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March to feature 'Musical Madness'

By **CARLTON WILKINSON • CORRESPONDENT •**
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THE GARDEN STATE PHILHARMONIC presents its annual three-week mini-season of events in the month of March, culminating in a performance of Joseph Haydn's oratorio "The Creation" in honor of the 200th anniversary of the composer's death in 1809.

The "March Musical Madness" festival leads off with a Young People's Concert, 3 p.m. Saturday, March 6 at Toms River High School North, 1245 Old Freehold Road, Toms River. The concert is dubbed "The Composer's Toolbox" and lays out some of the tools composers use to create beautiful orchestral music, including insights into notation and the instruments of the orchestra. The group will host an "instrumental petting zoo" beginning at 1:30 p.m. prior to the performance giving attendees a hands-on encounter with the orchestral instruments.

The orchestra performs a program of four great works from the repertoire 8 p.m. Saturday, March 13 at the Strand Theater, 400 Clifton Ave., Lakewood. Led by Anthony LaGruth, the Philharmonic will play a program titled "Symphonic Spring," featuring Rossini's overture to "L'Italiana in Algeri," Schubert's Symphony No. 5, American composer Charles Ives' haunting "The Unanswered Question," and the New Jersey premiere of a playful work by late German-American Gene Gutche titled "Bongo Divertimento."

Maestro LaGruth will lead a talk about the program, "Musically Speaking," at 7:15 p.m. prior to the concert.

The last concert of the "March Musical Madness" series features the Haydn oratorio in a performance 7 p.m. Saturday, March 20 at the Christ Episcopal Church, 415 Washington St., Toms River. The GSP Chorus and the Shrewsbury Chorale will join forces for "The Creation," along with soloists Elizabeth Andrews Roberts, soprano and Christopher Dickerson, bass.

An alumnus of the Young Artists program of the Washington National Opera, and a protege of Placido Domingo, Roberts is making her debut with

the GSP. Roberts recently appeared in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at New York's Avery Fischer Hall and Virginia Opera's production of La Boheme.

Returning to sing with the GSP, Dickerson was most recently featured as soloist in Handel's "Messiah," and has sung with the Lyric Opera of Chicago Center for American Artists and many other U.S. opera companies.

Haydn was a self-made composer who aspired to and achieved a court position and later joined the ranks of a growing number of successful independent composers. His career followed an enviable trajectory, leading to international acclaim in the decade before his death. Along with many other of his later works, the 1798 oratorio "The Creation" was an immediate success, garnering much praise and many performances during the composers' lifetime. It has been consistently rediscovered by each subsequent generation.

Tickets for the Young People's Concert are free and range from \$10 to \$35 for the other events. For tickets and more information to the "March Musical Madness" performances call the orchestra's office at 732-255-0460 or visit the group's Web site at www.gardenstatephilharmonic.org.

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