

'WITH VERDURE CLAD' THE CREATION IN COLONIAL NEW ZEALAND

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Haydn's *Creation* marks end of the eighteenth century, the end of the Enlightenment. The first public performance (following a private hearing at the Schwarzenberg Palace a year earlier) took place on March 19, 1799, at Vienna's Burgtheater. Immediately it was recognized as heralding a new era in music, capturing a Romantic ethos that set it apart from what came to be known as the Classical period. In 1800, Carl Friedrich Zelter wrote:

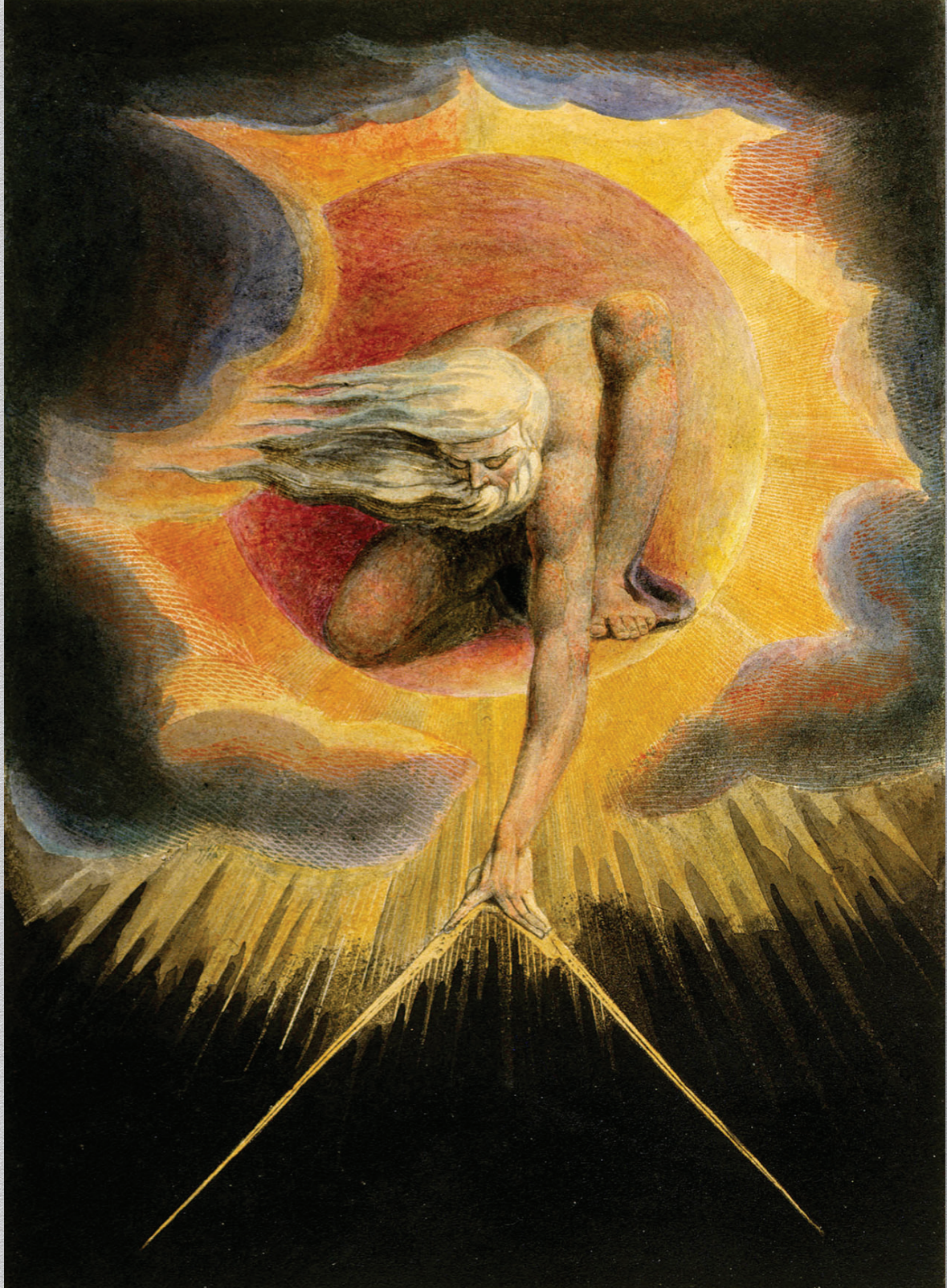
The overture ['Chaos'] bespeaks a master of the first rank... With almost all possible instruments available as raw materials, a gigantic, almost incalculable web of artistic splendour is woven and formed. The objection that Chaos cannot be depicted by means of harmony, melody and rhythm now falls to the ground...

