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# SPCO, chorale spread the joy

By Rob Hubbard  
Special to the Pioneer Press  
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If you've either lost your job recently or are anxious that the day is coming, take heart: Joseph Haydn was laid off at 58, and it was one of the best things that ever happened to him. After 29 years of faithful service at the Esterhazy palace, he was out on the street.

But an invitation to London led to him becoming a middle-aged sensation and sparked some of his greatest work.

Including what might be the crowning achievement of his voluminous oeuvre, his oratorio, "The Creation." It takes for its topic the biblical tale of the Earth's early years. And it's among the happiest large-scale works of the classical canon.

Thursday night, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, its Anniversary Chorale and three talented vocal soloists tapped into its bubbling bliss under the energetic leadership of Nicholas McGegan, suffusing St. Paul's Ordway Center with the sound of celebration.

Perhaps the only oratorio you've heard in concert is Handel's "Messiah." Well, that was among the works that inspired the 66-year-old Haydn to take his first stab at the form. But this weekend's concerts might leave you wishing that performances of "The Creation" would also become an annual tradition.

The members of the SPCO are old hands at Haydn, but this is among his most demanding works, with complex harmonies and abrupt shifts in mood, not to mention the team of 85 or so needed to pull it off. But the orchestra sounded splendid Thursday. And the Anniversary Chorale that Dale Warland

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assembled shone brightly throughout, most notably on a triumphal paean to love in the work's final section.

The soloists were also in fine voice, particularly bass-baritone Nathan Berg. He's made a specialty of this work, and it showed, from the tender opening words of "In the beginning" to some ground-shaking (and piercingly clear) low notes to the final affectionate words of Adam. Soprano Sophie Daneman and tenor Nicholas Phan also had many wonderful moments.

Holding it all together was the masterful McGegan, the perfect conductor for this joyful epic. This may be your last chance to experience him leading a work of this scale in the Twin Cities, as his SPCO tenure ends this spring. So these concerts also feel like a toast to a fruitful collaboration.

Rob Hubbard can be reached at rhubbard@pioneerpress.com.

Who: The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and Anniversary Chorale with conductor Nicholas McGegan

What: Haydn's oratorio, "The Creation"

When: 8 p.m. today and Saturday

Where: Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, 345 Washington St., St. Paul

Tickets: \$59-\$5, available at 651-291-1144 or [thespc.org](http://thespc.org)

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