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A New-World oratorio society springs up: Haydn, „The Creation“, and Boston’s Handel and Haydn Society

In: Joseph Haydn & Die Neue Welt. Musik- und Kulturgeschichtliche Perspektiven. Bericht über das Symposium der Internationalen Joseph Haydn Privatstiftung Eisenstadt im Rahmen der 23. Internationalen Haydntage vom 13. bis 15. September 2011 in Eisenstadt. Hrsg. von Walter Reicher, unter Mitarbeit von Wolfgang Fuhrmann. Eisenstädter Haydn-Berichte. Veröffentlichungen der Internationalen Joseph Haydn Privatstiftung Eisenstadt, Band 11. Wien, Hollitzer Verlag 2019, S. 159 – 178.

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## A New-World Oratorio Society Springs Up: Haydn, “The Creation”, and Boston’s Handel and Haydn Society

On Christmas night 1815, exactly one year after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain, nearly 1000 Boston residents attended the inaugural concert of the Handel and Haydn Society, the first self-described oratorio society in the United States. 100 singers – 90 men and 10 brave women – and an orchestra of fewer than 15 players, performed arias and choruses from “The Creation” and “Messiah”, along with a variety of other solos and choruses. The entire first part of the concert was music from part one of “The Creation”, ending with “The Heavens are Telling”. Part two of the concert was a mixture of arias and choruses from Handel’s “Messiah” and “Sampson”, along with some Liberty-themed songs. The third and final part included more Liberty songs, and choruses from “Messiah” and “Israel in Egypt”, concluding with the “Halleluiah” Chorus. The concert was repeated 18 January to a smaller but perhaps more prestigious audience which included a number of clergy, as well as state and local officials, the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts among them. In April 1817 the Handel and Haydn Society gave complete performances of both “The Creation” and “Messiah”, stretched over three nights: the first parts of both oratorios were performed on April 1, part two of each on April 3, and part three of each on April 4. This three-night Handel and Haydn Society performance was the first complete English-language performance of “The Creation” in America<sup>1</sup>. Three months later, five movements from “The Creation” were featured in a special concert in honor of newly-inaugurated President James Monroe<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1). Then on 21 December 1818 and 16 February 1819, the Handel and Haydn Society gave complete (or nearly so) one-night performances of “Messiah” and “The Creation”, respectively, in Boylston Hall<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Nicholas Temperley, the first Moravian performance of 1811 was not a complete performance, and would have been done in German. See Nicholas Temperley, *Haydn. The Creation*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 41f. For more on the first Moravian performance, see Kathleen Lamkin’s chapter in this book.

<sup>2</sup> “In splendor bright”, “The heavens are telling”, “Achieved is Thy glorious work”, and “The marv’lous work”. The original hand-written list also includes “Rolling in foaming billows” but that text does not appear in the program. Proposed concert order for performance, 1817, The Handel and Haydn Society, Boston, MA. Handel and Haydn Society Archives, Boston Public Library, Series 1, Box 1, folder 40.

<sup>3</sup> This less than two months after three complete performances of “Messiah” during the Christmas season, the first complete performances of this work in America.

Order of performances

Part 1<sup>st</sup>

✓ Duet and Chorus	- Hail Judea	Handel
Solo	Rolling in foaming billows	Haydn
Chorus	The horse and his rider	Handel
Trio	Desolate is the dwelling	Calcott
Solo	There's nothing true but heaven	Shaw
Solo	Thou didst blow	Handel
Chorus	He gave them hailstones	do
Duet of Chorus	This for our cause	do
	The scatter'd nations	
Trio	Peace to the souls	Calcott
Duet & Air	In splendor bright	Haydn
Chorus	The heavens are talking	do

Part 2<sup>nd</sup>

✓ Solo	Wreaths &c	
Duet	O lovely peace	Handel
Chorus	Atkrised is the glorious work	Haydn
Solo & Duet	Liberty	Handel
Solo & Chorus	The marvellous work	Haydn
Air & Chorus	Strike the Cymbal	Pucitta
Chorus	Hallelujah	Handel

A.B. Scores of the above pieces of music will be provided.

Figure 1: Handwritten plan of Handel & Haydn concert in honor of President James Monroe, given July 1817. Courtesy of the Handel and Haydn Society, Boston.

These early concerts established “The Creation” and “Messiah” as signature pieces of the Handel and Haydn Society; yearly Christmas season performances of “Messiah” have occurred to this day, and nearly every concert over the Society’s first 60 years contained at least a few numbers from “The Creation”, with 59 complete performances. By the end of the

1820s the Handel and Haydn Society began regularly programming other Haydn works, including the “Harmonie” Mass in Bb, Te Deum in C, Hob. XXIIIc:2, and Stabat Mater. Special and pivotal performances of the Handel and Haydn Society always included Haydn’s music. As recently as October 1986, then music director Christopher Hogwood ushered in what might be called the modern era of the Society as a so-called “period” ensemble with Symphony Hob.I:104 and the “Lord Nelson” Mass. The Handel and Haydn Society is credited with American premières of a number of other great works from the 18th and 19th centuries by a variety of composers<sup>4</sup>. Among all of these works, however, “The Creation” and “Messiah” continued to be most strongly identified with the Handel and Haydn Society, and helped the Society to establish itself as a fixture of Boston culture, up to the present day. To be sure, “The Creation”’s wonderfully colorful music gets much of the credit for its favor, but so, too, does its text’s outlook on the freshness of a new world, formed by a loving, Creator-Architect, to be revered its human caretakers. These ideas resonated in Boston’s society and politics in the “Era of Good Feelings” following the War of 1812, and reflected the principles that led to the founding and success of the Handel and Haydn Society, whose earliest members – mainly amateurs of various middle-class and working-class professions, along with a handful of trained musicians from England and Germany – believed in the bright future promised by this New World, sought to improve their ability to praise the Creator for this and other blessings, and looked to the best music of the Old World to help them achieve this.

#### POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CLIMATE: FEAR OF SECESSION, WAR, AND THE ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS

The early years of the 19th century were difficult in the new republic holding such high aspirations. The founding ideas of the United States, and its achieving of independence from Great Britain, were still very present in the minds of its citizens. But a series of external and internal conflicts in the first decade-and-a-half of the 1800s threatened this independence so recently gained, and provoked anxiety over the possibility of returning to a monarchical or tyrannical form of government, or perhaps a dissolving of the Union through a series of autonomous agreements between a hand-

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<sup>4</sup> American premières: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Mass in C, K. 262 (1829), Sigismund Neukomm’s “David” (1839), Handel’s “Samson” (1845), Gioacchino Rossini’s “Moses in Egypt” (1845), Handel’s “Jephtha” (1850), “Salomon” (1855), “Israel in Egypt” (complete, 1859), “Ode for St. Cecilia’s Day” (1863), and “Joshua” (1876), Giuseppe Verdi’s Requiem (1878), Johann Sebastian Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion” (1879), and Mass in B minor (1887).

ful of states and foreign governments. In the New England ports such as Boston, which relied upon maritime commerce for their prosperity, these conflicts and anxieties were amplified.

Competing British and French interests during the Napoleonic wars led to a series of edicts that severely hampered the maritime commerce so vital to America's northern port cities. The various campaigns undertaken by the British Navy at the turn of the century strained its ability to man its ships. To help alleviate this, they began a campaign of impressment of British merchant seamen into military duty. American trade ships were in constant danger of being boarded and their crews pressed into service. While international law recognized the right of a country to recapture its truant citizens for military service, and indeed, many British sailors had deserted to America in search of better pay and working conditions, mistakes inevitably occurred. The Royal Navy not only boarded American vessels, but boarding parties seized naturalized and native-born Americans from these vessels. From 1803 to 1812, between 3,800 and 6,800 American sailors were impressed by the Royal Navy<sup>5</sup>. In addition, several Orders of Council issued by the British government restricted American ships from travelling between France, Spain and the French West Indies, and in May of 1806 Great Britain declared the entire coast of northern Europe under blockade. To retaliate, France's Berlin Decree of November 1806 effectively blockaded the British Isles, prohibiting trade with all allied and neutral countries. This in turn led to further British declarations of blockade against all non-British vessels attempting to enter any Napoleon-controlled region. In total, from 1807 to 1812 an estimated 858 American ships were seized by British and French warships, in nearly equal numbers<sup>6</sup>.

This strangle-hold on American maritime commerce, along with the British support of native tribes in skirmishes aimed at curbing Westward expansion, led to the American Declaration of War against Great Britain on 18 June 1812. As is always the case in war, the American forces won several victories but also experienced crushing defeats on both land and sea. The low point during the 32 months of war was the burning of Washington, DC by British forces on 24 August 1814, following the American defeat at Bladensburg.

Political conflicts within the United States – some in response to these external pressures and some more clearly home-grown – added to the anxiety. The economic stress on New England's port cities, including Boston,

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<sup>5</sup> Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril*, New York 1964, pp. 16f.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17f. James Monroe, as Secretary of State, gave this estimate in July 1812.

caused by the aggressive French and British blockades, was exacerbated by the Embargo Act of 1807: an attempt by President Thomas Jefferson and his foreign policy advisor James Madison to protect American ships from British and French seizure by forbidding commerce through international waters. In the U.S., the embargo caused commodity prices to drop, and effectively shut down the northern ports, causing widespread unemployment of dockworkers, and hardship to all industries tied to maritime trade<sup>7</sup>. While the Embargo Act was repealed two years later, during the first months of the presidency of James Madison, the economic and political damage had been done. Additional legislation restricting maritime trade enacted up to and through the war years gave rise to a lively smuggling enterprise in Boston and other New England ports, but such illegal activities could not possibly make up for the depressed economic state caused by the blockades and protectionist measures<sup>8</sup>.

The 1807 Embargo Act and resulting economic hardship in New England escalated the hostility between the United States' two major political parties – the Federalists and the Republicans – which had been brewing since the mid 1790s. The New England states, particularly the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, leaned towards the Federalist party, finding benefit in a central banking system, and economic strength and stability through mercantilism, particularly foreign trade with Great Britain, which they still considered their cultural and social progenitor. The South and West supported the Republican party, which seemed to embrace a belief in economic and political stability through the favoring of agrarian concerns, and national self-reliance attainable by means of westward, and possibly northward, expansion<sup>9</sup>. The two parties' common beliefs in individual freedoms, and the desire to maintain the republican-based unity the New World offered through the balance of social forces and governmental branches, and harmony among the social classes, became overshadowed by profound distrust and suspicion. Each party saw in the actions of the other attempts to use the Constitution to usurp power, which would ultimately lead to despotism of one sort or another. It is this suspicion and distrust, more than actual ideological differences, which added to fears of the Union's dissolution, or a complete return to British rule. The New England Federalists viewed the

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Allen Rutland, *The Presidency of James Madison*, Lawrence, KS, 1990, pp. 5f.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> To be sure, the ideological differences between the two parties were much more vast and complicated, but this simplification will suffice to demonstrate the point for the purpose of my study. For more complete discussions of the two parties, see James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention. The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789–1815*, New York 1970 and Brown, *The Republic in Peril*.

