

TEMPO INTERPRETATION AND SYMBOLIC MOTIVES IN OPENING MOVEMENT OF HAYDN'S *THE CREATION*

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates two interrelated aspects of Franz Joseph Haydn's seminal oratorio, "*The Creation*" (Hob. XXI:2): tempo interpretation and symbolic motives. It compares historical and contemporary performance practices by analyzing tempo choices, from the composer's era to a 2025 performance in Thailand. The research utilizes Temperley's (1991) comparative tempo data from four distinct conducting traditions—Historic, Austrian, British, and Early Music—alongside an analysis of the contemporary Thai performance. The central focus is a semiotic analysis of the opening movement, "Representation of Chaos," which identifies seven key symbolic motives that reflect theological concepts. The most significant new finding is a recurrent 7-note motive, internally structured as a double triplet plus a final note (3+3+1), which appears seven times. The number seven symbolizes divine perfection (the seven days of creation), while the triplet motive signifies the Holy Trinity in Christianity. This discovery led to a creative application in the 2025 performance, where the researcher reintroduced this "Trinity" motive in the final measure of the oratorio by adding a specific ornamentation for the timpani as a cadential final. This act of cyclical return not only links the narrative's conclusion back to its beginning but also reinforces the work's core message with this divine symbol. This research, therefore, posits that tempo and symbolic motives are not mere aesthetic choices, but are fundamental to the narrative and theological structure of Haydn's masterpiece.

Keywords: Tempo interpretation; symbolic motive; *The Creation*; Joseph Haydn; oratorio; musical analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and significance of the problem

Joseph Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation* (Die Schöpfung), stands as a monumental work of the classical era, profoundly reflecting the philosophical and religious ideals of its time through its musical structure. Throughout his life, the Austrian composer gained immense experience, composing over one hundred symphonies, earning him the titles "Father of the Symphony" and "Father of the String Quartet" (Rosen, 1997). His interest in the oratorio genre, which is a large-scale musical work with a religious narrative, like opera but without staging, costumes, or acting (Bennett, 1995), was significantly ignited after he witnessed performances of Handel's oratorios in England. Inspired, Haydn resolved to compose a grand oratorio of his own.

The result was *The Creation*, composed between 1796–1798. With a libretto arranged and translated by Gottfried van Swieten from the Book of Genesis, the Psalms, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the work was an immediate and resounding success (Indiana University Bloomington, n.d.). Haydn introduced innovative sounds and concepts, leveraging his lifelong mastery of orchestral writing to create vivid tone paintings. This expertise, honed through his symphonies—many of which he gave descriptive nicknames, such as No.30 “Alleluia,” No.82 “The Bear,” and No.101 “The Clock”—allowed him to masterfully depict the narrative through both orchestral and vocal forces. The success of *The Creation* soon led to a commission for another major oratorio, *The Seasons*.

Regarding tempo, the divergence in performance practices, from historical accounts by Haydn's own student to modern interpretations, such as the characteristically slower tempos of the British tradition compared to the Austrian tradition, raises crucial questions. What constitutes an “appropriate” tempo according to the composer, and how do different choices affect the listener's perception?

In the realm of symbolism, while analysts like Rosen (1980) have examined the structure of “Representation of Chaos,” a full exploration of its theological semiotics remains incomplete. This opens an avenue for further inquiry into the specific musical codes Haydn employed to depict the primordial chaos and how these codes connect to the religious beliefs of the Classical era.

This research, therefore, focuses on two interconnected aspects: the interpretation of tempo throughout the oratorio and the symbolic motives hidden in its instrumental opening movement.

1.2 Research objectives

1. To analyze tempo interpretations in Haydn's *The Creation*, comparing performance practices from the composer's era to a contemporary performance in Thailand in 2025
2. To identify and interpret the symbolic motives in “Representation of Chaos” opening movement and explore their potential application in a creative performance context.
3. To provide a valuable resource for future studies on tempo, symbolism, and performance practice in Classical-era music.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 An overview of the 32 movements in Haydn's *The Creation*

Joseph Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation* (Die Schöpfung), is structured in three parts and comprises 32 musical numbers or movements. The narrative, guided by the archangels Gabriel (Soprano), Uriel (Tenor), and Raphael (Bass), recounts the biblical story of creation from the Book of Genesis.

Part 1: The First Four Days of Creation. Part 1 is the most dramatic, depicting the emergence of order from chaos. It covers the first four days of creation, celebrating the formation of light, earth, heavens, and water, and the appearance of plant life. Part 1 consists of 14 movements.

Part 2: The Fifth and Sixth Days of Creation. Part 2 focuses on the creation of animal life, from sea creatures and birds to beasts of the land, and concludes with the creation of the first humans, Adam and Eve.

Part 3: Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Part 3 is a lyrical and idyllic portrayal of Adam (Bass) and Eve (Soprano) in the Garden of Eden, praising God and expressing their love for each other.