Almost all discords that occur are deliberately treated with complete freedom. The unusual combination of figures and note values, which include semibreves, minims, crotchets, quavers and semiquavers, triplets, roulades, trills and grace-notes, gives the score a peculiar and mysterious look.

One is astonished at the multitude of small, playful figures that swarm around huge, dark masses, like clouds of insects against the great horizon. All these things in combination, in the dark imagery of Chaos, make up an endlessly harmonious fabric, in which the succession of modulations is indescribably beautiful and in many places so sublime and lofty as to evoke awe.¹

Note those words *sublime* and *awe*. They resonate with E. T. A. Hoffman's celebrated summation of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5* as the herald of the Romantic era, a work that he said set in motion "the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, suffering."² Haydn was pleased with Zelter's analysis. As a harbinger of the Romantic period, *The Creation* also reflects a heightened responsiveness to nature. Janus-like, it both sums up the achievement of the Classical era and sets the agenda for the Romantic age. It is also a work that participates in an intertextual dialogue with Handel's oratorio and *Messiah* in particular. The sense of *The Creation* as simultaneously revisiting *Messiah* and announcing Romantic ideals are both central to understanding the special place that Haydn's work held in nineteenth-century New Zealand colonial society.

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The history of *The Creation* is well known, but we revisit it briefly here to underline why audiences in an English colonial society should regard it as somehow their cultural property. Thanks largely to Baron Gottfried van Swieten (who sponsored performances of Handel's oratorio in Vienna and commissioned Mozart's re-orchestration of *Messiah*), Haydn was already very familiar with Handel's oratorio before his first visit to England in 1791. Once there, he experienced the centrality of these works in the English imagination. He almost certainly attended the 1791 Handel commemoration in Westminster Abbey, where he would have heard the Handel oratorio delivered by massive forces—the forerunner of so many large choral society Messiahs (and a far cry from any performances that Handel himself had presided over).³

In August 1795, Haydn returned from his second visit to England with a libretto based on Milton's *Paradise Lost* and purportedly written for Handel. This he gave to van Swieten, who translated it into German for Haydn to set, providing copious notes to the composer on how he thought it should be treated (Haydn ignored most of these). In June 1799, Haydn announced: “the success which my oratorio *The Creation* has been fortunate enough to enjoy has induced me to arrange for its dissemination myself.” He published an edition

with German and English texts, for which van Swieten shoehorned the original English libretto into the musical setting. Two competing English-language performances of *The Creation* were mounted within weeks of the bilingual score reaching London. This English version is thus linked both to the pre-history of Haydn's oratorio and its early performances. Considering that it is a sometimes bizarre manipulation of an eighteenth-century English text by a German-speaking intellectual, it has a charm of its own.

The parallels between *Messiah* and *The Creation* extend beyond the general concept. The overall structure of *The Creation* mirrors that of *Messiah*. Both are in three parts, with the third part just half the length of each of Parts I and II (see Table 1). Part II of *The Creation* ends with a Hallelujah chorus (“Achieved is the Glorious Work... Alleluia”) and the textual echoes are striking, *Messiah's* “For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth... forever and ever” is answered by van Swieten's ungainly “Glory to his name forever/ He sole on high exalted reigns.” It is hardly surprising that *The Creation* came to be regarded as a companion piece to *Messiah*. Numerous nineteenth-century concert reviews in New Zealand reflect, sometimes at length, on the parallels between these two works.

The Creation enjoyed enormous popularity in New

Table 1. Summary Comparison of the Structure of *Messiah* and *The Creation*

Handel's <i>Messiah</i>	Haydn's <i>The Creation</i>
Part the First	Part 1
1-21 Prophecy of Christ's coming; the Birth of Christ	1-14 God creates the heaven and earth (Days 1-4)
Part the Second	Part 2
22-44 Christ redeeming humanity through his suffering →Hallelujah	15-26 God creates all living things, including man and woman (Days 5-6) →Alleluja
Part the Third	Part 3
45-54 Post-resurrection humanity living in the confidence of redemption	27-32 Post-creation humanity (Adam and Eve) living in happiness



