

PETER REED – CLASSICAL SOURCE
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David Perkins's "Re:Creation" is billed as a new oratorio. In fact, it's nearly two years since its premiere in Guildford. The title obviously evokes the giant presence of Haydn's masterpiece; as for the 'Re:' bit, it suggests regeneration and is indeed 'about' (as in 're' your memo) creation, as Derek Wensley (a retired minister of the United Reformed Church) expertly-gathered extracts from the Bible demonstrate (from Genesis, St John's Gospel, lots of Job and various epistles, psalms and prophecies and a chunk of Revelation – all in direct, fairly modern versions). His selection and his splicing is masterly.

The first two of the five 20-minute sections cover roughly the same Old Testament ground as Haydn, except that Jesus, as the agent of renewal, gets a look-in very early on. Parts 3 and 4 are about creation turning away from God and returning via Jesus. The fifth is about the ascendancy of Jesus, culminating in a vision of the celestial city as extravagantly detailed in the Book of Revelation.

Since this is a contemporary work, people might be puzzled that "Re:Creation" doesn't go near subjects such as the rape of creation and global warming, but our fall from grace wouldn't chime in with the inherently optimistic and traditional view of the creator's relationship with his creation.

To begin with, this unchallenging approach seems more than adequately reflected in David Perkins's music, a middle-of-the-road blend of musical, minimalism, comfort-zone harmonies and a general sense of blessed-out lyrical loveliness, the sort of heart-felt, edge-less music so familiar in modern liturgies of all denominations. The excellently played (by the composer) and crucial piano part, almost amounting to an *obbligato*, relied a bit too much on Elton John-style arpeggios but it gave propulsion to the score's predominantly easy andante tread and was leavened by some attractively pastoral violin and woodwind solos. Perkins could have given the organ a bit more to do apart from the statutory shock-and-awe beefing up of the climaxes. He has cited the choral works of Bach, Handel and Haydn as inspiration, but the overall effect of the music, at its best, is much more meditative and homogeneous.

The turning point, cunningly placed just before the interval, was a long and ravishing duet for soprano and mezzo that set the tone for the second half. This built impressively in Part 4 on the back of a big tune reminiscent of a phrase from one of the songs in "Carousel", and achieved something remarkable in Part 5, where the music simultaneously relaxes and gathers into a vision of the city of god and eternity worthy of Vaughan Williams's "The Pilgrim's Progress".

The composer must have been very gratified by the high standard of the performance and the sense of commitment from the performers. There were fine contributions from Louise Crane, Justin Lavender, Wyn Pencarreg and Jeremy White (as the resoundingly sung voice of God) and a thrilling performance from Amy Haworth, making the most of the soaring, radiant vocal lines.

Just as exceptional was Consortium, an ensemble of 24 singers, who produced a sound of warmth, immediacy and great refinement – they were very good. Timothy Ball achieved a fine balance between the various performer layers and the scale of the work – not huge but superbly well projected – suited the St John's setting perfectly.