Table 1: Summary list of Haydn's *The Creation* numbers

Part	Day	Movement	Role	Type	Name
I	0	1	Orchestra	Introduction	Representation of Chaos
	1	2	Raphael & Chorus	Recitative	In the beginning.... Let there be light!
		3	Uriel & Chorus	Aria	Now vanished by the holy beams
		4	Raphael	Recitative	And God made the firmament
	2	5	Gabriel & Chorus	Aria & Chorus	What wonder doth His work reveal
		6	Raphael	Recitative	Let the waters under the heavens be gathered to one place
	3	7		Aria	Rolling in foaming billows
		8	Gabriel	Recitative	Let all the earth bring forth grass
		9		Aria	Now cooling green
		10	Uriel	Recitative	And the heavenly host proclaimed the third day
		11	Chorus	Chorus	Awake the harp, ye chords awaken

Table 1: Summary list of Haydn's *The Creation* numbers (continued)

Part	Day	Movement	Role	Type	Name
	4	12	Uriel	Recitative	Let there be lights to divide the day from the night
		13		Recitative	In shining splendor, radiant now the sun bestrides the sky
		14	Chorus	Chorus	The heavens are telling the glory of God
II	5	15	Gabriel	Recitative	Let the waters being forth..every moving creature
		16		Aria	On mighty wings now circling soars the eagle proud
		17	Raphael	Recitative	And God created great whales
		18		Recitative	And the angels struck their immoral harps
		19	Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael	Trio & Chorus	In faïsses raiment now... The Lord is great
	6	20	Raphael	Recitative	Let the earth bring forth ev'ry living creature
		21		Recitative	Straight opening her fertile womb
		22		Aria	Now heaven in fullest glory shone
		23	Uriel	Recitative	And God created man in His own image
		24		Aria	In native worth and honor clad
		25	Raphael	Recitative	And God saw everything that He had made...it's very good
		26	Chorus-Trio-Chorus	Trio & Chorus	Fullfilled at last the glorious work
III		27	Uriel	Recitative	In rosy mantle
		28	Adam, Eve, Chorus	Duet & Chorus	By Thee with grace, O mighty Lord
		29	Adam and Eve	Recitative	Now is our duty
		30		Duet	Sweet companion, at thy side
		31	Uriel	Recitative	O happy pair
		32	Chorus and Soli	Tutti	Sing to God

Note: This table synthesizes information from the following sources. The English vocal text is derived from the choral edition of Haydn's *The Creation*, edited by Robert Shaw and Alice Parker (Haydn, 1957). And the movement numbers are according to the Breitkopf & Härtel (Haydn, n.d.-a) and Kalmus Editions (Haydn, n.d.-b). Interpretive notes, historical context, and specific performance details are compiled from various concert program books, including those from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (Bratby, 2025) and Bangkok Combined Choir and Orchestra (2025).

2.2 The study of tempo in Haydn's *The Creation*

Tempo is an important element in Music. It is an Italian word meaning 'speed'. Most composers indicate the speed on the musical score with tempo marking, which is an indication given to the performer (most often in the form of Italian words or phrases) of the speed of a composition or a section of a piece, or of a change of speed during a composition, such as "Largo" means broad, slow, "Vivace" means lively, brisk (Bennett, 1995, p. 335). Tempo can be measured by a metronome using BPM (Beats per minute), a measure of tempo indicating how many musical beats occur in one minute. For example: ♩ = 120 means there are 120 of quarter-note beats per minute.

Conductors have long debated the appropriate tempo for the opening of *The Creation*, marked *Largo*. While "very slow," this indication allows for a wide range of interpretation. Historically, Haydn's own tempos were often faster than modern conventions. His approach to sacred music was rooted in vitality and joy, as noted in the program for a 2025 performance by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra:

"Whenever I think of God, I can imagine only a Being infinitely great and infinitely good, and this idea... fills me with such confidence, such joy, that I should set even a *miserere* in *tempo allegro*" (Bratby, 2025, p. 7).

This quote reveals Haydn's intention for his sacred music to be energetic and uplifting. During his lifetime, the work was performed over 40 times. Antonio Salieri, who played the harpsichord for Haydn in many of these performances, documented the tempos, although his manuscript was later lost. Fortunately, some of these markings were preserved in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (AMZ).

A more comprehensive record comes from Haydn's student, Sigismund Neukomm, who studied with the composer during the composition of *The Creation*. Neukomm's detailed tempo markings were later published and are included in Nicholas Temperley's (1991) comparative study. Temperley's work contrasts historical tempos with those of ten 20th century conductors. This present study extends that analysis by including data from a 2025 performance by The Bangkok Combined Choir and Orchestra.

Charles Rosen (1980) notes that “Representation of Chaos” utilizes a modified slow-movement sonata form. Haydn conveys a sense of chaos not through a lack of structure but through the subversion of expectation: he obscures cadential clarity with abrupt, distant modulations and employs rhythmic instability through anticipations and syncopations. However, while Rosen provides a detailed structural analysis, his description of a key recurring figure as merely a “staccato arpeggio” overlooks its deeper symbolic potential, which this study aims to explore

2.3 Symbolic motives in “Representation of Chaos”

V. Kofi Agawu’s (2025) theory of “topics” or the Symbolic Motives is like a shared cultural vocabulary of musical ideas. These are specific musical styles, gestures, or textures that refer to common social events, places, or feelings that the composer and the audience of that era, such as the Classical period, would have immediately recognized.