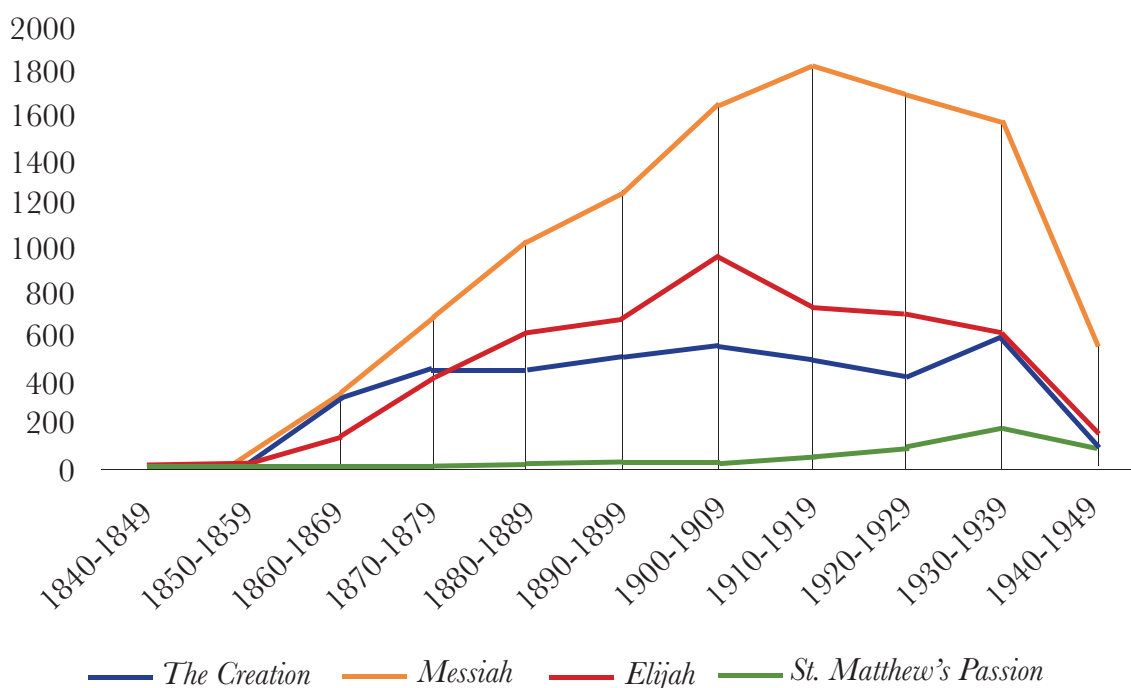
Zealand during the nineteenth century. Part of this was undoubtedly because it was regarded almost as an English work. Alongside *Messiah* and *The Creation*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was also embraced by New Zealand colonial society. Like *The Creation*, *Elijah* entered the world (at its première in Birmingham in 1846) with an English version of its German libretto, and it too derives from a Handelian model of the oratorio. It was first performed in New Zealand in Auckland in 1859.⁴ Table 2 shows references to *Messiah*, *The Creation*, and *Elijah*, with Bach's *St Matthew Passion* included to put them in perspective. Note that these references do not all relate to actual performances (some are advertisements for scores, others are included in more general musical articles) but, broadly speaking, they follow the same curve. They are, in any case, an indication of interest.

In the early years of the colony, excerpts from *The Creation* featured strongly in concert programs. The scene is set by a concert "before a numerous audience" late in

1853 in a schoolroom in Lyttleton (the busy port suburb of Christchurch). The program followed what was then a standard template: a first half of sacred music (dominated by numbers from *Messiah*, *The Creation*, and *Elijah*) followed by a selection of secular items. *The Lyttleton Times* reported:

The Concert commenced with the solo and recitative from Handel, beginning "There were Shepherds," sung by Miss King; the chorus being spiritedly taken up by the whole body. This was followed by Mr. Packer playing on the Cornet the air "With Verdure clad," from Haydn's *Creation* in a style of intonation enabling the hearers to follow the words of the air throughout. The chorus from the *Messiah*, "Their sound is gone out" succeeded this and was rendered with great accuracy. An alto solo from Mendelssohn's [*sic*] "*Elijah*" was then sung by Mr. Mc-

Table 2. References to Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in New Zealand Newspapers 1840-1950



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Cardell after which the chorus, "The last day," composed by Whitaker, was given in full choir... Mr. Smeaton's solo on the violin, from Mozart, followed—then a trio from the "Elijah," which from the unequal voices of the singers appeared one of the least successful efforts of the evening. The "Hallelujah" chorus completed the arrangement of the sacred pieces.

