

from a performance in the South Tyrol, directed by the young German cellist-conductor Philipp von Steinaecker. Once you have adjusted to the vast, cavernous acoustic of Brixen (Bressanone) Cathedral, there is much to enjoy here. From the opening evocation of the primeval void, Steinaecker has a keen ear for Haydn's miraculously inventive orchestration and secures lively, stylistically assured playing from his cosmopolitan period band. One or two of his tempi – say, in 'With verdure clad' or the trio and chorus 'The Lord is great' – struck me as over-impetuous. The all-English chorus – just 22 singers but sounding much larger – is lithe and youthfully fresh of tone, topped by a gleaming soprano line. Tenors and basses are incisive without ever bawling (the tenors' leap to a top A near the climax of 'The Heavens are telling' rings out thrillingly); and while the swimmy acoustic compromises perfect contrapuntal clarity, the singers clearly articulate Baron van Swieten's quaint, Milton-inspired text, touched up at some of its more nonsensical moments.

Steinaecker's soloists are all good without quite equalling those on Paul McCreesh's *Gramophone* Award-winning Archiv performance. David Stout, the Raphael, fields a resonant bass-baritone (strong low notes) but could do with more subtlety and grace in, say, the dulcet close of 'Rolling in foaming billows', where his soft tones lack warmth. Tenor Andrew Staples, too, is happier in robust than lyric mode. Mark Padmore, for McCreesh, distils a greater sense of wonder and mystery at the first moonrise, and more tenderness at the creation of the first woman.

Swedish soprano Ida Falk Winland sounds slightly pressed by Steinaecker's brisk (and unyielding) tempo in 'With verdure clad' but phrases and colours delectably in her avian aria. She survives into Part 3 as a sweet-toned Eve, where Stout is replaced by the mellow baritone of Robert Davies (Haydn never used more than three soloists in *The Creation*). The long Adam-and-Eve love duet is a delight, lyrically intimate at the opening, eager and impulsive in the *Allegro*, frolicking, chortling woodwind to the fore. I'm glad to have heard this new recording, above all for some magnificent choral singing. But if you want Haydn's prelapsarian vision in English, McCreesh's inspiring performance is still the one to go for.

Richard Wigmore

Selected comparisons:

Gabrieli Consort, McCreesh (3/08) (ARCH) 477 7361AH2

VOCAL REVIEWS

Haydn

The Creation (sung in English)

Ida Falk Winland *sop* **Andrew Staples** *ten*

Robert Davies *bar* **David Stout** *bass-bar*

Musica Saeculorum / Philipp von Steinaecker

Fra Bernardo (M) © FB1301272 (102' • DDD)



For obvious commercial reasons, recordings of *The Creation* in English are still rare. Which makes it slightly surprising that this new version derives