



re:creation

A new oratorio brings a fresh light to the ancient story of God's work in restoring creation, says Kenwyn Pierce

SUDDENLY creation is a hot topic. Creationists and atheistic evolutionists' quarrelsome noise echoes through public debate, advertising campaigns, the media and classrooms. Two sides battle for their tightly held beliefs to win over their opponents. No matter how earnest and sincere, but the contest is pretty ugly – scientific evidence thrown from one side to the other.

In the midst of this clatter, a fresh and positive look at creation is welcome. In the prestigious St John's, Smith Square in London, UK the premier of *Re:Creation* – an oratorio for choir, soloists and orchestra – gave its audience to enjoy the story of God's work across the whole sweep of history.

At an hour and a half long the, it celebrates with broad brushstrokes, God's work in making and redeeming creation. It is a story that for many within the church has become dulled by familiarity. For many others, the biblical account of God's involvement in creation and human history is completely unfamiliar.

The driving force behind the work, librettist of *Re:Creation*, Rev Derek Wensley, a retired minister of the United Reformed Church, is

inspired by the choral masterpieces of Bach, Hayden and Handel – whose sacred works have brought deep emotional and faith responses for generations. He also wants to make this story accessible for more people.

"Music lovers' passion to sing or hear major sacred works in 17th century English, Latin or German is fine," he says. "Sometimes those languages are a barrier to the greatest story ever getting from the ear to the mind and heart to stimulate a response of faith and worship. 'Re:Creation' is my attempt to let that happen for all who sing and hear it."

Mr Wensley's background as a preacher is apparent at every stage. Not that the libretto ever preaches, but his clarity of purpose shines through the whole piece, it never loses its focus on God's love and delight in his creation.

Composer David Perkins unusual, tuneful, and assessable approach to the oratorio in tune with the modern English Bible translations.

The opening phrases, full of expectation and potential, bring together the "in the beginning" statements of Genesis and of John's Gospel. It is at the dawn of creation that the audience is introduced to Jesus – who upholds all things by the word of his power. It is followed by a celebration of God's work in creation drawn from the most lyrical sections of the Book of Job.

A chillier note is sounded as God's judgement is announced in section three. "When he thunders, the waters in heaven roar."

Yet when voice of God, sung by Royal Opera House Bass/Baritone Jeremy White, makes its late entrance, it is restoration of relationship with his people that is his chief concern. He asks, from Jeremiah, "Why then, my people, do you turn away from me without ever turning back?:"

God's passion and creativity is purposeful and deep rather than exuberant. So God's dismay is parental and distressed, not explosive or vindictive in anger. From this point on, God is, at every point, restoring creation to its rightful glory.

By the time we get to the final section, dominated by texts from Revelation the audience is ready for God to announce "Look I am making all things new" and to receive it as a conclusion to the whole sweep of history.

Re:creation is evangelical in its very best sense. The vision of God's work is wide as it effortlessly and imaginatively weaves texts from the New and the Old Testaments.

Leaving the concert and going back into the night-time streets of London, I just became a little more aware of the ground beneath my feet, the air I breathed and the sky above my head as something more significant and purposeful than I had before.

Now Mr Wensley wants to see *Re:creation* heard by wider audiences. Plans are being considered to take the work to festivals in the UK and to promote it in church based choirs in English speaking countries around the world.