The secular portion of the music commenced with a piece on the piano-forte by Mr. Bilton... The concluding piece, "God save the Queen," was joined in most heartily by the greater part of the audience.⁵

The audience participation in a closing "God Save the Queen" makes it startlingly clear that this was an English expatriate event. Tracking such concerts through the nineteenth century reinforces the sense of a community determined to hang on to a culture they had grown up with on the other side of the world.

The fourth and last concert for 1856 presented by the Auckland Choral Society was in three parts: first, excerpts from *Elijah*, then excerpts from Mendelssohn's *St Paul*, and finally excerpts from *The Creation* (see Photo 1). A review in the *Daily Southern Cross* was critical not just of performance standards but of the work itself. This repeated the all-too-familiar complaints about Haydn's animal imitations (for which Handel's *Israel in Egypt* must take some responsibility) but went beyond this to compare *The Creation* unfavorably with *Messiah*:

At the risk of being charged with musical heresy, we must confess that it is not one of those compositions over the score of which we most delight to linger. It is a great work, beyond a doubt; nothing less could be expected from its author; but if tried after the severely beautiful "Messiah," it falls by contrast into a second class place among oratorios. Haydn himself was of too playful a temperament to rise to the level of such a subject. This is only too clearly shown by one of the recitatives, in which he descends to imitative trivialities.⁶

AUCKLAND CHORAL SOCIETY.

PATRON—HIS EXCELLENCY COLONEL GORE BROWNE.
CONDUCTOR—MR. JOSEPH BROWN. ACCOMPANIST—MR. J. FLETTERWOOD.

THE Committee of this Society have much pleasure in announcing the Fourth and last Concert of the course ending October 1, 1856, to take place on THURSDAY, the 23rd instant, in the ODD FELLOWS' HALL.

PROGRAMME.

PART I.
SELECTIONS FROM MENDELSSOHN'S ORATORIO OF "ELIJAH."
Recitation—Ye people read your hearts. | Recit.—See how he sleepeth.
Air—If with all your hearts. | Trio—Lift thine eyes.
Quartet—Cast thy burden. | Air—Oh, rest in the Lord.
Chorus—The Lord is God. | Chorus—He that shall endure.

PART II.
SELECTIONS FROM MENDELSSOHN'S "ST. PAUL."
Chorus—To find on high. | Chorus—Sleepers, wake!
Recit.—And they stoned him. | Duett—Now we are ambassadors.
Chorus—To Thee, O Lord. | Chorus—How lovely are the messengers.
Recit.—And the witnesses. | Chorus—O, Thou, the true and only God.
Chorus—Happy and blest are they. | Chorus—Not only unto him.

PART III.
SELECTIONS FROM HAYDN'S "CREATION."
Recit.—In the beginning. | Air—In splendeur bright.
Chorus—And the Spirit. | Chorus—The heavens are telling.
Recit.—And God saw the light. | Recit. & Air—And God said "Let the
Air—Now vanish. | earth bring forth."
Chorus—Despairing, cursing. | Recit.—Straight opening.
Recit.—And God made the firmament. | Air—Now heaven in fullest glory.
Solo & Chorus—The marvellous work. | Recit.—And God created man.
Recit. & Air—And God said "Let there be | Air—In native worth.
light." | Chorus—Achieved is the glorious work.

Books of words will be sold at the door, price 6d.
Doors open at Seven; to commence at half-past Seven, p.m.
Honorary members are requested to produce their cards at the door.
The cards for the next course, to end October 1, 1857, will be issued after the 23rd instant, when persons wishing to become members are requested to make application to the Secretary or a member of the Committee.
J. E. BATES, Hon. Sec.
P. S.—The amateur members are requested to meet on Wednesday, the 22nd inst., in the Odd Fellows' Hall, for practice.

