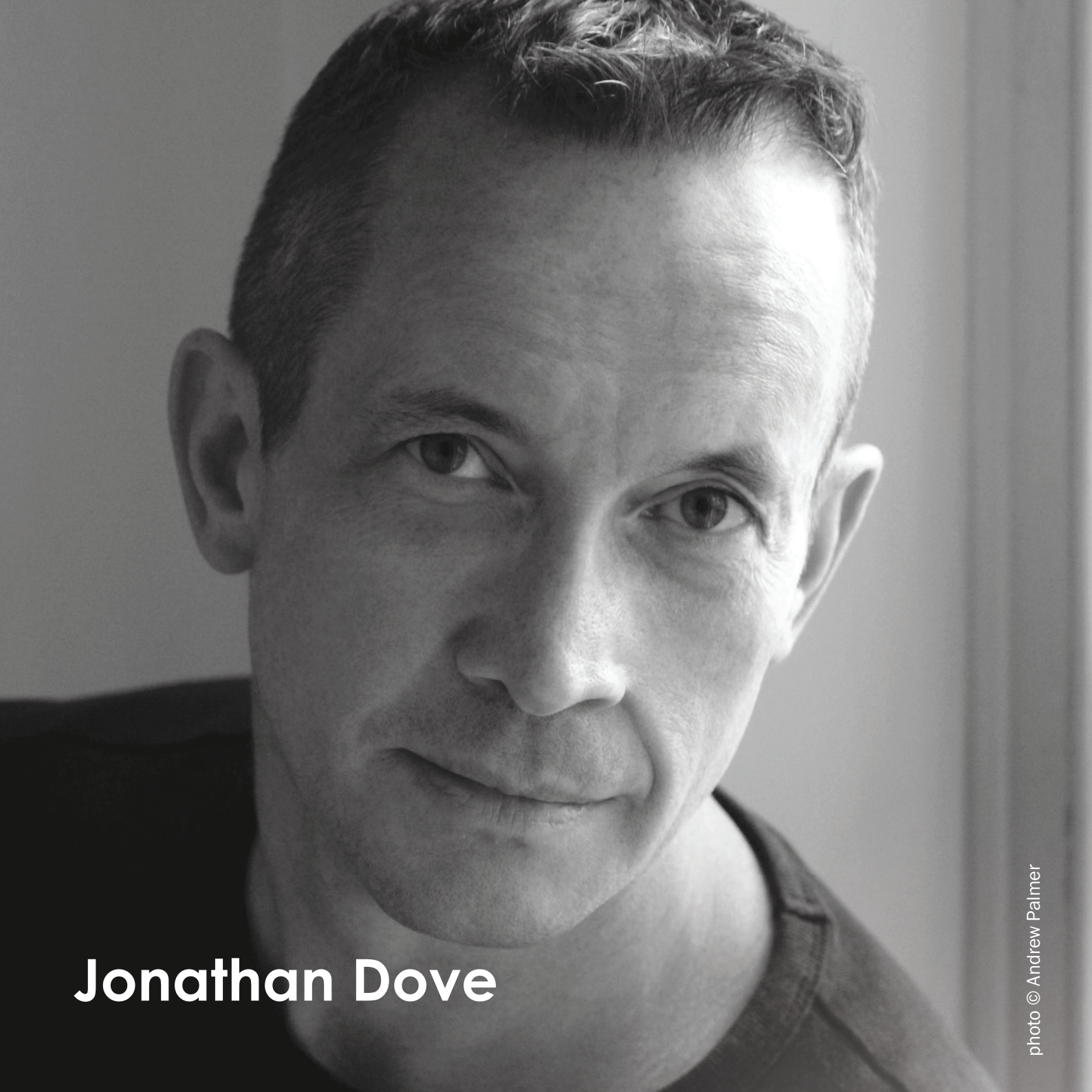




A Brief History
of Creation
Gaia Theory

BBC Symphony Orchestra • Josep Pons
Hallé • Hallé Children's Choir
Sir Mark Elder