Embargo Act of 1807 and other Non-intercourse Acts aimed at regulating commercial shipping, the Louisiana purchase in 1803, military campaigns in the Northwest, and finally the Declaration of War against Great Britain, all of which were enacted by two successive Southern – that is Virginian – presidents, as deliberate attempts to weaken the economic and political clout of the New England states, especially Massachusetts, with the ultimate goal of establishing a Virginian despotic dynasty<sup>10</sup>. Josiah Quincy (1772–1864), a Massachusetts congressman and future Boston mayor, berated this series of executive edicts in 1813, colorfully expressing the Federalist party's suspicion of a Virginia Republican dynastic conspiracy<sup>11</sup>:

This is the point on which the projects of [Madison's] Cabinet for the three years past have been brought to bear – that James the First [Madison] should be made to continue four years longer. And this is the point on which the projects of the Cabinet will be brought to bear for the three years to come – that James the Second [Monroe] shall be made to succeed, according to the fundamental precepts of the Montecellian [referring to Jefferson] dynasty.

In October 1814, after the federal government refused to send federal troops to defend New England when invaded by the British, the Massachusetts Legislature called for a meeting of Federalist party representatives to discuss their grievances against the Republican administrations. Twenty-six representatives from five New England states met in Hartford, Connecticut 15 December 1814 to 4 January 1815. Some of the radical members at the Hartford Convention went so far as to suggest secession from the Union by individual states, who would sue Great Britain for separate peace. But the moderates prevailed at the Hartford Convention, and the meeting adjourned without definite actions, only a report outlining a number of recommendations<sup>12</sup>.

Republicans, for their part, had always held the same suspicions of despotism toward the Federalists. The Republican party, in fact, was established by Thomas Jefferson in the 1790s to stem policies suggested by Alexander Hamilton and his political allies regarding the need for a more centralized government, including a central bank and maintenance of a large army, and which seemed to assert the notion of a privileged governing class made up of merchants, bankers and other commerce-related individuals, not interested in or capable of representing the needs of the agrarian class. Jefferson

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<sup>10</sup> Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41f.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

and the Republicans regarded such policies as designed to subvert republican government in order to replace it with a monarchical system similar to that of Great Britain, or perhaps even a return to the protection and jurisdiction of Great Britain. According to Jefferson, “The constitution [permits] its citizens to follow agriculture, commerce, navigation & every other lawful pursuit, equally under the protection of the nation” and further, “under the mask of federalism, hearts devoted to monarchy” must be removed from public office<sup>13</sup>. Talk in Federalist circles regarding the rights of states to supersede federal laws even to the point of secession, their vehement opposition to the Louisiana Purchase and 1807 Embargo Act, their encouragement of, or at least turning blind eyes to, New England’s smuggling activities, and finally their calling for concessions to Great Britain rather than a declaration of war in 1812 (which every congressional Federalist opposed) and refusal to activate state militia when the British invaded New England, only intensified the Republicans’ suspicion of Federalists’ plots to overthrow the entire Union, or to effect a secession of the New England states and establish a separate Federalist confederacy.

Such suspicions and harsh words were not confined to the halls of government. The non-monarchical, republican, representative model of society of the United States had become a moral and religious *sine qua non*, and often the subject of discussion from the pulpit. Clergy were active participants in the political process and workings of government, and the contrasting views of how such a society could be sustained, and generate optimal moral conditions in support of a God-fearing people, conveniently, perhaps inevitably, fell into the Federalist-Republican camps. The Congregationalist, Presbyterian and Episcopal clergy, and some of those professing the Unitarian and Universalist creeds – in other words, those churches most prominent in Boston and other New England cities – tended towards the Federalist camp. (It is even believed that all Congregationalist ministers in Massachusetts were active Federalists.) Those Protestant sects affiliated with more rural settings, such as Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, and some of the more liberal Unitarian ministers, favored the Republican ideology. Thus the opposing ideals, and the suspicions, that had become so firmly embedded into the political arena acquired moralistic and religious validity.

But at the end of 1814 and in the first months of 1815, the republic’s outlook brightened. Just three weeks after the humiliating burning of the nation’s capitol, U.S. forces won a stunning victory in Baltimore, as Fort McHenry was able to hold off the British forces. On Christmas day, the British and Americans signed the Treaty of Ghent ending the War, with

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<sup>13</sup> Brown, *The Republic in Peril*, pp. 10ff.

both sides agreeing to status quo ante bellum. Before word of the treaty reached the U.S., Andrew Jackson's army defeated the British troops in the Battle of New Orleans on 8 January 1815. While this battle had no effect on the peace treaty, news of Jackson's victory over the battle-hardened British troops boosted national pride, and reaffirmed the nation's sovereignty. Even the Hartford Convention, with its bending to the will of the moderates in the Federalist party, confirmed the importance of the cohesion of the Union, and fortified the principles of representative governance and equal consideration of Northern and Southern – commercial and agrarian – economic and political issues. "If the Massachusetts Federalists and the Hartford Convention are to be arraigned by history," writes James Banner, "they must be arraigned for their fidelity to the republican faith"<sup>14</sup>. In a sense, then, they agreed with Thomas Jefferson, the founder of the Republican party, who wrote in 1809 that the continued health and prosperity of the nation rested upon "due balance between agriculture, manufactures, and commerce"<sup>15</sup>.