Photo 1. Advertisement for an Auckland Choral Society concert on 23 October 1856 (from *The New Zealander* 12 (October 18, 1856))

The writer appeals here to a stereotype—the "playful Haydn"—that is at odds with the sublimity and awe detected by Zelter. But it accords with a nineteenth-century narrative that sees Haydn as personifying an eighteenth-century detachment from serious matters. E. T. A. Hoffmann, in the article on "Beethoven's Instrumental Music" referred to earlier, writes of Haydn's "serene and childlike personality" whose symphonies evoke "laughing children, peering out from behind the trees" who "pelt one another playfully with flowers."⁷ Not deterred, a year later the Auckland Choral Society was again rehearsing the first two parts of *The Creation* (with the program rounded out with sections of *Resurrection and Ascension* by George Elvey⁸). Orchestral parts



had been ordered for this performance, but they failed to arrive in time. (The Society was later gifted a set of parts by Sir George Arney.⁹) These reviews, incidentally, are rich in information about the standard of choral singing in New Zealand at this time, much of it judged wanting in comparison to what they had left behind. A reviewer for the *Daily Southern Cross*, commenting in 1857 on the deficiencies in the Auckland Choral Society, wrote of “our anxiety to see grand compositions produced near to the style of the old country.”¹⁰

Performances of the entire work seem to have begun in the 1860s. In March 1864, the Dunedin Philharmonic Society announced that it would follow up a successful performance of *Messiah* with one of *The Creation*. A month or so later, the Auckland Philharmonic Society was busy rehearsing the oratorio. And in August of that year, the work was presented complete by the Nelson Harmonic Society. A review of this performance began with a complaint about van Swieten’s translation:

In 1798 Haydn gave the world his oratorio “The Creation,” the noblest of his works, although composed in his sixty-fifth year, and which ranks with the greatest musical works of our age. It is a pity that the text, which was originally written in German, is so badly translated. That at present in use is the first translation undertaken by Baron von Sweeten [*sic*], and it is surprising that to this day no improvement has been attempted...

That was just the first of the reviewer’s complaints (though, typically for the time, these are couched in patronizing language):

The Harmonic Society is at present the only institute in Nelson whose aim is to cultivate the fine arts. A sharp critique of last night’s performance of the “Creation” must therefore not be expected from us. Taking into consideration the very limited means at the command of the Society, we do not hesitate to call this concert a successful one, although it has fully convinced us that the Harmonic Society over-estimates its powers by choosing such a difficult master-

piece as the “Creation” for their concert. It is impossible that seven or eight instruments can do justice to Haydn’s splendid orchestral music, in which the greatest beauties lie in the particularly nice balancing of the instrumental powers. This instrumental deficiency we chiefly observed in the strikingly beautiful recitative which serves as an introduction to the first part, and in the Hallelujah finale of the second part. The deficiency was unfortunately increased by one of the violins being out of tune. The choruses, without exception, were rendered very effectively; but we regret we cannot say the same of the solos. The gentleman in whose hands chiefly the bass parts were placed is gifted with a fine melodious voice, but, unfortunately, he spoils it by choking the notes to such a degree that it becomes painful to the audience...

The review concludes by more or less dismissing altogether the Society’s brave venture: “The audience was very large and fashionable, and we believe would have been better satisfied had the Society been less ambitious and made up its programme of popular glees and judicious operatic selections.”¹¹ We should perhaps be alert to the fact that a “fashionable” audience was unlikely to be a diverse audience. These performances existed for the colonial elite. At this distance it would be difficult to document, but it would be surprising if Māori, or even working-class Irish immigrants, were anywhere to be seen. Perhaps the taste of Christchurch audiences was more sophisticated. In August 1869, *The Press* reported:

The Town Hall was not only crowded last night, but densely packed, indeed hundreds had to go away unable to obtain admission to hear the performance by the Christchurch Musical Society of Haydn’s magnificent oratorio, “The Creation,” which was rendered most creditably. In consequence of the large number of persons unable to gain admission the oratorio will be repeated on Monday evening.¹²

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A year later *The Auckland Star*, apparently oblivious to what was happening elsewhere in the country, reported:

It is gratifying to all lovers of music in the city to learn that preparations are in progress for the rendering of this magnificent creation [*sic*] of Haydn by the Choral Society. This is the first time that this has been attempted in Auckland, and if we do not mistake the first time in the Australasian colonies.¹³