Jonathan Dove

A Brief History of Creation

1	Stars	4'31
2	Earth	2'54
3	Rain	3'04
4	Ocean	5'04
5	Shark	3'06
6	Out of the Ocean	2'29
7	Trees	2'44
8	Dinosaurs	5'46
9	Birds	1'03
10	Whales Return to the Sea	5'44
11	Elephants	3'09
12	Monkeys	2'42
13	Man	5'09

Hallé • Sir Mark Elder *conductor*

Hallé Children's Choir • Shirley Court *choir director*

LIVE RECORDING

Gaia Theory

14	I	8'33
15	II	7'44
16	III	5'30

BBC Symphony Orchestra • Josep Pons *conductor*

LIVE RECORDING

Total timing 69'31

Introduction by Jonathan Dove

Both pieces on this album were inspired by scientific ideas about the world we live in.

A Brief History of Creation was sparked off by a James Turrell art installation that gave me the feeling of looking through space to the first stars: it started children's voices singing in my mind's ear, surrounded by twinkling percussion. I found myself wondering about the beginning of the universe, and what the story of creation might sound like as a sequence of songs for children. I thought it would be fun to sing about the birth of the Earth and the beginning of life, accompanied by a symphony orchestra, conjuring vivid images that would be as true as possible to current scientific narratives. It occurred to me that this would be perfect for the extraordinary Hallé Children's Choir, who had asked for a substantial new piece. The inspiring Shirley Court and her team skilfully guided the choir through the enormous challenges of learning a long piece of

music with a complex text, and their astonishing achievement is captured in this live recording of the world premiere.

Gaia Theory is an attempt to evoke in music an idea about the world that is still quite new.

In books and articles published from the 1970s onwards, James Lovelock has developed the idea that the Earth behaves as a self-regulating organism, which always maintains a balance favourable for life. This is a beautiful idea; and Lovelock's image of everything dancing together to achieve such balance is an invitation to music. *Gaia Theory* celebrates the global dance that makes life possible. It was commissioned by the BBC for the 2014 Proms: Josep Pons and the BBC Symphony Orchestra gave the world premiere at the Royal Albert Hall and rose to the occasion with enthusiasm and brilliance. I am grateful to the BBC for releasing its recording for this album.

Notes by Kate Molleson

Jonathan Dove tells big stories. He writes tunes that raise the pulse and get under the skin. He says he composes the music he would like to hear himself – nothing obfuscated, nothing contrived. The directness is fun and disarming, whatever the forces, whoever the intended listeners. Like the simple potency of the oldest fairytales, Dove’s music deals in matters that are serious and fantastical with an unflinching clarity that streamlines the message and hits hard.

Few composers working today have made opera so unfussily their own. Grand epics, sagas and fairytales populate his works, but he also has a knack for framing the drama of the everyday. Take his first stage work, *Flight* (1998), which told the mundane comings and goings of an airport departure lounge. An utterly banal scenario, you might think, yet the piece is gripping and hilarious, a tremendously compassionate portrait of human interaction and reaction.

Key to all this is how his music respects both audiences and performers. Dove can connect with amateur singers because he doesn’t patronise them – in fact, he recognises they bring a special vibrancy to the stage. He can connect with children because he doesn’t write down for them, and because he never lets the energy drop. In his opera *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (2007), he had the sense to do what Walt Disney didn’t: to leave in the darkest, most brutal aspects of the tale, to recognise that kids can handle it. “Children love stories,” he says. “Most enjoy singing, too: you could say that opera is a natural medium for them.” *The Hackney Chronicles* (2001) gave nine-year-olds the responsibility of not only singing, but also of running an entire opera company. Needless to say, they rose to the challenge.

