



Haydn's *Creation* not quite a Big Bang at Holland Festival

★★★★☆ ?

By Nicolas Nguyen, 15 June 2016

Holland Festival presented a live performance this week of Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* (*The Creation*) accompanied by film images by visual artist Julian Rosefeldt in a concept that was premiered at last year's Ruhrtriennale in Duisburg. For the occasion, Dutch National Opera was transformed into a vast concert auditorium with a stage-wide screen in front of which soloists, musicians of B'Rock Orchestra and the G⁺

“a performance dotted with the surprising contrasts and contrasting tempi”

Reviewed at Dutch National Opera and

choristers of Collegium Vocale Gent, directed by René Jacobs, performed. Unfortunately, the performance as a whole did not quite add up to the spectacular Big Bang it promised on paper.

The



The Creation

© Wonge Bergmann Ruhrtriennale (2015)

underwhelming impression was largely created by Mr Rosefeldt's film images. Rather than illustrate creation, the Berlin-based artist deliberately chose images that work antithetically with the music. In the program notes, he states that he "thought it was important for the film to... leave space, so that the music can unfurl its own expressive power". It certainly did. As Haydn's most innovative music was being performed, the spectator was treated to a succession of slow motion aerial views of the arid Atlas region, the abandoned sets of a film studio in the Moroccan desert and decaying industrial sites of the Ruhr Region in Germany. I'll concede that the gigantic projected images, all in tones of tan, sand and ochre were a striking sight at first, but over a performance of more than an hour and forty minutes, it all fades in a sea of monotonous beige. Even the short moment of footage of fornicating stray dogs that made my neighbour chuckle did nothing to retain my attention on the screen, and I quickly drifted to concentrate on the performers on stage.

Ballet, Amsterdam on 13 June 2016

Haydn, *The Creation*

PERFORMERS

René Jacobs, *Conductor*

Sunhae Im, *Soprano*

Thomas Walker, *Tenor*

Johannes Weisser, *Bass-baritone*

B'Rock

Collegium Vocale Gent



Still from *The Creation*

© Wonge Bergmann Ruhrtriennale (2015)

Things on stage went mercifully better. René Jacobs led his fellow citizens of Ghent from the B'Rock Orchestra in a performance dotted with the surprising contrasts and contrasting tempi he holds the secret of, highlighting a wealth of details through bold effects. A tad too bold at times perhaps. The period instrument orchestra's strings throbbed, but it was especially its winds, and particularly Tami Krausz' flute and Jean-Philippe Poncin's clarinet, that dazzled. Koen Plaetinck's fortepiano continuo was unashamedly attention-seeking.

Of the soloists, I really liked bass-baritone Johannes Weisser's chocolatey timbre and his extremely stylish way of biting into each word. Thomas Walker's unique and instantly recognizable tenor, both flexible and masculine, with a timbre edging on the hoarse, was well-suited for Archangel Uriel who gets the only ominous verses of the whole piece in his final warning to Adam and Eve "not to get misled by false conceit". Another regular collaborator of the Flemish maestro, soprano Sunhae Im boasts impeccable musicality and a young-sounding light soprano. However, in this particular part, I yearn for a fuller and creamier sound, as well as some more power – her voice was inaudible in the ensembles.



The Creation

But the only exhilarating performance of the evening came from the excellent Collegium Vocale Gent. Their clean, robust sound, their precision and vitality made each of their interventions the true highlights of the whole performance, never more so than in the ultimate chorus. "Sing the Lord, ye voices all !" indeed.