Composers can use Topics like building blocks to create a hidden story or “Plot” within a piece of instrumental music. By arranging different Topics in sequence, or even playing them simultaneously, they can create a sense of interaction, conflict, or development, just as characters in a story do. For example, a composer might introduce a Topic representing a “Noble” or “Aristocratic style,” such as a stately, elegant minuet, and then have it interrupted by a Topic representing a “Rural” or “Country style,” such as a simple, folk dance. The contrast between these two Topics could be interpreted as a narrative about the conflict or interaction between different social classes.

Topic provides a framework for understanding symbolic motives. Agawu (2025) divides musical meaning into two modes:

2.3.1 Introverted semiosis

Meaning derived from the internal relationships within the music itself: harmony, rhythm, melody, and texture.

2.3.2 Extroverted semiosis

Meaning is derived from the music’s reference to the outside world. These outside references can be social activities, such as a hunt or a military march, historical contexts, such as a solemn, church-like setting, or philosophical ideas. This is the opposite of analyzing music purely based on its internal structure or Introverted semiosis, which only focuses on the relationships between the notes, chords, and rhythms within the piece.

In short, Extroverted Semiosis is about what the music points to in the real world. For example, the sound of a fanfare topic points to the idea of royalty or the military while Introverted Semiosis is about how the music is put together internally.

By using a Topic or Symbolic Motive with shared external meaning (Extroverted semiosis), a composer can place it alongside other Topics to build a narrative (Plot). This is how instrumental music can tell a rich story without using any words (Agawu, 2025).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Scope: The study analyzes the Breitkopf & Härtel (Hady, n.d.-a) and Oxford score of *The Creation* and the modern English vocal text adapted by Robert Shaw and Alice Parker (Hady, 1957). The primary focus is the symbolic analysis of the overture and the comparative tempo analysis spanning from the 18th century to 2025.

3.2 Data collection: Data were gathered from scholarly books, academic journals, and video recordings of performances.

3.2.1 Primary sources

Authoritative editions, including Breitkopf & Härtel (Hady, n.d.-a) and Oxford editions (Hady, 1957), were examined to establish baseline notation, articulation, and instrumentation across 32 musical numbers. English choral editions are by Robert Shaw and Alice Parker.

3.2.2 Secondary sources

Temperley’s (1991) comparative study of conductors provided benchmark data on tempo choices among Austrian, English, and Early Music traditions.

3.2.3 Contemporary observation

A 2025 performance in Thailand was analyzed through video recordings of the Bangkok Combined Choir and Orchestra’s performance to assess modern interpretative trends (Hongcharu, 2025).

3.3 Data analysis: The analysis combines formal musical analysis of the score with a hermeneutic approach informed by the biblical text of Genesis.

3.3.1 Tempo analysis

Tempo indications for all 32 movements were cataloged from historical and modern performances. Comparative tables were constructed to identify patterns and deviations across five conductor groups: Historic, Austrian, English, Early Music, and Contemporary Thai interpretations.

3.3.2 Symbolic motives analysis

The opening movement, “Representation of Chaos,” was subjected to detailed score analysis. Seven recurring motives were identified, including chromatic passages, double-dotted, and arpeggio motives. Each motive was mapped to its structural position and interpreted in relation to theological and cosmological symbols. Analytical diagrams were created to illustrate motivic recurrence and thematic unity.

This research employs a qualitative and comparative approach, combining historical document analysis with performance observation. The study is divided into two main components: Tempo interpretation across different eras and symbolic motive analysis in the opening movement of *The Creation*.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: Tempo interpretation across historical and modern performances, and symbolic motive analysis in the opening movement of *The Creation*.

4.1 Tempo interpretation

Tempo or speed of the music piece is one of the most contested aspects of *The Creation*’s interpretation. This study compares tempo data across five traditions, adapting Temperley’s (1991) original table to include the 2025 Thai performance. The traditions are:

Historic: Tempo recorded by Antonio Salieri (Sa) and Sigismund Neukomm (Ne).

Austrian: Conductors such as Clemens Krauss (Kr), Jascha Horenstein (Hr), and Herbert von Karajan (Ka). This tradition is generally characterized by faster tempos (Temperley, 1991).

British: Conductors such as Vincent Novello (No), David Willcocks (Wi), and Neville Marriner (Ma), who often adopt more contemplative, slower tempos (Temperley, 1991).

Early Music: Conductors like Simon Rattle (Ra), and Christopher Hogwood (Hg), who focus on period-informed practices (Temperley, 1991).

Thai (2025): The Bangkok Combined Choir and Orchestra’s performance conducted by Charunee Hongcharu (Hc) (Hongcharu, 2025).