The magical, the larger-than-life, the matter-of-fact. There’s a fine balance at play here. Dove writes music to fit the forces available – in the 1980s he made

a series of chamber opera arrangements of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Verdi's *Falstaff*, Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, even Wagner's *Ring* for 18 musicians. It's the kind of pragmatism that endears him to commissioners, but the value of economy is also an artistic ethos. In Dove's dramas, nothing clutters the point.

Maybe it's because he knows theatre from the inside out. He grew up in Blackheath, London, where he learned piano, organ, violin and viola and went to see every production going at the nearby Greenwich Theatre. He was obsessed by the stage. While most kids were building diggers or robots out of Meccano, he was building model theatres. He went on to read music at Cambridge and study composition with Robin Holloway, then became music adviser to the Almeida. Even his non-theatre works are dramatic: *The Magic Flute Dances* (2000) is a flute concerto that imagines the fortunes of the enchanted pipe after the opera has ended. *Stargazer* (2001) is a trombone concerto that Dove describes as

nothing less than an opera for the solo instrument.

There is also a social conscience, a conviction that composers should not operate at a remove from real life and politics. The refugee character in *Flight* is depicted with compassion and dignity, a countertenor voice full of pathos. Yet never does the moral message become earnest. *The Walk From the Garden* (2012) is an arresting meditation on ecological apocalypse. "How do you make art that relates to a pressing contemporary topic like that," Dove pondered aloud, "that isn't going to be a sermon or a lecture? It will be up to the audience to find meaning or significance in what you offer them." *In Damascus* (2016), a work for tenor and string quartet, faces up to personal responses to the Syrian war. The beauty of the piece is its restraint. It doesn't sensationalise, doesn't get maudlin, doesn't moralise or politicise. The words are direct and the music stays true to that.

The works on this album are a summation of many of these traits. ***Gaia Theory*** (2014) was inspired by a trip to the Arctic – a project called Cape Farewell, organised to allow artists to witness climate change first-hand. Dove says the experience woke him up to the speed and scale of changes taking place: on return, he wondered how it might be possible “to write about this without finger-wagging”. He turned to the work of James Lovelock, who has been writing for decades about ecology with the core assertion – the Gaia Theory – that the earth behaves as a self-regulating organism and maintains surface conditions that are favourable for life. What could be more affirming? The sun’s heat moderated by cloud cover, the atmosphere, the albedo of the polar ice-sheets and so on – all affected by the behaviour of microscopic organisms as well as by animals, the respiration and rock weathering activities of lichens, plants and trees and innumerable other processes, including human activity. Lovelock describes us all being locked

in a sort of dance in which everything changes together.

And so Dove found himself wondering about that dance, and starting to imagine what it might sound like. “How would the heat of the sun change the character of the dance? As one process adapts and responds to another, what would happen if some elements of the dance started to spin out of control?” The answer is the insuppressibly vital and optimistic music you hear in *Gaia Theory*. This is no finger wagging, no grim harbinger of doom. It’s a blithe celebration of the resilience of life.

A Brief History of Creation (2016)

romps through 14 billion years of history, from cell division (the choir reduced to one single, tiny voice) to dinosaurs to monkeys and finally to man. This time, Dove found his inspiration in a gallery in Bremen, where an exhibition of works by the American artist James Turrell prompted some fairly elemental questions: how did it all begin? And what happened next? “Looking down from the top floor through great circles of colour-

changing light to the distant sparkling points in a dark ellipse on the ground floor,” Dove reflected, “I felt that I was looking back in time to the origins of the universe – and I started to hear children’s voices in my mind’s ear, accompanied by twinkling metal percussion.”

With a punchy text by Alasdair Middleton, this account of our collective origins is no creation myth. “I thought we should tell the modern version of our story,” Dove says, “and be as scientifically accurate as possible.” From the irrepressible explosion of the very first notes, the result is dazzling, exhilarating, full of rousing harmonies and energetic hooks. It is also, Dove admits, “a bit arbitrary, with enormous gaps in the story: we decided just to include some bits we thought it would be fun to sing about”. If proof is needed that it is indeed fun to sing, listen to the performance given by the Hallé Children’s Choir. This kind of gusto cannot be faked.

