians of tomorrow to one day take their place.

They're also working hard to smash the barriers that can stop brilliant people getting into classical music. They've teamed up with national partners to support women conductors to develop their careers, to help global majority musicians get vital experience in the orchestra world, and to celebrate disabled and non-disabled musicians breaking new ground together in inclusive ensemble RNS Moves. And they bring new musical opportunities to the region, headlining the first-ever BBC Proms weekend outside London.

Because they whole-heartedly believe orchestral music is for anyone - big cities and rural villages, tiny babies and life-long listeners, die-hard fans and curious minds - they travel far and wide to make sure there's top-notch classical music on offer for anyone ready to say "I'll give that a go". You'll find them in churches, castles, and community venues across the North, as well as leading the charge in Carlisle, Kendal, Middlesbrough, and Sunderland.

With 65 years of success to build on, they've signed a dynamic artistic leadership – Music Director Dinis Sousa, Artistic Partner Maria Włoszczowska, Principal Guest Conductor Nil Venditti and Associate Conductor Ellie Slorach – to lead the way into a bold, bright future.