Table 2: Comparison of metronomic tempos in Haydn's *The Creation*
(Temperley, 1991, p. 238; adapted by Author, 2025)

Mov. No. Br. Ed.	mm.	Haydn's tempo mark and time signature	Unit	Metronome tempos (BPM)										
				Historic		Austrian trad.		British trad.			Early Mus.		Thai	
				Sa 1813	Ne 1832	Kr 1949	Hr 1959	Ka 1982	No 1858	Wi 1974	Ma 1980	Ra 1990	Hg 1990	Hc 2025
Part I														
1	1	Largo 2/2	♩		54	46	48	38	60	40	33	44	56	50
2	18	Largo 2/2	♩		54	50	58	54	60	46	40	58	58	60
3	1	Andante 4/4	♩	120	112	126	126	126	88	132	138	132	138	126
	53	Allegro moderato 4/4	♩		84	76	69	88	60	96	88	100	100	72
4	7	Allegro assai 4/4	♩		152	152	132	144	132	138	152	160	152	144
5	1	Allegro 4/4	♩	58	88	100	100	92	72	92	104	88	104	104
7	1	Allegro assai 4/4	♩		138	144	144	132	132	144	144	152	152	132
9	1	Andante 6/8	♩		120	108	104	112	92	108	108	126	116	120
11	1	Vivace 4/4	♩		104	104	96	108	69	100	108	112	112	108
13	1	Andante 2/2	♩	76	100	96	52	60	80	76	58	63	72	76
	26	Piu adagio 2/2	♩		69	50	58	60	60	72	63	63	63	69
14	1	Allegro 2/2	♩		88	76	63	92	58	84	108	108	108	88
	95	Piu allegro 2/2	♩		108	108	72	112	72	92	126	132	120	100

Table 2: Comparison of metronomic tempos in Haydn's *The Creation* (Temperley, 1991, p. 238; adapted by Author, 2025) (continued)

Mov. No. Br. Ed.	mm.	Haydn's tempo mark and time signature	Unit	Metronome tempos (BPM)										
				Historic		Austrian trad.		British trad.			Early Mus.		Thai	
				Sa 1813	Ne 1832	Kr 1949	Hr 1959	Ka 1982	No 1858	Wi 1974	Ma 1980	Ra 1990	Hg 1990	Hc 2025
Part II														
16	1	Moderato 2/2	♩		126	126	126	132	104	126	132	138	132	126
17	6	Poco adagio 4/4	♩		116	88	60	63	80	88	84	84	88	112
19	1	Moderato 2/4	♩		116	120	120	116	84	132	132	144	132	126
	1	Vivace 4/4	♩		116	96	104	92	80	108	108	108	112	116
21	1	Presto 4/4	♩		92	69	63	63	76	72	80	88	88	69
	18	Prestro 6/8	♩		116	100	108	112	112	108	108	116	112	104
	40	Andante 6/8	♩		132	126	100	92	120	108	92	112	116	108
	58	Adagio 4/4	♩		58	58	46	54	44	33	44	44	36	58
22	1	Maestoso 3/4	♩		100	100	84	96	84	100	100	126	116	114
24	1	Andante 4/4	♩		108	120	126	100	88	112	120	132	126	126
26	1	Vivace 4/4	♩		104	108	92	112	88	96	104	112	116	116
	1	Poco adagio 3/4	♩		112	126	112	126	132	160	138	152	152	160
	1	Vivace 4/4	♩		104	92	96	108	88	104	104	112	116	112
♩														
27	1	Largo 3/4	♩		80	72	80	72	66	84	72	84	76	80
28	1	Adagio 4/4	♩		56	50	54	56	60	54	56	66	63	64
	47	Allegretto 2/4	♩		92	100	84	100	66	92	100	108	108	92
30	1	Adagio 3/4	♩		112	120	116	100	100	116	100	160	120	120
	72	Allegro 2/4	♩		112	108	126	112	88	120	116	126	132	112
32	1	Andante 4/4	♩		108	104	100	69	112	112	100	108	108	138*
	10	Allegro 4/4	♩	120	100	88	96	108	80	96	104	112	120	108

Note: The data for Historic, Austrian, British, and Early Music traditions are adapted from "Haydn's tempos in *The Creation*," by Temperley (1991), p. 238. Copyright 1991 by Oxford University Press. The Thai (2025) column represents original data from the current study.

Temperley (1999) concludes that the British tradition's slower tempos may reflect a desire to emphasize the music's contemplative, sacred nature. However, in general, 20th century performances of the opening movement adopted a significantly slower tempo than historical sources suggest (Temperley, 1999). The 2025 Thai performance, influenced by the fast-paced nature of the 21st century, largely aligns with the faster tempo of the Historic and Austrian traditions, while also incorporating unique tempo flexibility for expressive purposes, particularly in the finale. In 2025, the Thai conductor's interpretation mostly follows the Historic and Austrian traditions, derived from Haydn and Neukomm, except for the seven movements, which are deliberately adjusted for religious symbolism and dramaturgical coherence. Instead of uniform acceleration or modernist virtuosity, the 2025 conception employs tempo as semiotic reinforcement; tempo is not "faster" merely for effect, but "fitting" to the theological narrative.