This self-reflective, affirmative sentiments regarding the principles of democracy, republicanism and federalism following the War of 1812 continued through the final two years of the Madison presidency (1815–16), and into the term of his successor, fellow-Virginian James Monroe. Building on the relative good will and unity apparent in the New England states following the war, and in order to secure support for his plans to rebuild and enhance the nation's defense, Monroe embarked on a tour of the northern states during the first months of his presidency in 1817. In nearly every city he visited he was met with displays of patriotic celebration. A reporter for the "New Haven Herald" (Connecticut) wrote of Monroe's visit there<sup>16</sup>:

It was the general spirit of hilarity which appeared to manifest itself in every countenance, that evinced the pride and satisfaction with which the Americans paid the voluntary tribute of respect to the ruler of their own choice – to the magistrate of their own creation. The demon of party for a time departed, and gave place for a general burst of NATIONAL FEELING.

Monroe's visit included a five-day stay in and around Boston, at which time the Handel and Haydn Society concert mentioned above was given in his

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<sup>14</sup> Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*, p. 350.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Thomas Leiper, 21 January 1809. Quoted in Edward McNall Burns, *James Madison. Philosopher of the Constitution*, New York 1968, p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register* 12 (12 July 1817), p. 314. Quoted in Noble E. Cunningham, *The Presidency of James Monroe*, Lawrence, KS, 1996, p. 36.

honor, on 5 July. Newspapers in Boston reported that the ill will so long demonstrated by members of the two political parties was absent during Monroe's visit, replaced by a palpable sense of unity. The "Boston Herald" on 10 July proclaimed the times an "Era of Good Feelings" and observed<sup>17</sup>,

during the present jubilee many persons have met at festive boards, in pleasant converse, whom party politics had long severed. We recur with pleasure to all the circumstances which attended the demonstrations of good feelings.

It is during this Era of Good Feelings, following the darkness of the War of 1812 and the political rancor between the two political parties, that the Handel and Haydn Society was established and began to develop, and it is those re-emerging sentiments of national unity, representative government, and New-World freedom, that the founders of the Society determined Haydn's "Creation" could so well express.

#### BEGINNING OF THE SOCIETY, AND ITS FOUNDERS

In February of 1815 a group of amateur instrumental and vocal musicians calling themselves the Philoharmonic Society<sup>18</sup> were preparing a concert in honor of George Washington's birthday. A handful of them entered into a discussion regarding the poor quality of choral music in Boston, and how this problem might be rectified. The Constitution of the Handel and Haydn Society was drafted during two subsequent meetings, and it was adopted by its membership on 13 April 1815, just a few months after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent and Jackson's victory in New Orleans. On 5 February 1816 the Handel and Haydn Society was officially incorporated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Society's Constitution and Act of Incorporation, and its functioning in the early years, focused on three fundamental precepts: 1) the improvement of vocal church music, within the context of 2) deference to the music traditions of the Old World (particularly London) which were to be models, and 3) an enlightened religious and societal outlook, including the acceptance of members regardless of social status. Section 1 of the Act of Incorporation directly states that the Society was formed "for the purpose of extending the knowledge and improving the style of performance of Church Music"<sup>19</sup>. This mission was

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Also referred to variously in its own materials as the Philo-harmonic Society, Philharmonic Society, and Phil Harmonic Society.

<sup>19</sup> Act of Incorporation and By-Laws of the Handel and Haydn Society, reprint Boston 1858.

elaborated upon in the original Preamble to the Society's Constitution, including the evocation of the Society's namesakes<sup>20</sup>:

While in our country almost every institution, political, civil, and moral, has advanced with rapid steps; while every other science and art is cultivated with a success flattering to its advocates; the admirers of musick find their beloved science far from exciting the feelings, or exercising the powers, to which it is accustomed in the old world [author's emphasis]. Too long have those to whom heaven has given a voice to perform, and an ear to hear, neglected a science, which has done much towards subduing the ferocious passions of man, and giving innocent pleasure to society; and so absolute has been this neglect, that most of the works of the greatest composers of sacred musick, have never found those, in our land, who have even attempted their performance.

Impressed with these sentiments, the undersigned do hereby agree to form themselves into a society, by the name of the HANDEL AND HAYDN SOCIETY, for the purpose of improving the style of performing sacred musick, and introducing into more general use, the works of HANDEL, HAYDN, and other eminent composers: and we agree to adopt for the government of the Society, and abide by, the following regulations.

The only requirements for membership into the Handel and Haydn Society were a good voice and unanimous approval of the Board of Directors.

These precepts clearly reflect the interests of those wanting to establish a music culture in Boston during this Era of Good Feelings. According to Michael Broyles, author of "Music and Class Structure in Antebellum Boston"<sup>21</sup>, there were a number of attempts at cultivating such a music culture in Boston at this time, with particular interest in music's moral and "enlightened" qualities or potential. Most prominently, Presbyterian and Congregationalist reformers found value in music's ability to create a devotional atmosphere and to enrich the soul, and Boston's upper class believed music could be used to perpetuate the republican vision of American society<sup>22</sup>. Both groups looked to the music and culture of London. As the War of 1812 concluded, such ideas were foremost on the minds of Bostonians, including the founders of the Handel and Haydn Society, its early members, and its audiences. The leading voices at the meetings, and the principle drivers in the establishment and early devel-

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<sup>20</sup> Constitution of the Handel & Haydn Society: Instituted April 1815, Boston 1815, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Broyles, Music and Class Structure in Antebellum Boston, in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44 (1991), pp. 451–493.

<sup>22</sup> pp. 452f.

opment of the Handel and Haydn Society, were Johann Christian Gottlieb Graupner and Thomas Smith Webb.