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JONATHAN DOVE ON NMC

Variations for Judith NMC DL3009

featuring Jonathan Dove’s *Ist Bach bei mir*
Melvyn Tan *piano*

A Brief History of Creation

(spoken)

What did we come from?

How did it begin?

Perhaps it began with...

1. Stars

Light Star

Nebula

Eta Carinae

Spiral Nebula

Quasar

Blazar

Hypernova

Supernova

2. Earth

The Earth became

A glittering globe of flickering flame

A boiling sea of magma broke

Upon on a fiery shore

A flaming fruit suspended –

Solid fire its core.

3. Rain

Rain and Rain;

Rain put out the fire.

Rain and Rain;

Dampened the flame

Rain and Rain;

For the next few centuries

Rain and Rain;

More of the same.

It rained upon the fiery sea.

Rain and rain;

It rained upon the fiery shore.

Rain and rain;

It rained a bit longer

Rain and rain;

Then rained some more.

Rain and rain

It rained upon the molten earth

Rain and rain;

It rained upon that angry red

Rain and rain;

Till the molten earth and the angry red

From rain and rain

Were cold and dead.

Cold grey rain from a sky of lead.

Rain and rain

The solid flame

In rain was drowned.

And the molten earth

Became solid ground.

Solid centuries of rain

For the next few years

It rained

Again

4. Ocean

And look, there is an ocean

And look, there is a sun

And look, within the ocean

Something has begun.

Just look, there is an ocean

A vast and sunlit sea

And look, it is an ocean –

Of possibility

And look, within the ocean

Shimmering, sunlit;

A single cell dividing.

A single cell is split.

A single cell dividing.

A single cell is split.

A single cell mutating

What will become of it?

*A million little changes,
Over a million years,
An ocean of potential,
And in it something stirs.*

*Bacteria and algae form
In the warm and nursing seas
Form and change and grow and range
Through the possibilities*

*And look, there is an ocean
And look, life has begun
And look, within the ocean
Something sees the sun.*

5. Shark

*I was here before you
Waiting in the dark
I was here before you
I am shark.*

*I was here before you
These eyes have seen it all.
I bask here in the ocean
And wait for you to fall.*

*I survived the comet's crash
Two mass extinctions too
I survived the dinosaurs
I'll survive you.*

*I was here before you
I was finished first.
It's for your flesh I hunger.
It's for your blood I thirst.*

*I was here before you
Waiting in the dark
And I'll be here long after you
I am shark.*

6. Out of the Ocean

*The certain safety of the Ocean's floor
We leave.
And up the tangled shingle of this alien shore
We heave.
We pant and stutter, splutter, gasp and gape to draw
In virgin oxygen.
We breathe.*

(spoken)

*First scuttling scorpions, tetrapods totter
Crabs scramble, reptiles, beetles creep and crawl
And slow uncurl the ferns*

7. Trees

*Then Green,
Lush and violent, vivid, vibrant green,
Where, drunk on golden nectar, fat gold bees
Chase green and gilded dragonflies between
The slow, uncurling ferns,
Green,
Beneath green trees.*

8. Dinosaurs

*We're dinosaurs
And we are dead.
We ruled the earth
With tooth and claw
With snarl and bellow
Growl and roar
But we don't rule it anymore
We're dinosaurs
And we are dead.*

*We're dinosaurs
And we are dead
We on one another fed.
Not much went on
In our head
A comet killed us
So it's said*

*We're dinosaurs
And we are dead.*

*We're dinosaurs
And we are dead
Tail and scale
And fang and claw
Snarl and bellow
Growl and roar
For a hundred and fifty million years
Or more
We ruled the earth
For what that's worth.*

*We're dinosaurs
And we are dead
And our song ought
Give pause for thought
Your fates and ours –
They might be linked;
We're dinosaurs
And we're extinct.*