Special notice from Table 1: Comparing movement No.32 (Final andante)

The most significant deviation occurs in the closing chorus, traditionally slowed to evoke benediction. The 2025 performance accelerates Andante to ♩ = 69, counteracting narrative stagnation after the Adam-Eve duet. This adjustment reorients focus from anthropocentric sentiment to divine praise, demonstrating tempo as a semantic agent rather than a decorative parameter. Neukomm marks Andante, typically delivered at ♩ = 108. Modern conductors often slow to ♩ = 69–100, treating it like a liturgical benediction. The 2025 performance adopts a quicker Andante (♩ = 138 or ♩ = 69). This adjustment is not aesthetic; it is a narrative correction from the inertia. The preceding movement, No. 31, Adam and Eve's duet, lingers in self-referential

adoration, shifting the theological focus from God ("sublime happiness of two lovers") to the human self. A faster Andante restores vertical orientation, signifying praise to the Creator. The conductor's task, therefore, becomes centripetal, drawing the narrative axis back to divine praise: a faster Andante is not a diminishment of reverence but a restoration of priority. Shawn Eaton (2017) notes that Haydn's dynamic language aims to stimulate "sacred emotional elevation" rather than Romantic subjectivity:

Haydn's goal was to heighten sacred emotion in the listener, not through tragic Romantic affect, but by projecting joy, light, and divine grandeur (Eaton, 2017, p. 33–35).

This provides a basis for the conductors to interpret the tempo as Haydn's intended.

4.2 Analysis of symbolic motives in "Representation of Chaos"

The symbolic gestures are analyzed and interpreted by theological evidence in the Genesis chapters 1–2 of the Bible. The analysis reveals seven key symbolic gestures, presented in order of appearance:

4.2.1 Introduction: The Initial "Bang" and the up and down motive

The work begins with a powerful, unison C across the orchestra: a mighty opening that can be interpreted as a musical "Big Bang" or the grand pronouncement of God's power before creation begins. Following the first tutti bang, which serves as the dramatic curtain-raiser for the Chaos. Haydn introduces the first theme on an oscillating up-and-down motive (Figure 1). This gesture systematically creates an image of instability, wavering, and a lack of clear direction.

In measures 3–7, we encounter short chromatic ascending and descending fragments alternating in quick succession. This motive remains unresolved and is propelled by a double-dotted rhythm (Figure 2), which conveys stress and heaviness. This produces a sense of metric imbalance and a portrayal of disorder. The melody moves up and down, making gestures that fail to form complete phrases, indicating a lack of stability. The Rhythm starts the first time of double dotted rhythm in the Clarinet at the end of this phrase.



Figure 1: Opening tutti unison C followed by the first theme with chromatic in first violin section
Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation* (Haydn, n.d.-a, mm. 1–7).



Figure 2: Double-dotted rhythm in clarinets in mm. 7–8
Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation* (Haydn, n.d.-a, mm. 7–8).

4.2.2 The seven sets of seven-note ascending motive

In measures 6–14, there is a set of seven-note motives that consists of ascending 2 sets of triplets, then reaching a final note of the group. The 7-note motive appears seven times, ascending through the orchestra. The number seven biblically symbolizes perfection and completeness (the seven days of creation). The internal structure of three plus three directly references the Holy Trinity. Haydn carefully engineers this ascent to span just under two octaves each time, creating a sense of controlled, striving energy. A triplet is a rhythmic group of three notes played in the time usually taken by two notes of the same value. Each of the three notes in a triplet has the same rhythmic value. Triplets could be connoted as the Trinity in Christianity.

The Doctrine of the Trinity is teachings central in Christian theology states that Lord is one, but consists of three personal: Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit (Waruwu et al., 2025).

The set of seven-note motives starts in the bassoon, then the violas, the second violins, the violoncellos, the second violins, the bassoon, and the second violins. This happens seven sets. (Figure 3) The Ascending gestures symbolize spiritual elevation, divine revelation, and movement from earth toward heaven. Seven signifies completeness, divine perfection, order, and existence.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done (Holy Bible, n.d., Genesis 2:2–3).

No.1 Representative of Chaos
Largo

Figure 3: The seven sets of seven-note (3+3+1=7) ascending motive

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation* (Haydn, n.d.-b), showing the motive's appearance seven sets from measures 6–14.

The Jewish Encyclopedia (Jacobs & Ochser, 2021) refers to the number seven as “the general symbol for all association with God” and “the favorite religious number of Judaism.” Since God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh, seven also represents both completion and perfection (Leonard, 2021). The number 7 represents God's perfection and divine completeness in the Jewish culture and appears more than 700 times in the Bible.

4.2.3 The chromatic descent

In measures 15–19, following the seven ascending motives, there is a long set of descending chromatic scale from high C down to F that appears in the first violins. This gesture, a topic known as *lamento*, can be interpreted as God's benevolent will descending to bring order to the formless void. It resolves accumulated tension.

Figure 4: Chromatic descent in first violin section

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the Chromatic descent melody in first violin section.

4.2.4 Rhythms of disorder and chaos

Haydn introduces rhythmic instability through syncopated figures and anticipation (notes arriving before the beat), musically depicting the disorder and formlessness of the pre-creation state. In measures 21–24, the bassoon continues with the ascending and descending gestures (Figure 5) with the double dotted

motives (Figure 6) in the flutes and Oboes. It represents the chaos and the heaviness. The Clarinet then enters with its own syncopated figures, further contributing to the rhythmic instability and enhancing the overall sense of pre-creation disorder.