Johann Christian Gottlieb Graupner (1767–1836) was an active musician in London in the early 1790s. He played oboe in Salomon's orchestra during Haydn's visits to London, and he also played double bass. After arriving in Boston in 1797, Graupner established himself in the city's musical and commercial circles as a publisher, importer, music teacher, and performer. He and his wife Catharine, who was the soprano soloist for the first Handel and Haydn Society concerts, were noted for their support of Boston's amateur musicians, and for organizing musical gatherings and concerts, particularly at their own business establishment, Graupner's Hall. Sometime before 1810 (the exact date is unclear) Graupner began inviting his musician friends to join him to practice Haydn symphonies and other works for their own enjoyment<sup>23</sup>. The group of three or four violins, Graupner on double bass, a flute (probably Thomas Smith Webb), two clarinets, a bassoon, a horn, and tympani, more formally organized themselves into the Philoharmonic Society, and in 1815 began advertising public concerts<sup>24</sup>. In 1819 they became the first symphony orchestra in the U.S. to incorporate. The Philoharmonic Society, with Graupner listed as its leader and double bass player, functioned as the orchestra for Handel and Haydn Society concerts. Several of its musicians, including Graupner, continued to play in Handel and Haydn Society events for many years after the Philoharmonic Society was dissolved in 1826<sup>25</sup>. In addition to his pivotal role as orchestra leader, Graupner's import and publishing company was the main supplier of performance materials for the Handel and Haydn Society during its first two decades.

Boston-born Thomas Smith Webb (1771–1819) served as the Handel and Haydn Society's first president and music director, until 1817. Webb was perhaps the model American music Kenner. He was a successful businessman, having shared ownership of a number of paper mills and paper products shops, and had an admirable career in the military, culminating in his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel Commandant of the Second Regiment of the Rhode Island Militia in 1807<sup>26</sup>. Throughout his life he was exposed to

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<sup>23</sup> John S. Dwight, *The History of Music in Boston*, in: *The Memorial History of Boston*, vol. 4, ed. Justin Winsor, Boston 1881, p. 419.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416.

<sup>25</sup> Newspaper notices of informal meetings of the Philoharmonic Society confirm that the group still met privately on occasion for the next ten years, until Graupner's death in 1836. Cf. Broyles, p. 459.

<sup>26</sup> Herbert T. Leyland, *Thomas Smith Webb: Freemason, Musician, Entrepreneur*, Dayton,

music, either by circumstance or design, and so gained general knowledge of the art and developed skills as a flautist, tenor, and choral leader. As a teenager, Webb is said to have studied general music, flute and fife with William Billings, although no documentary evidence exists to support this claim<sup>27</sup>. He moved to Providence, Rhode Island in 1799 and opened a shop for selling wallpaper, as well as musical instruments and printed music<sup>28</sup>. In July 1804 Webb met James Hewitt, who had decided to spend the summer months in Providence. Hewitt lived in the Webb household in the summers of 1804 and 1805. Webb biographer Herbert Leyland surmises that Webb received music training from Hewitt, either formally or informally: "From the instructions received during the two visits Webb undoubtedly gained much musical knowledge that was to be of value to him as the future conductor of the Handel and Haydn Society concerts"<sup>29</sup>. By the time Webb formed the Handel and Haydn Society in 1815 he had already had a hand in organizing both the Boston Philoharmonic Society with Graupner, and the Psallonian Society of Providence in 1809 "for the purpose of improving in the knowledge and practice of sacred music and inculcating a more correct taste in the choice and performance of it"<sup>30</sup>.

Colonel Webb's most significant mark on American history and an aspect of his life that guided his thought and actions, and no doubt influenced his affinity for the enlightened perspective expressed in Haydn's "Creation", was his activity as a Freemason. Webb was first forwarded as a candidate for Freemasonry in 1790, at the age of nineteen, and achieved the level of Royal Arch Mason in 1796. On 14 September 1797 Webb published his first edition of "The Freemason's Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry" outlining the American Knighthood ceremonies, Masonic directories, and the history of Freemasonry in the U.S. Webb would subsequently publish six revisions of "The Freemason's Monitor" (1802, 1805, 1808, 1812, 1816, 1819) and it continued to be revised and printed after Webb's death. Furthermore, Webb formed new lodges in several states, as far west as Ohio, and unified the American form of Freemasonry known as the York Rite.

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OH, 1965, p. 189.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167f.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204f. The Psallonian Society was founded by Webb, Oliver Shaw, and Moses Noyes, and incorporated in 1816. Like the Handel and Haydn Society, it was created in order to improve local performances and selection practices of sacred music. It continued under the leadership of Shaw until its dissolution in 1833. See Bruce Degen, "Shaw, Oliver" in: *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, second edition, Oxford, 2013, vol. 7, p. 474.

Because of these significant accomplishments, Thomas Smith Webb is recognized as the Founding Father of the American or York Rite of Freemasonry<sup>31</sup>. Webb's own words give some indication of how faith and Freemasonry shaped him, and how he, in turn, desired to shape the Freemason<sup>32</sup>:

A Mason should [...] have his heart open to all kind influences and a desire for usefulness limited only by his power of doing good. [Freemasonry is] a system designed to draw forth the best affections of the human heart and instruct us in our duty to God and man. [...]  
[Freemasonry] must therefore continue to flourish wherever the rights of man are respected, until faith shall be lost in sight, hope end in fruition, and charity, greatest of the three, "shall stand before the host of heaven confest, forever blessing and forever blest."

