

Ambitious work will be worth the effort

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IT'S PASSIONATE, it's powerful and it's very challenging. But this hasn't put Nantwich Choral Society off performing Haydn's *The Seasons* at the town's Civic Hall tomorrow.

In fact, musical director John Naylor couldn't be more excited about presenting the colossal work in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the composer's death.

"I'm really looking forward to it; in fact I'm quite fired up," he admits. "We performed Rutter's *Psalmfest* earlier in the year and that was challenging but the choir did very well and got a great response. This is totally different," he adds. "It's one of the largest works we've ever done and it's certainly one of the largest we've ever done in Nantwich, but it's one we've all enjoyed learning together."

Expressing spring, summer, autumn and winter, the work is fundamentally a piece about the seasons and their influence on man. But underneath, as John points out, it's much more complex.

He says: "Of course it depicts the seasons, but philosophically it's a work that shows the debate between the age of reason and people's relationship with God. People were beginning to doubt and to question religion and Haydn captures this in the music. But you have to remember that this was written at the time Napoleon was rampaging around Europe, so the whole European political situation was in great turmoil."

Completed in 1801, *The Seasons* took Haydn two years to finish and is classed as one of the most difficult oratorios to perform. Its score requires full orchestra and three soloists, but the Choral Society has pulled out all the stops.

"It's not performed very often because it is such a big work, but it follows on from the huge success he had with *The Creation*," says John, who is conducting the work in a new English translation by Michael Pilkington. "We will be singing with the newly-formed Northern Concordia Orchestra, which includes a full set of strings, woodwind and brass, and we have three soloists joining us. Soprano Jane Johnson is a local singer who many may have seen before; tenor Matthew Minter is a member of the BBC Daily Singers and baritone Marcus Farnsworth is an up and coming rising star who sang with us a couple of years ago."

And John firmly believes that the hard work and dedication of everyone involved will pay off. He concludes: "*The Seasons* is full of contrast, rousing colours and lovely little arias and tunes. It's also very funny in places. People might think it's going to be heavy going but it's not. It's interesting, comic and wonderful to listen to. In fact it's Haydn at his most mature, and we can wait to perform it."

The Nantwich Choral Society can be seen at Nantwich Civic Hall tomorrow at 7.30pm. Tickets priced £12, £10 concessions, on the door.