The transition from “miscellany programmes” featuring numbers from *The Creation* alongside others from *Elijah* and *Messiah* to full performances of the work coincides with the first debates about Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859) in New Zealand. The Anglican Bishop of Wellington, C. J. Abraham, denounced Darwin in terms that indicate he had completely failed to understand the principles of natural selection: “Were it not for their supposed effect upon religion, no-one would waste his time in reading about the possibility of polar bears swimming about and catching flies so long that they at last get the fins they wish for.”¹⁴ Could the enthusiasm for Haydn’s *Creation* in the mid-nineteenth century be related to its apparent endorsement of a creationist perspective? There is no evidence for this, although the apparent rise of interest—against the trend—in *The Creation* in the 1920s shown in Table 2 coincides with a period of vigorous debate between evolutionists and creationists.¹⁵

More interesting is the coexistence of enthusiasm for *The Creation* with activities that seem diametrically opposed to the profound respect for nature at the heart of the oratorio. Whaling in New Zealand pre-dates by some decades the signing in 1840 of the Treaty of Waitangi (the founding document of New Zealand as a British colony). Māori, who were typically skilled seamen, became heavily involved in the industry (Queequeg in Melville’s *Moby Dick* is Polynesian). In the first half of the nineteenth century nearly 100 whaling stations were established in New Zealand. How, one wonders, did audience members reconcile this very visible and cruel industry with the warmth (indeed, the loving attitude) conveyed in Raphael’s beautiful accompanied recitative?



Photo 2: A view of the Whale Fishery. In: *A Collection of Voyages round the World ... Captain Cook's First, Second, Third and Last Voyages Volume V, London, 1790. Page 1910. Call Number G160 .C64 1790 v. 5*

And God created great whales
And every living creature that moveth
And God blessed them, saying
Be fruitful all, and multiply!
Ye winged tribes be multiplied and sing on every tree!
Multiply, ye finny tribes, and fill each wat'ry deep!
Be fruitful, grow and multiply!
And in your God and Lord rejoice!¹⁶

Worse even than the ravages of whaling, a land completely “clad with verdure” was stripped to create farmland or sometimes simply to make it more straightforward to extract timber being felled further inland (see Table 2). The first full performances of *The Creation* in the late 1860s took place against a backdrop of accelerating deforestation. As Catherine Knight points out, “In the decades following 1870, a renewed assault on the forest began. Settlers pressed into uncolonised regions further inland, which were at that time largely forested. For these settlers, the priority was the clearing of land for conversion to pasture, and they did this not by milling, but by fire.”¹⁷ The audience that overflowed the Christchurch Town Hall in 1869 could not have been unaware of this brutal devastation of the landscape. According to Thomas Potts MP (speaking in 1868), Banks Peninsula (just to the south of the city) had been “covered, for weeks together, with thick and lurid smoke.”¹⁸



Photo 3: Williams, William, 1858-1949. View of an area at Matamau, which has been cleared of nearly all forestation. Ref: 1/1-025788-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

This observation was made during the first of two significant parliamentary debates about this destruction. Potts had presented a motion “That it is desirable Government should take steps to ascertain the present condition of the forests of the Colony, with a view to their better conservation.” In introducing this, he pointed to the ecological damage inflicted by deforestation in other countries:

The mischievous results from the cutting down of forests in a wholesale manner had called for the attention of the Legislature of Victoria; and in America, where the settlers had been exceedingly wasteful of the wood, it had been suggested to the Government that they should make some reserves in perpetuity. Marsh, an American writer on physical geography as modified by human action, citing the effects of disforestation [*sic*] on the French slopes of the Alps, and other localities, carefully points out the varied influence of the forests, as shelter, on temperature, on humidity, on floods, on the flow of springs and his arrangement of facts proves the removal of forests to be the primary cause of excessive inundations.¹⁹


This seems prophetic. It is not about the Amazon; it is prompted by the treatment of New Zealand indigenous forests. The debate in Parliament, like climate change debates today, was turbulent, with one member threatening to move an amendment that would have replaced “a view to their better conservation” with “a view to their better destruction.”