Sometime after Webb retired from the Handel and Haydn Society, a member wrote this account of his personality which seems to indicate he took to heart his own words: "In him were embodied a soul of feeling and philanthropy; an understanding clear and penetrating; a disposition kind and complicated; a taste exquisitely delicate and refined"<sup>33</sup>.

The Graupner-Webb partnership is a microcosm of the character of the larger body of the Handel and Haydn Society in its earliest years. Graupner was a musician by trade, with ties to London and the Old World, and even to Haydn as a member of Salomon's orchestra. A number of noteworthy musicians with roots in London attached their names to the Handel and Haydn Society as soloists. Organist Dr. George K Jackson (1745–1823) had played sacred concerts with the Graupners, and served as the organist for Handel and Haydn off and on from its founding into the early 1820s. He was born in England and is reported to have studied under Nares at the Chapel Royal. He sang tenor in the 1784 Handel Commemoration concerts, and published a "Treatise on Practical Thoroughbass" in 1785. Jackson emigrated to Norfolk, Virginia in 1796, and gradually moved north until settling in Boston in 1812<sup>34</sup>. English ballad singer Charles Benjamin Incedon

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<sup>31</sup> Webb's life as a Freemason and contributions toward the York Rite are discussed throughout Leyland (ibid.), and the precepts of the York Rite as presented in "The Freemason's Monitor" are summarized in Leyland's Chapter 15 "Illustrations of Masonry" (ibid., pp. 429–451).

<sup>32</sup> From Thomas Smith Webb, *Masonic Addresses*, Webb MSS. (quoted ibid., pp. 242–244.).

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in H. Earle Johnson, *Hallelujah, Amen! The Story of the Handel and Haydn Society*, Boston, Boston 1965, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 22ff. See also Charles H. Kaufman, Jackson, George K(nowil), in: *Grove Music Online*. [www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/14024?q=Jackson%2C+George&search=quick&pos=2&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/14024?q=Jackson%2C+George&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1#firsthit). (30.08.2018).

(1763–1826) served as tenor soloist for the 1818 concerts. Before his visit to North America 1817–18, Inledon had performed for 30 years in London, including Covent Garden. He was one of the soloists for the first London performance of “The Creation” in 1800<sup>35</sup>, and was apparently quite knowledgeable of the Handel English oratorio tradition. One amateur member of the Handel and Haydn Society left an account of a rehearsal of “For unto us a child is born” where Inledon was becoming impatient<sup>36</sup>:

[Inledon] then [...] proceeding to drill the singers, insisted on the unexcited progress of the semi-chorus [sic] portions till the climax was reached with the words, „Wonderful!” „Councillor,” etc., which should burst upon the ear with the square and solid stroke of a vast explosion.

Other European musicians that headlined as soloists in the early years of the Handel and Haydn Society included Mrs. Catharine Graupner, Thomas Phillips, and Charles Edward Horn.

Like Webb, most of the soloists and leaders of the Handel and Haydn Society in its first two decades were middle- and working-class amateur musicians. Captain John Dodd, the first baritone soloist and one of the Society’s trustees, was a merchant. Benjamin Holt, the Society’s second president (1818–19) who brought in Inledon and Phillips, was a school teacher. Amasa Winchester, the Society’s first vice president and third president (1820–26), was both a merchant and a school teacher. The Society’s two most famous early members – Jonas Chickering and Lowell Mason – were themselves middle class amateurs when they began their relationships with Handel and Haydn. Both names appear among the list of past and present members in the 1828 edition of the „Act of Incorporation and Bylaws of the Handel and Haydn Society”. The twenty-year-old Chickering joined the Society in 1818 shortly after arriving in Boston as an apprentice to piano maker John Osborn<sup>37</sup>. He served as president of the Society 1845–49. Mason’s first experience with the Society was in 1821. The Boston-born Mason was working as a banker, choral director, and music arranger in Savannah, Georgia, when he sent Dr. George K. Jackson a selection of works by eminent composers that he had adapted for choral use. Jackson lauded the adaptations and arranged for the works to be published jointly by Mason and the Handel and Haydn Society, bearing the title „The Boston Handel and Haydn Collection of Church Music, harmonized for 3 and 4 voices, with figured bass, for Organ and Pianoforte”. Two subsequent

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<sup>35</sup> Temperley, Haydn. *The Creation*, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *Hallelujah, Amen!*, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

volumes appeared in 1823 and 1824. Although the 1828 roster of members lists Mason as joining in 1821, he remained at his bank post in Savannah until 1827, when Amasa Winchester and other Society officers enticed Mason to return to his home town and assume duties as the president of the Handel and Haydn Society by offering him a \$ 2,000 stipend over two years and securing for him a job as a teller at the American Bank. Mason held the post until 1831. He would remain in Boston, and there establish his American Academy of Music in 1833<sup>38</sup>.

While these superstars of the Handel and Haydn Society are certainly noteworthy, it was the non-exceptional membership that most directly testified to the New World, republican outlook of the Handel and Haydn Society, during this “Era of Good Feelings”. Members were drawn from the various Boston churches and represented a wide array of middle- and working-class occupations. The original members included merchants, attorneys, bankers, tailors, teachers, schoolmasters, apothecaries, blacksmiths, bricklayers, shipwrights, soapboilers, wharf workers, and several in the building trades<sup>39</sup>.

An amusing, revealing anecdote regarding the rugged middle-class nature of the Society relates a custom of Boston’s church choirs also practiced at Handel and Haydn Society rehearsals. During breaks and at other times it was deemed necessary during the four-hour rehearsals, thirsty singers were at liberty to

retire down the little narrow and steep stairs on either side of the organ, to refresh the inner man with wine and spirits [provided by the Society]. The process was called “tuning”, and the members, while engaged in the laborious effort to master Handel’s [and Haydn’s] difficult choruses, found it necessary to “tune” quite often during a rehearsal.