9. Birds

*Dinosaurs began to die,
So we sought solace in the sky.
Scales are feathers; limbs are wings;
The throat that screamed and roared
Now sings.*

10. Whales Return to the Sea

*Now the ungulates emerging –
They do not slither or creep
But run, lollop gallop canter and leap
On hooves of horn;
Rapturous ruminants!
And the whales return to the sea.*

*The Perissodactyla!
Who go on uneven toes.
Firstly the horse
The young earth thrilling under the thunder of hooves;*

*The exaltation of speed.
Then the tapir
With a flexible snout, who bares his teeth in delight.
The rhinoceri;
Indian, Javan, Sumatran,
The Black and the White,
Clad in armour atrocious, yet they feed on the herb.
And the whales return to the sea.*

*And now the Artiodactyla
Who stand upon even toes.
The Goat and the Antelope,
Skipping and skittish and shy
Wide-eyed by the water,
Funambulist in the boughs.
Hippopotami.
Web-footed horse of the river,
Born in the water,
Emerging at sunset to graze.
And the whales return to the sea.*

*Tubulidentata!
Aardvarks feeding on ants by the light of the moon
Sirenia!
Dugongs and manatees at play in deep waters
Chrysochloridae!
Golden moles – alone of their kind.
Chiroptera
Bats – whose compass is music.
And the whales return to the sea.*

11. Elephants

*Paleomastodon,
Thundering, blundering, down through time
Ancestors of the elephant line.*

*Soon come
Anancus, Stegadon, Mastodon, Mammoth.*

*But first the
Primelephas
The new elephant*

*The true elephant
Whose form and features help to define
Eminent pachyderm,
Two tusks of ivory,
Sensitive Herbivore.*

*Primelephas
The new elephant
The true elephant
In his prime*

12. Monkeys

*Racketing around the trees
Chattering monkeys,
Their eyes
Are wise.*

13. Man

*(spoken)
Down from the trees, soon the stooping primate
stands, erect.*

*Walking, leaving the prints of our feet in the sand,
Walking, facing the rising sun,
Walking, we follow the call of the land,
Walking, our first journey has begun,
Walking, placing one foot in front of another,
Walking,
Father,
Mother.*

Text by Alasdair Middleton
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Jonathan Dove's music has filled opera houses with delighted audiences of all ages on five continents. Few, if any, contemporary composers have so successfully or consistently explored the potential of opera to communicate, to create wonder and to enrich people's lives.

Born in 1959 to architect parents, Dove's early musical experience came from playing the piano, organ and viola. Later he studied composition with Robin Holloway at Cambridge and, after graduation, worked as a freelance accompanist, répétiteur, animateur and arranger. His early professional experience gave him a deep understanding of singers and the complex mechanics of the opera house. Opera and the voice have been the central priorities in Dove's output throughout his subsequent career.

Starting with his breakthrough opera *Flight*, commissioned by Glyndebourne in 1998, Dove has gone on to write almost thirty operatic works. *Flight*, a rare

example of a successful modern comic opera, has been produced and broadcast many times, in Europe, the USA and Australia.

Throughout his career Dove has made a serious commitment to community development through innovative musical projects. 2015 brought the world premiere of *The Monster in the Maze*, a new community opera commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, Berliner Philharmoniker and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, performed under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle in three separate translations and productions. *The Monster in the Maze* has since been performed around the world, translated further into Taiwanese/Chinese, Portuguese, Swedish and Catalan, and received a BASCA British Composer Award in 2016.