Figure 5: Measures 21–24 Arpeggio up and down in bassoon part

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the motive's appearance in first bassoon section (mm. 21–24).



Figure 6: Measures 22–24 the double-dotted motives present instability, heaviness, and tension in flutes and first oboe

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the motive's appearance in flutes (mm. 22–24).

Followed by the anticipated rhythm (Figure 7) in measures 26–30, this motive intensifies the sense of the unorder and instability.



Figure 7: Measures 26–30 anticipated rhythm in strings

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the motive's appearance in strings section (mm. 26–30).

4.2.5 A single descending double-dotted motive to the climax

Before the series of twelve double-dotted motives begins, Haydn introduces one double-dotted motive in first violin and cello part in measure 31, immediately followed by the clarinet's glissando. After the glissando, Haydn launches into twelve consecutive double-dotted figures, beginning in the lower instruments from the double bass, cello, and bassoon and gradually ascending through the orchestra's higher-range instruments. This progression creates a sense of mounting pressure and inevitability, a symbolic climb from the depths of chaos toward the threshold of order.

Following this, the flute executes a rising glissando at measure 39. The ascent reaches its formidable climax in measure 40. Here, the entire orchestra erupts in a *fortissimo* sextuplet figure, creating a massive wave of sound. However, Haydn adds a remarkable layer of texture, while the rest of the orchestra executes this rapid, powerful rhythm, the horns and trombones sustain a long, unwavering C note. This sustained pitch acts as a firm harmonic anchor against which the turbulent sextuplet pushes, magnifying the dramatic tension. The climax is then sealed by a final, seventh note on the next beat, which cuts through with authoritative force to convey a sense of absolute and decisive completion.



Figure 8: The powerful tutti climax on a sextuplet (except horns and trombones) followed by a seventh note

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the motive's appearance in measure 40.

4.2.6 The return of the trinity motive: the ladder toward light

After the climax, the doubled-triplet motive returns, now interwoven with ascending scales, signaling that the process of ordering has begun. Immediately after this decisive moment, Haydn introduces

ascending double triplets in sequences of seven notes in four sets, functioning as a ladder toward light and order. The flute then joins with three additional ascending seven-note figures in measures 41–47 (Figure 9), its bright timbre symbolizing illumination. Although anticipated rhythms appear in two subsequent measures, they now act as forward-driving forces rather than destabilizing ones.

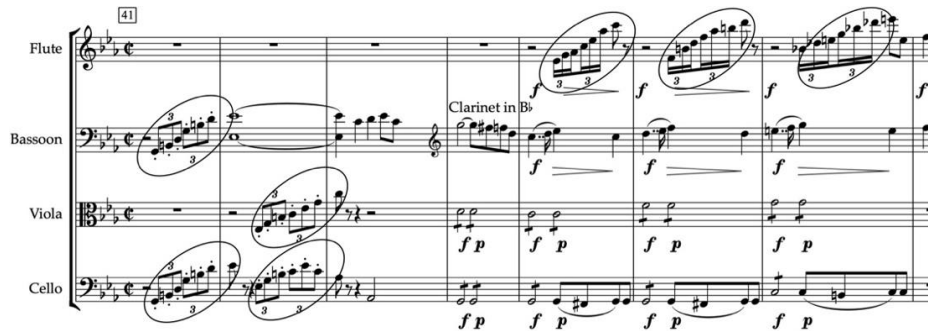


Figure 9: Measures: 41–47 Ascending seven-note motives ($3+3+1 = 7$)

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the motive's appearance seven sets from measures 41–47.

4.2.7 Flute descent

In the final section, the bassoon initiates another seven-note ascent, answered by the clarinet twice, signifying collaboration 2 times by the woodwinds (Figure 10). The flute then descends, gently offering a gesture of goodwill, closing the opening number as if affirming the divine intention to create a beautiful world (Figure 11).

The overture concludes with a serene, diatonic descending line in the flute. This bright, clear sound represents the dawn of divine light and goodwill, resolving the chaos and leading into the first vocal narrative.



Figure 10: Measure 49 The seven ascending motives in the bassoon

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the motive's appearance in bassoon (m. 49).



Figure 11: Last 4 measures, the descending passage from the flute symbolizes benevolence

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the motive's appearance in flute from measures 55–58.

4.3 Timpani cadential final, ornamentation, and symbolic meaning in 2025 performance

A unique dimension of the 2025 interpretation is the double-triplet seven-note timpani ornament added to the final cadence. While not in the autograph, historical treatises support this interpretive liberty as C.P.E. Bach notes that timpani strokes may be expanded for heightened effect, and also Haydn's *Military Symphony* demonstrates openness to extended timpani rhetoric.

Creative application: The discovery of this rhythmic motive informed a creative decision in the 2025 performance. In the final measure of the entire oratorio, a figure mirroring the doubled-triplet motive from the overture was added to the timpani part. (Figure 12) This act of *cyclical return* brings the work full circle, framing the entire story of creation with the symbol of the Trinity, linking the very end back to the very beginning.

Figure 12: Bring back the seven-note motive in timpani in the last measure of No.32

Note: Musical example transcribed by the author from Haydn's *The Creation*, showing the addition of Seven-Note in timpani in the last measure of the last number.