On one occasion Mr. Stockwell, the Society’s first organist, was missing from his post when the singers were in their places ready to continue. Samuel Richardson, a powerfully built member of the bass section, went looking for Stockwell, and found him “tuning” behind the organ. Richardson soon returned, “holding the delinquent organist by the collar of his coat, his legs dangling helplessly in the air, and placed him at the organ”<sup>40</sup>. Despite the compass of occupations and Christian creeds of the participants, which must also have meant a broad spectrum of political convic-

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 49f.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> Related by Nathan Duren Gould (quoted *ibid.*, pp. 38f.).

tion, the desire to improve their knowledge of and skill in the performance of church music bound them together.

## WHY “THE CREATION”?

So why did Haydn’s “Creation” become the defining piece (along with “Messiah”) of the Handel and Haydn Society in those earliest years? Or, to reword the question: How was Haydn’s “Creation” capable of, and successful at, fulfilling the three fundamental precepts of the Society’s Constitution and goals? Unfortunately, none of the founders of the Society have left any documentation regarding the reasons for their choice of “The Creation”, so deductions must be made based on the historical and cultural contexts outlined above, and by looking more closely at the repertoire choices of early programs, keeping in mind that at the time “oratorio” did not necessarily denote the performance of a single piece, but more often referred to a concert containing several sacred works.

### 1. Improvement of vocal church (sacred) music

Because of its focus on the Biblical Creation story, and in particular its preponderance of choruses praising the Creator-God, Haydn’s “Creation” was an appropriate tool for improving vocal church music. Considering the program for the first concert of December 1815, the choices made by the Society’s officers constitute a drama of praise and worship of a Triune God. Part I of “The Creation” in its entirety is filled with arias and choruses in praise of God the Creator; the choices made in Part II, including “I know that my Redeemer liveth”, “He shall feed his flock”, “Lift up your heads” from “Messiah”, and “Let the bright Seraphim” from “Samson”, continue the praise theme, but refocused on God the Son. Part III – “The Lord is a man of war” and “He gave them hailstones for rain” from “Israel in Egypt”, “’Tis Liberty, dear Liberty” from “Judas Maccabaeus”, a chorus “When winds breathe soft along the silent deep”, depicts God’s Spirit working through and for humanity to establish His earthly Kingdom, characterized by the defeat of tyranny and the establishment of Liberty, which will be eternal, as so vivaciously praised in the concluding “Hallelujah” chorus.

Griesinger famously described Haydn’s own religious experience in composing “The Creation”: “I was never so devout” Haydn told Griesinger, “as during the time that I was working on ‘The Creation’. Every day I fell to my knees and prayed to God to grant me the strength for a happy completion of this work”<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup>Quoted in Mark Berry, Haydn’s “Creation” and Enlightenment Theology, in: *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2008), pp. 25–44, here p. 28.

And Haydn himself alluded to the sacred nature of “The Creation” in a letter to Charles Ockl of 24 July 1801<sup>42</sup>:

The story of the creation has always been regarded as most sublime, and as one which inspires the utmost awe in mankind. To accompany this great occurrence with suitable music could certainly produce no other effect than to heighten these sacred emotions in the heart of the listener, and to put him on a frame of mind where he is most susceptible to the kindness and omnipotence of the Creator.

Members of the Society and audiences commented on the concerts being religious experiences as well as entertainment. One subscriber wrote: “We attend its performances, not only to be pleased, but to be improved. While the critic in music admires the display of skill, and the mere lover of fine sounds enjoys an exquisite repast, the deaf spirit may be awed with admiration, melted into tenderness, and kindled to praise”<sup>43</sup>.

## 2. Deference to and modeling of Old World music tradition

Compared to the rural south and west, New England’s port cities in the U.S. continued to maintain a close relationship to Europe through immigration and commerce. In Boston, ties to London were particularly strong. Cosmopolitan Boston admired the cultural life of London, and sought to import parts of it, including its music. (Recall, for example, Graupner’s Philoharmonic Society, founded just prior to the Handel and Haydn Society.) Of course, for those interested in sacred vocal music, the oratorio genre stood out as the highest form of expression appropriate for the audiences and singers. The oratorios of Handel attached Bostonians to that important London tradition, and Haydn’s “Creation” represented modern music’s best clearly sacred example of the living tradition. Representing the old and the new – Handel and Haydn – was important enough to the Society’s founders that they included both composers in the name of the organization, and in its founding documents. The distinction between the old and the new was not lost on the audience. The following comparison of Handel’s and Haydn’s music appeared in Boston’s “Columbian Sentinel” newspaper 31 January 1816, after the first concert and its repeat performance<sup>44</sup>:

Haydn is excessive in his modulations and in inversions and involutions of his harmony; indeed, his combinations are often wonderful and sometimes

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<sup>42</sup> Landon V, p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Johnson, *Hallelujah, Amen!*, p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 13.

difficult to be resolved by any established order of harmony. Handel is more simple in his melodies, direct in his harmonies, and therefore grand and majestic in his choruses. Haydn will therefore continue to be the favorite of professors while Handel will forever satisfy and delight the Amateur.