Information about the artists on this disc can be found on NMC's website:

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STEVE PORTNOI *Recording Engineer & Producer*

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CHRISTOPHER ROUSE *Recording Engineer*

ANN MCKAY *Recording Producer*

STEVE PORTNOI *Mastering*

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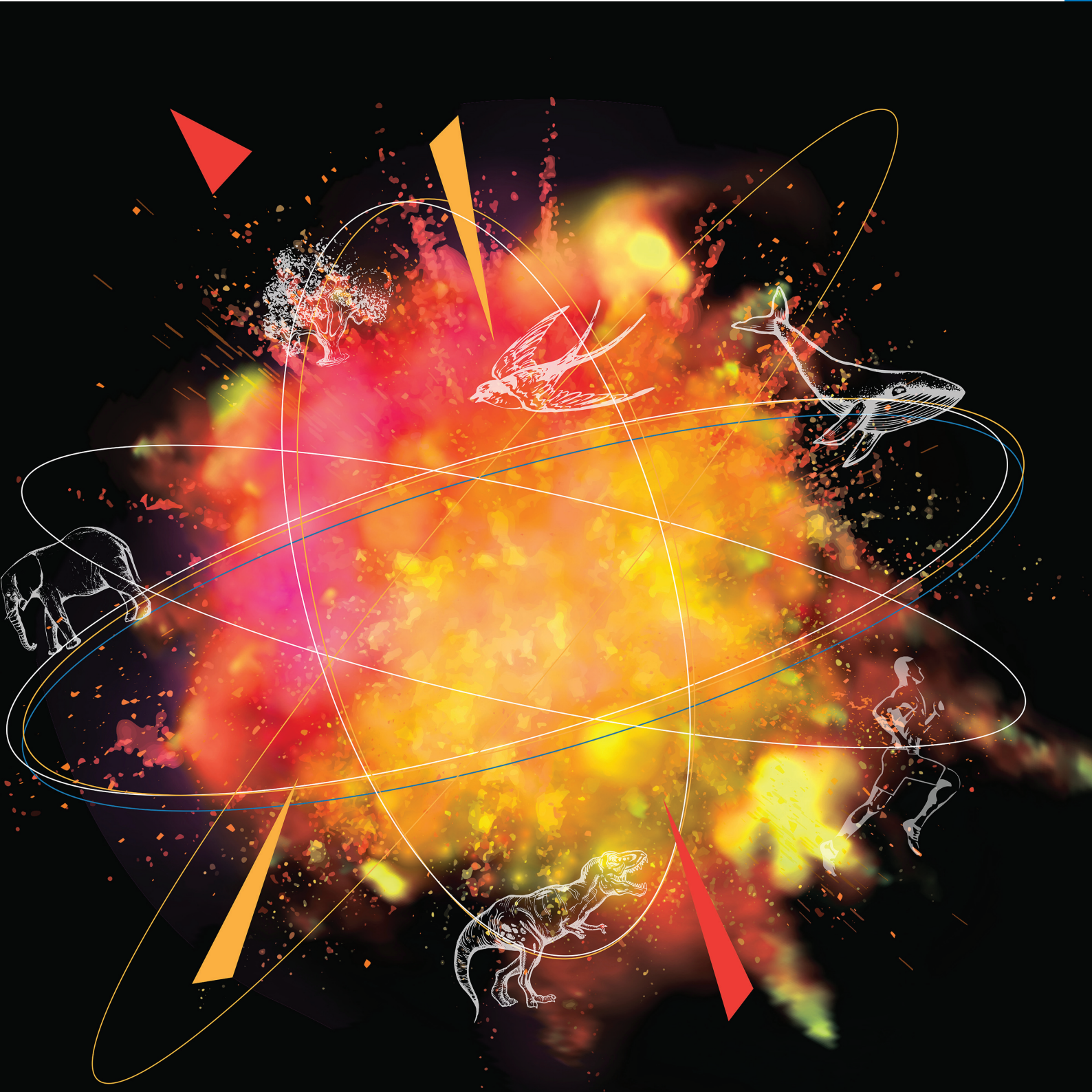
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Jonathan Dove A Brief History of Creation

1-13	A Brief History of Creation Hallé Children's Choir • Hallé • Sir Mark Elder <i>conductor</i> LIVE RECORDING	47'25
14-16	Gaia Theory BBC Symphony Orchestra • Josep Pons <i>conductor</i> LIVE RECORDING	21'47
	Total timing	69'31

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