Table 3: Summary of symbolic motives discovered in this research

Symbolic motive	Topic identity	Introversive	Extroversive
1. Tutti in C and chromatic	Strong opening	Unison and no cadence	Big bang and mighty opening
2. Seven-note groups	Trinity (3+3+1)	Harmonic progression	Divine perfection
3. Chromatic descending	Learned style/Lamento	Voice-leading technique	Resolving chaos to order
4. Anticipation rhythms	Disruption	Rhythmic displacement	Disorder of pre-creation
5. Double dotted rhythms	Heaviness and tension	Rhythmic displacement	Disorder of pre-creation
6. Climatic sextuplet	Trinity (6+1) and power	Harmonic tension relief	God's decisive creative act
7. Flute descending	Pastoral/Sensibility	Bright tone color	Divine's good will

As shown in Table 3, this study has identified and analyzed the symbolic motives of Haydn's *The Creation*, which no previous study has investigated, including Agawu's framework.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This section discusses the tempo interpretation and the symbolic motives in "Representation of Chaos," along with their implications for conductors, performers, scholars, analysts, and future creative applications in performance.

5.1 Tempo interpretation

The findings of this study highlight the dynamic interplay between historical fidelity and contemporary interpretation in performances of Haydn's *The Creation*. Tempo choices, while initially grounded in the composer's descriptive markings, have evolved significantly across eras. Early performances adhered closely to 18th century conventions, reflecting a culture of precision and respect for the composer's intentions. In contrast, Romantic aesthetics introduced expressive flexibility, evident in the rubato and tempo fluctuations observed in 19th and 20th century interpretations. This shift underscores a broader trend in Western music toward prioritizing emotional depth over structural clarity.

The comparative analysis of conductor groups reveals that cultural context strongly influences interpretative decisions. Austrian tradition conductors' preference for brisk tempo aligns with Central European traditions emphasizing vitality and clarity, whereas English tradition conductors' contemplative

pacing reflects the oratorio's sacred character and Anglican choral heritage. Early Music specialists, by contrast, demonstrate a commitment to historically informed practices, maintaining relative stability in tempo choices. The 2025 Thai performance illustrates how modern social dynamics, particularly the influence of fast-paced digital media, shape aesthetic expectations, prompting conductors to adopt accelerated tempos in later movements to sustain audience engagement. Concurrently, the tempos in the Thai performance aligned more closely with Historically Informed Performance (HIP) and Austrian traditions than with the English tradition school, yet it inherited the latter's flexibility in tempo. The researcher contends that, because an oratorio lacks costumes and staging, its narrative momentum depends entirely on the music and its content. Therefore, the musical progression should be concise and avoid excessively slow passages to maintain audience engagement. Tempo thus emerges as a critical element. This is especially pertinent following the intentionally lengthy duet between Adam and Eve in No. 31; initiating No. 32 with a moderately fast tempo is crucial in a contemporary context to re-energize the audience in preparation for the brisk final chorus of praise.

5.2 Symbolic motives in "Representation of Chaos"

Symbolic motives in "Representation of Chaos" further complicate interpretative strategies. Their recurrence at structural junctures suggests that Haydn intended these gestures as narrative anchors, guiding listeners through the transition from disorder to creation. Modern conductors who emphasize these motives through articulation and dynamic contrast enhance the oratorio's programmatic clarity, even when tempo flexibility introduces deviations from classical norms. This interplay between symbolic emphasis and tempo variation reflects a hybrid approach that balances historical awareness with contemporary sensibilities.

The analysis reveals the recurrent use of a seven-note motif, which appears in seven sets at the beginning. Furthermore, at the work's climax, Haydn employs a sextuplet performed by the full orchestra, which resolves on a seventh, conclusive note. Consequently, the researcher posits that the addition of an ornament for the timpani in the final measure, consisting of a double triplet followed by a final note to create a seven-note motive, would establish a meaningful connection. This addition is reminiscent of the seven occurrences of the motif in "Representation of Chaos" movement or the sextuplet motive at the opening's climax. Its application to the timpani to conclude the work would therefore clarify its thematic significance, culminating with the seven-note symbolic motif in the final 'Amen' chord.

The interpretation of symbolic motives is highly beneficial for creating a compelling narrative. An awareness of the seven symbolic motives identified in "Representation of Chaos" enables the conductor to emphasize and imbue these moments with significance. This, in turn, allows the overall musical expression to convey deeper, more engaging content. Conducting that communicates meaning stems from the conductor's profound understanding of the score, enabling clear communication through sound, an outcome achievable only through a thorough interpretation of the work. Leopold Mozart expressed this approach best when he wrote:

To read the musical pieces of a good master rightly according to the instructions.... Not only must one observe exactly all that has been marked and prescribed and not play it otherwise than as written; but one must throw oneself into the affect to be expressed and apply and execute in a certain good style all the ties, slides, accentuation of the notes, the forte and piano; in a word, whatever belongs to tasteful performance of a piece (Mozart, 1951, p. 216).