### 3. Enlightened, republican religious and social outlook

Much has been written about the Enlightenment outlook of “The Creation”. Most recently, Nicholas Temperley’s study of the work in the “Cambridge Music Handbook” series handles this topic, and Mark Berry’s 2008 “Austrian History Yearbook” article “Haydn’s ‘Creation’ and Enlightenment Theology” reviews the text and music in the context of 18th century “Enlightened” Protestant and Catholic theology. Unfortunately Thomas Smith Webb, who as president was charged with making repertoire decisions, left nothing in writing regarding his choices. However, given that Freemasonry was such a central part of Webb’s moral, ethical, and religious formation, there can be little doubt that “The Creation” was specifically chosen by Webb because of its Enlightened perspective. The optimistic picture painted by “The Creation” of the Grand Architect’s work, before the fall, joyously praised time and again by the created, who in turn are themselves called upon to participate in the creative process, must have resonated with Webb’s striving to achieve “best affections of the human heart,” and instructive in „our duty to God and man.” In Temperley’s speculative words, “It is not impossible that the author of the libretto was a Freemason”<sup>45</sup>. Berry adds, “Humanism [in ‘The Creation’] involves not only paying attention to man but also praising God, Creator of this greatest wonder of all. The one will naturally lead us to the other”<sup>46</sup>.

The spectrum of religious affiliations of the Society’s first members, and in the Boston audience, must also have influenced Webb’s choice of performing oratorios, and specifically “The Creation”. Praise and worship of the Creator here is not drawn from the doctrine of any one Christian faith, but instead, again quoting Temperley, “directly based on the beauty and reason of nature”<sup>47</sup>. Griesinger said that the faith Haydn expressed in “The Creation”: “left every man to his own conviction and recognized all as brothers.” “Such principles of religious tolerance,” says Berry of Griesinger’s assessment, “grounded not upon indifference but upon positive belief, typify

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<sup>45</sup> Temperley, Haydn. *The Creation*, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> Berry, Haydn’s “Creation” and Enlightenment Theology, p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Temperley, Haydn. *The Creation*, p. 15.

the spectrum of Enlightened religious thought<sup>48</sup>. In this regard, perhaps Webb felt that the composer of “The Creation” was a kindred spirit.

It is Haydn’s particularly brilliant focus on light and order that has inspired the most critical ink. Again quoting Berry: “Light was a symbol that few in Haydn’s first audiences would have failed to recognize at some level; it was not simply or primarily a representation of the sublime, but was above all the quintessential symbol of Enlightenment<sup>49</sup> and “the word ‘order’ is stressed throughout and is a constant preoccupation of the Enlightenment – theologically, socially, and politically, these spheres in any case being inextricably interlinked.” The same metaphoric meanings of light and order have been recognized by Webb, and by a significant portion of the early Handel and Haydn Society audience.

Such an Enlightened, optimistic expression of order took on a new and profound political significance in the “Era of Good Feelings” in Boston and the rest of New England following the War of 1812. The War’s conclusion, and the resulting relative cooperation between heretofore widely separated political factions, revived a belief that the United States could become the republican New World that it had promised from its founding – God’s Kingdom on Earth, Eden before the fall, liberated, free from tyranny. Its citizens could be, should be, the co-creators of this society. Such an idea would certainly have been consistent with Webb’s political temperament, informed by the Freemasonic ideals he elaborated upon in his speeches, and his writings in “The Freemason’s Monitor”. It seems also to have been part of the thought process behind the programming of the Handel and Haydn Society’s first concert: in Part 3 of the program, the God of War in “Israel in Egypt” is evoked, defeating the tyrannical Egyptian Pharaoh, replacing him with a pastoral expression of “Liberty, dear Liberty”, which recalls for the audience the idyllic character of “The Creation” which they had heard in Part 1. This same dramatic progress from the battling and defeating of tyranny to a peaceful freedom patterned on the Heavenly realm also appears in Part 1 of the concert given for President Monroe in 1817 (Figure 1). Part 2 focused on expressing and praising that peace and liberty, as always, ending with “Hallelujah”. “The Creation”’s contributions to the vision of the ideal world here are “In splendour bright”, “The heavens are telling”, which complete Part 1, and in Part 2 “Achieved is the glorious work”, and “The marvelous work.” “Rolling in foaming billows”, the first “Creation” movement on this concert, was always included in the early Handel and Haydn performances. From the boisterous seas so familiar to

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<sup>48</sup> Berry, Haydn’s “Creation” and Enlightenment Theology, p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

the Boston merchants and tradesmen, to the mountains, vales, rivers and streams to the west, could there have been a better description of this New World, which had recently fought a second war to maintain its liberty, and which offered so much promise for its citizens, regardless of social, occupational, or religious differences? As Handel and Haydn historian H. Earle Johnson speculates<sup>50</sup>:

Before the august presence of the nation's chief executive "Come, Ever-Smiling Liberty" from "Judas Maccabaeus" and "'Tis Liberty, Dear Liberty" were partnered with Haydn's new created world whose precise location was well known to every citizen of Boston.

## CONCLUSION

In his article "'The Creation' and Enlightenment theology" Mark Berry stated, "[social] order is not merely providential but is also conducive to virtue. In this respect, 'The Creation' is very much a piece of the time and place in which its libretto was written"<sup>51</sup>. The work's enlightened reflection on and praise of the Creator-Architect, its optimistic view of Creation, and its inspired musical expressiveness, well suited the goals of the first oratorio society of the New World, and helped establish the Handel and Haydn Society as a permanent fixture in Boston. In the Era of Good Feelings following the harsh, uncertain years of blockade, war, and political distrust, perhaps no work was better suited to this time and place.

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<sup>50</sup> Johnson, *Hallelujah, Amen!*, p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Berry, Haydn's "Creation" and Enlightenment Theology, p. 40.