

# Story of creation restored

THE new oratorio for five soloists, choir, and orchestra by David Perkins and Derek Wensley, *Re:Creation*, which received its first performance at Holy Trinity, Guildford, traces man's arduous progress from the first book of the Bible to the last, opening with the creation story as enunciated in Genesis (later taken up by Job) and culminating in Revelation and its vision of the City of God.

No one coming away from the première could doubt the sheer zest of the celebratory passages in Perkins's always attractive and frequently colourful score.

Musically, *Re:Creation* is good to sing; and later in the oratorio, especially in the fourth section ("God's Creativity Restored"), moments of flair and imagination peep through a score that earlier on relies perhaps too much on the composer's gift for slightly bland chord-infilling. Yet he had a point: any depiction of the creation, as Haydn confirms, needs to move quite slowly, if one is to hint at the sheer awe and scale of events.

Conversely, indeed, one might accept such rippling arpeggios, with their associations of *Tubular Bells* or Philip Glass, as an integral and even key part of the work. With works like *Skool and Crossbones* and *The Selfish Giant* to his credit, and as Music Director of the Yvonne Arnaud Youth Theatre, David Perkins has a notable record as a composer of musicals.

If there were shades of *Godspell* or Lloyd Webber in certain soothing harmonies, there were plenty of places where the idiom worked well, not least a lively almost Walton-like scherzo in the tense part 3 ("God's Creativity Resisted"); in the writing midway for a chastened choir; and in the imaginative, at times desolate, writing for the Voice of God, finely sung by the baritone Leon Barger.

There was some terrific writing, too, for hard-working clarinet and cor anglais ("God said: Let the waters teem") in section 2, and for flute and cor anglais (the valiant Sylvia Harper) later on; and some evocative touches of percussion, delivered with pinprick precision by Graham Dare.

Parts of section 4 — even though it coasts momentarily from Stravinsky to the darkly Elgarian, from gospel music to the Salvation Army — felt masterly.

What was needed, I think, was a greater complement of strings. We were treated to just a string quartet (two violins, cello, and double bass). The viola's omission may have been telling on the textures; and a horn might have helped.

Without a doubt, the real quality of this new oratorio lies in the text by the Revd Derek Wensley, a retired United Reformed Church minister, who mounted the first Guildford Christian Arts Festival more than 30 years ago. Plenty of such texts are too obvious. Mr Wensley's biblical selection traces fresh paths.

All four soloists acquitted themselves honourably, Timothy Ball conducting; but the chorus (entitled "Ghosts") deserved the chief honours. If only a shudder had gone down our spines as well.