

# Why I Quit Wrestling Alligators

by Eastman Curtis



I was born into the attraction business. My father bought a small tourist attraction in Lake Wales, Florida, near Weohyakapka. Lake Wales is the only town in Florida with a hill. The attraction was named "The Great Masterpiece" at my grandmother's last request — bless her heart. But we soon had to change the name to "Masterpiece Gardens" because people thought they were paying a dollar-fifty to see some oversized painting. Included in this attraction business was a tribe of Seminole Indians, which I'll get to in a minute. There was also this hermit living down by the lake who never told us his name; in fact, he didn't believe in names. He thought they summed people up. I never knew what happened to him, but with all the tourists coming down and taking pictures, he probably moved further back into the woods. I just know that "Hey You" was gone one day.

It wasn't long till my father expanded his business by buying a few parrots from Panama City, and we were the first attraction in the area to have parrots that did tricks. Then other places like Cypress Gardens went out and bought a lot of birds that were pre-trained. But before I got involved with training our birds, my father made me pull weeds. This was the first job I ever had, and I thought that if all work was like that, I'd rather live with "Hey You" the hermit.

I spent most of my time talking to the tourists and soon discovered they would believe anything you told them. I remember standing on the bridge over Chip-Choo Creek, throwing popcorn to the bluegills, when a crowd of people came tramping over the bridge and wanted to know what I was doing.

"Feeding the piranhas," I said.

The entire crowd, determined to see the fish, pinned me against the guard rail. My father finally had to come down to rescue me. He had a hard time convincing them that I had innocently misidentified the fish.

Needless to say, my father wasn't pleased with my weed pulling progress and soon sent me out in the swamp with a machete and told me to cut some nature trails. The mosquitoes would suffocate you, and the thousands I massacred with my machete didn't effectively alter the total population, and I decided to head for higher ground, eventually taking retreat in the Indian village on the edge of the swamp. Every morning thereafter my machete and I would take the back way to their village. I would spend much time with the Indians — eating, occasionally camping, and learning their tongue.

Above all else, I was interested in their hobbies; my favorite was alligator wrestling. I would watch the alligators for hours and hours, trying to understand the mentality of these peculiar creatures. Then one day my Indian friend told me he would teach me to wrestle them. When I entered the pit for the first time and chose my three-foot victim, I heard the booming voice of my father: "Get out of there!"

He told me to go straight to his office, and I waited there for twenty-one minutes. After giving me the old "son, what am I going to do with you" talk, he threatened to send me off to military school. I finally convinced him I was a natural bird trainer and would be a big success at the bird show. He decided to give it a try.

At the end of the week I performed my first bird show. Then I advanced to training ducks. Since the people over at Cypress Gardens had gotten parrots, my father got back at them by buying ducks. This was the strangest point in my career. I trained ducks to play guitar, drums, organ and golf, and we even had a duck that would flip rings over her neck.

"See a duck ring its own neck!" I would shout.

Now these Indians didn't know what had happened to me after I was so rudely interrupted by my father two months before. In fact,

I had been so busy cleaning up bird extracts, training ducks and giving bird shows that I had forgotten about my desire to wrestle alligators. They finally sent out Beaufort, a three-hundred pound squaw, to find me. Just the sight of her reminded me of the alligators, and with an hour until my next bird show, I decided to go back over to the village with her and take up where I had left off — with that three-foot gator.

But when I got back I learned that my three-foot friend had been eaten by Harve. (Indians name the alligators only when they're over eight-feet-long.) The next size was a four-and-a-half-footer. I got a quick edge and flipped him over on his back. Only then did I realize I was sitting on an alligator's belly, holding his mouth shut with my hands. I counted to three and took off running as fast as I could. When I got out of the pit the Indians were gathered around laughing, and I didn't know why; not until I noticed the gator still was on his back, motionless. It was one of my first real awakenings about alligators — that if you flip them over it momentarily paralyzes them. The Indians poked him with a stick and he turned back over. I looked at my watch and saw I had missed the bird show, and my father was fast approaching the village along the edge of the swamp.

That's about it, I guess, because after that, my father sent me away to military school. But that's a story all in itself.



*Eastman Curtis, a freshman at Brevard College and a music major, is from Lake Wales, Florida. He has had varied experience with wild animals and works part-time at a local pet shop. His principal musical interest is in percussion, and he plays drums for the Brevard College Stage Band.*



## Haydn's "THE CREATION"

by Randy Snyder

*The partial musical scores accompanying this essay represent only those notes relevant to the discussion.*



Franz Haydn was a composer constantly experimenting with new forms and textures of expression. After completing the London symphonies, Haydn felt he had experimented with orchestral compositions long enough and that it left him no challenge. This led him to work on an oratorio, a piece with libretto (usually religious) that is performed without scenery, costumes, or action by solo voices, chorus, or orchestra. This was an area of composition in which he had not yet proven himself.

There are two stories about Haydn's reason for choosing the creation as a subject for an oratorio. One story is that a friend, Baron Gottfried van Sweiten, gave him a libretto written by Tidley, who had compiled it for Handel from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The other story maintains that one of Haydn's friends suggested starting with the creation in the Bible. One may believe both stories in that the creation in the Bible was suggested to Haydn and he then mentioned it to van Sweiten, who in turn procured the libretto.

Although the libretto form was important to Haydn, it was not that so much as the lure of creating a musical background that would support the libretto while creating the musical imagery to describe creation, that was his ultimate challenge.

Nonetheless the libretto, or text is important, for it paints a picture which the music must support. The imagery is the text of "The Creation" challenged Haydn to use all his creative powers, translating, in effect, the words into a musical form. Haydn's basic scheme for this oratorio was to have it narrated by solos of the Archangels Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael, and a duet by Adam and Eve.

The relationship between the text and melody nears perfection. Throughout the oratorio, it is evident that Haydn had a good matching of words and pitches, appropriate rhythm (as it is used to add effect and to create

imagery) and his placement of vowel and consonant sounds in the higher and lower voice registers.

One cannot really appreciate this relationship without knowing something about style analysis wherein the overall musical structure is taken into account also. One can read the text and it will move the imagination, more directly if less powerfully than will the music. By analyzing music, one is reducing subjective feeling into something approaching objective quantities. Even at the cost of some of the magic, it lets one know more of the composer's imagination and skill in organizing and presentation.

In musical analysis, certain terms are essential: timbre, dynamics and texture. Timbre refers to acoustical tone, the quality or character of the sound wave. For example, the difference between a trombone and trumpet is not so much that one is a bass clef instrument and the other a treble clef instrument. The difference lies in the quality or character of sound. The trombone's sound is richer, darker and mellower than the clear sound of the trumpet. Next is dynamics, which includes all aspects of intensity of sound — that is, intensity as indicated by markings and implied by orchestration. Texture is the arrangement of timbre. Other terms will be introduced throughout the discussion of "The Creation."

It can be said that the music of Haydn is picturesque and that this is especially true in "The Creation." This music, as in any oratorio, is for the most part an accomplishment. But in some parts of the piece Haydn's music speaks directly to the listener's imagination. This is the case at the beginning of "The Creation."

The introduction is entitled "Representation of Chaos." This introduction is fifty-nine measures long and in the opening Haydn states the tonic chord of C minor with a dynamic marking of forte and then a decrescendo. In the next measure he states a sixth chord in first inversion with a dynamic marking of piano, and for the next few measures the dynamics are fluctuating.

Having mentioned the chords, it is necessary to mention harmony, or the progression of chords, which to adds color and creates tension with the dynamics. As the harmony creates color and tension, the dynamics act as aids in stressing these places of effect created by the harmony.