Although the ornamentation was less prevalent in the classical era than in the Baroque, it was still practiced. Therefore, as Leopold Mozart recorded, any addition that "belongs to tasteful performance of a piece" is justifiable. Consequently, the reintroduction of the seven-note figure in the final measure of the oratorio is considered appropriate. This figure serves a dual purpose: it symbolizes God's presence from the beginning to the end of the work and provides a powerful sense of completeness as a cadential final. When the conductor recognizes these seven symbolic points within "Representation of Chaos," they can communicate their significance through gesture, thereby emphasizing and narrating their meaning. This interpretative choice makes the opening movement more engaging and clarifies its narrative. Ultimately, these findings affirm that performance practice is not static but responsive to cultural, technological, and aesthetic shifts. For conductors, the challenge lies in negotiating this continuum, honoring Haydn's intentions while engaging modern audiences. Future research might explore how digital platforms and globalized performance contexts continue to reshape interpretative paradigms in canonical works. The semiotic elements examined, ascending seven-note gestures, the descending flute line, and the timpani double-triplet closure, demonstrate that Haydn encoded theological content not only in text or harmony but within instrumental motion. These motives are not incidental: Seven ascending tones signal divine completeness and order, descending benevolent lines signal grace proceeding from God to the world, and Cadential ornaments seal *The Creation* with ritual resonance.

5.3 Implications for the future

For conductors and performers: The findings in this study enable more purposeful interpretive decisions. Choices regarding tempo, dynamics, and articulation can be made with the specific goal of illuminating these symbols for the listeners, moving beyond mere convention or personal feeling. For example, a performer might emphasize the instability of the anticipations to heighten the sense of chaos or shape the seven-note figures with clear direction to convey the process of ordering. Tempo decisions must be tied to narrative function, not merely to metronome numbers. The conductor's task is dual, which involves understanding symbols and technical fidelity that preserves tempo continuity and maintains clarity in transitions.

For scholars and analysts: Agawu's framework, as applied here, is a powerful tool for decoding the layered meanings of Classical-era music. This methodology can be applied to other works by classical composers to explore how they used a shared "musical language" to communicate complex narratives and abstract ideas. The study can be applied to newly composed music for theater to express symbolic representations of various concepts that the composers wish to convey.

For creative application in performance: As demonstrated in this research, identifying these motives can inspire new creative choices. The discovery of the "Trinity" motive in the opening number led to its reintegration at the oratorio's finale in the timpani part. This created a cyclical return, framing the entire narrative of creation with a powerful, unifying symbol.

6. CONCLUSION

This research investigates two interrelated dimensions of Franz Joseph Haydn's oratorio, *The Creation*: the historical evolution of tempo interpretation and the theological significance of symbolic motives. Through a comparative analysis of performance data and a semiotic reading of the score, the study argues that these elements are not merely aesthetic choices but are fundamental to the work's narrative and theological structure.

The first part of the analysis, based on a comparative table of metronome markings (Table 2), reveals a significant divergence between historical and modern performance traditions. Historically documented tempos from Haydn's era, particularly those recorded by his student Sigismund Neukomm, are notably faster and more energetic than the slower, more contemplative paces widely adopted by the 20th century British tradition. The study situates a contemporary 2025 Thai performance within this landscape, demonstrating its alignment with the swifter historic and Austrian traditions. Critically, this modern interpretation is shown to employ tempo strategically as a narrative device, most notably by accelerating the final chorus to counteract narrative stagnation and restore the work's theological focus on divine praise.

The second part of the study decodes the symbolic motives in the "Representation of Chaos" opening number (Table 3), using V. Kofi Agawu's theory of musical topics. The analysis posits that Haydn did not merely "tone-paint" chaos but encoded specific theological concepts into the musical motive. A primary finding is the identification of a recurrent seven-note motive, internally structured as a doubled triplet plus a final note (3+3+1), which appears seven times. This is interpreted as a dual symbol: the number seven represents divine completeness (the seven days of creation) and divine perfection, while the internal triplet structure signifies the Holy Trinity. Other motives, such as descending chromatic lines and specific rhythmic patterns, are similarly interpreted as representing concepts like disorder and chaos. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that tempo and symbolic motives in *The Creation* are intrinsically linked. A performance that overlooks the work's original energetic pacing risks obscuring the function of its symbolic gestures. The research culminates in a creative application in the 2025 performance, where the primary symbolic "Trinity" motive from the opening number was reintroduced in the oratorio's final measure. This act of cyclical return frames the entire work, reinforcing its core message. Ultimately, the paper provides a framework for interpreting *The Creation* not just as a musical masterpiece, but as a profound narrative in which every structural choice is integral to the story of divine order emerging from chaos.

DECLARATION

1. Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The author used generative AI tools (Grammarly - Premium Version and ChulaGENIE) only for language refinement, clarity improvement, and minor translation support during the preparation of this manuscript. These tools were not used for idea generation, data analysis, or drafting the core arguments.

3. Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from publicly available musical scores, historical sources, and performance materials. No new datasets were generated or analyzed. Further details are available from the author upon reasonable request.

4. Ethics statement

This study does not involve human subject research. No personal or sensitive data were collected. The research is based on musical score analysis, historical sources, and performance interpretation; therefore, formal ethics approval was not required.

5. Funding

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6. Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT)

Charunee Hongcharu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing.

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