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The Creation

Christina Landshamer (soprano), Maximilian Schmitt (tenor), Rudolf Rosen (bass); Collegium Vocale Gent, Orchestre des Champs-Élysées/ Philippe Herreweghe Phi LPH 018 96:58 mins (2 discs)

There's no shortage of high quality Creation recordings, whether in period performing style and scale or with sizable choirs and modern-instrument orchestras. Happily, the newest makes a worthy addition. A successor to Phi's superb 2014 Haydn Seasons by the same forces (reviewed October 2014), and featuring two of Herreweghe's Seasons soloists, it bursts from the speakers with the same combination of vigour, technical accomplishment and, above all, unforced pleasure in Haydn's cornucopian invention that should make even the most dedicated Creation admirer listen with fresh ears. As in that Seasons recording, it's Herreweghe's steady mastery of pace that causes the music to flow with such apparent naturalness. Those seeking outsize impressions of Biblical majesty may at first be disconcerted by the straightforwardness of the conductor's unfolding— no wide-screen effects mark either the great C major 'Licht' fortissimo moment or the multifarious depiction of the animal kingdom, no grandiosity bloats the contrapuntal choruses. The work's splendour seems instead built up, with unfailing vitality of choral and orchestral attack, directly out of the succession of movements. Christina Landshamer's soprano and Maximilian Schmitt's tenor are of ideal youthful freshness and flexibility for Herreweghe's purposes; the Swiss bass Rudolf Rosen adds robustness of colour and texture to the sound-picture without risking heaviness. And the recording, like the reading itself, presents that sound-picture with just the right fullness and freedom from inflated perspectives.

Max Loppert

PERFORMANCE *** RECORDING *******