Potts also quoted the Austrian geologist Ferdinand von Hochstetter (1829-1884), who had visited New Zealand from 1858-1860 on a research expedition:

[E]xtensive districts within that range which formerly had been covered with Kauri woods, are now totally destitute of such; and the extermination of that noble tree progresses from year to year at such a rate that its final extinction is as certain as that of the natives of New Zealand. The European colonisation t[h]reatens the existence of both, and with the last of the Maoris the last of the Kauris will also disappear from the earth.²⁰

Parliament picked up the debate in 1873 again when the member for Thames, Charles O’Neill pleaded with his colleagues to act “so that history might not be able to relate that they received a fertile country, but, by a criminal want of foresight, transmitted to posterity a desert.”²¹

In twenty-first-century Aotearoa New Zealand, *Messiah* still gets at least annual performances in most major towns and cities (‘For we like sheep’), *Elijah* has virtually fallen from view, and presentations of *The Creation* are intermittent. How apt that WSCM2020 in Auckland will conclude with this masterpiece. It fits perfectly with the Symposium’s theme of *People and the Land: He tangata/He whenua*. It is, of course, a celebration of the natural world that implicitly underlines humanity’s responsibility for its preservation. In the concluding recitative, Uriel voices a caution that our well-being will be threatened if Adam and Eve (us!) “misled by false conceits... strive at more than granted is.” As performers and audience members, we know that is precisely what happened. And we also understand the urgency of remedial action, action that includes reforestation in New

Zealand but that has implications for every community sending delegates to the Symposium. The text of the United Nations' Paris Agreement (2015) describes climate change as "a common concern of mankind." Haydn's *Creation* is an excellent way to reflect on the gap between a prelapsarian (pre-colonial, pre-industrial) world and the one in which we live, struggling to control and reverse anthropogenic climate change. 

NOTES

- ¹ *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* IV (1801-2): 390ff. Quoted in Heinrich Schenker, *The Masterwork in Music: A Yearbook*, vol. 2 (1926), ed. William Drabkin (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 103.
- ² E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music" (1813); translation from *Source Readings in Music History* ed. Oliver Strunk, rev. Leo Treitler (New York & London: Norton, 1998): 1195.
- ³ John A. Rice, "Did Haydn attend the Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey?," *Early Music* 40 (2012): 73-80. This debunks some of the myths surrounding Haydn's attendance at the 1791 commemoration (including the claim, first advanced by Carl Ferdinand Pohl, that, on hearing the "Hallelujah" Chorus, Haydn wept and exclaimed, "He is the master of us all.")
- ⁴ *New Zealander* XV (issue 1411) October 26, 1859; this, and all other references from nineteenth-century New Zealand newspapers, have been sourced from *Papers Past* (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>).
- ⁵ *The Lyttleton Times* III (issue 156), December 31, 1853; sourced from *Papers Past* (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>).
- ⁶ *The Daily Southern Cross* XIII (issue 974) October 28, 1856; sourced from *Papers Past* (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>).
- ⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 1194. It is Mozart, Hoffmann continues, who "leads us into the heart of the spirit realm."
- ⁸ Nicholas Temperley writes in *The New Grove*, "Elvey's anthems, services and oratorios are long since forgotten; even when they were written they were half a century out of date, using an inflexibly Handelian style." Temperley, Nicholas, and Bruce Carr. "Elvey, Sir George," *Grove Music Online* (2001). Oxford University Press. Date of access Dec. 8, 2019, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline-com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000008757>.
- ⁹ *Daily Southern Cross* XV (issue 3817), November 12, 1869.
- ¹⁰ *Daily Southern Cross* XIV (issue 1067), September 18, 1857; sourced from *Papers Past* (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>).
- ¹¹ This and the preceding quotations from *The Colonist* VII (issue 709), August 12, 1864; sourced from *Papers Past* (<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>).
- ¹² *The Press* XV (1987) August 28, 1869.
- ¹³ *The Auckland Star* I. September 27, 1870.
- ¹⁴ Quoted by Ronald L. Numbers and John Stenhouse, "Antievolutionism in the Antipodes: From Protesting Evolution to Promoting Creationism in New Zealand," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33 (2000), 336.
- ¹⁵ See Numbers and Stenhouse, "Antievolutionism in the Antipodes," 341ff.
- ¹⁶ English text for No. 17 Recitative (Raphael).
- ¹⁷ Catherine Knight, "The Paradox of Discourse Concerning Deforestation in New Zealand: A Historical Survey," *Environment and History* 15 (2009), 325.
- ¹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* IV, 189 (October 7, 1868); available through *Historical Hansard* <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/historical-hansard/#1854>. See also Paul Star, "Potts, Thomas Henry," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1993, updated November 2010, Te Ara—*The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2p27/potts-thomas-henry> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ Ferdinand Hochstetter, *New Zealand: its physical geography, geology, and natural history*, trans Edward Sauter (1867): 141 <http://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document/?wid=441>.
- ²¹ *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* XV (October 7, 1873): 188.