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The Creation: Haydn's Drama

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Haydn's use of drama in regard to his oratorio *The Creation*. To understand Haydn's use of drama, we considered three main aspects. The first aspect is the means by which Haydn came about *The Creation* text and the meaning it held for him. The second aspect is an analysis of the work, particularly looking at text painting, comedic elements, and orchestration. Finally, we will discuss the reception of Haydn's work and the importance it held in relation to the aesthetics of the time. *The Creation* was a staple of Haydn's work, and would prove to be a large influence on future composers, as well as writers and artists.

One aspect of music that keeps listeners coming back to a piece is the composer's ability to create drama. Eighteenth-century composer Joseph Haydn was well known for his symphonies, string quartets, and for helping to shape the Sonata Allegro form. Additionally, he was a composer of drama. Haydn's oratorio *The Creation* was successful and monumental during the 18th century. What seems to be a classic work by today's standards had a great impact on Haydn's contemporaries, and the future of musicianship as a whole. A large part of this work's success is due to Haydn's talent for creating drama within the work. Several elements were at play to create the success of Haydn's oratorio: the text easily lending itself to expression, elements of Handelian influence, Haydn's use of musical symbolism, and Haydn's skill in text painting and orchestration.

In 1795, while he was in London for the second time, Haydn was asked by Johann Peter Salomon, a fellow composer and impresario, to consider composing an oratorio based on an old text.¹ This text was written in English by an unknown author, detailing the events that took place in the Creation story.² Probably written fifty years prior to Haydn's *The Creation*, the text was originally meant for Handel to use; however, the composer never used it.³ Originally titled *The Creation of the World*, the text was primarily compiled from three sources: the Creation story from the book of Genesis in the King James Bible, the book of Psalms, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which was an interpretation of the same Creation story. The work is separated into three parts: the first part covers the first four days of Creation, the second part describes days five and six, and the third part details Adam and Eve's love and gratitude in the Garden of Eden.⁴

¹ Hubert Unverricht, "Salomon, Johann Peter," Oxford Music Online, 24 Jan. 2018.

² Howard E. Smither, A History of the Oratorio, Volume 3: The Oratorio in the Classical Era, The University of North Carolina Press: United States of America, 1987, 490.

³ Mark Berry, "Haydn's Creation and Enlightenment Theology," Austrian History Yearbook 39 (2008), 30.

⁴ Nicholas Temperley, *Haydn: the Creation (Cambridge Music Handbooks)*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 21.

Haydn was initially skeptical of the text, but agreed to take it with him to further consider Salomon's proposition⁵. When Haydn showed the text to his patron, Baron Gottfried van Swieten, he was immediately on board with the idea, and urged Haydn to create the work. Swieten took it upon himself to translate the text into German for Haydn. While Swieten used as much of the original text as possible, he chose to omit sections that he considered unimportant, while also adding elements that enhanced the music.⁶ It was Haydn's wish that the piece be available in equal facility in both German and English. After translating and lightly modifying the libretto, Swieten translated it back into English. The fact that it was published bilingually was remarkable, as this oratorio was the first to be published in this way.

While he was initially skeptical whether or not he wanted to compose the oratorio, composing *The Creation* became a positive spiritual experience for Haydn.⁷ The biographer Georg August Griesinger recorded that if Haydn had writer's block, he would pray until more ideas came to him. In addition, as Haydn was working on *The Creation*, he would pray for strength to complete the piece to the best of his ability.⁸ Religion was an important inspiration for Haydn, however, Handel was also a great influence for *The Creation's* artistic elements. When Haydn initially visited London, he was taken aback by the annual Handelian festivals held there. He had previously heard Handel's oratorios, but had never heard them in London. Through these experiences, Haydn cultivated an admiration of Handel, which inspired Haydn to use the elements he heard in his own works.⁹ This Handelian influence is present in much of the text

⁵ Ibid, 20.

⁶ Smither, 490.

⁷ Karl Geiringer, *Haydn*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1946, 144.

⁸ Berry, "Haydn's Creation...", 28.

⁹ Smither, 488-489.

painting, and also by the structure of the oratorio itself. Havdn utilized the chorus and soloist relationship within his works, varying them from number to number, much as Handel did.¹⁰

While the influence of both religion and Handel played a large role in *The Creation*'s production, Haydn's ability to express musical drama is primarily seen in symbolism portrayed within the music itself. Musical symbolism can be seen in text painting, which is accomplished by attaching an overarching meaning to different intervals, keys, sounds, and instrumentation. Haydn utilizes many of these elements in this work. Howard E. Smither notes the importance of the key of C. The oratorio begins in C minor in "The Representation of Chaos", eventually resolving to C major on the famous "Light Chord". C major is used at the end of part one and two when God creates the world and again when God creates man. However, at the end of part three, when Adam and Eve are central characters, the key is in B-flat rather than C. This change in key is symbolic in that Adam and Eve are considered to be lower beings than the angels, while also hinting at their eventual fall from grace.¹¹

In addition to the use of tonality to convey ideas, the most prominent element of Haydn's drama and creativity was his ability to portray real life phenomena in his music. The creation story easily lends itself to text painting. By far, the most famous movements of the creation are No. 1 and No. 2: the Representation of Chaos and the first Recitative and Chorus. The most iconic instance of this text painting takes place in the introduction, "Representation of Chaos", which is purely instrumental. The "Representation of Chaos" is particularly impressive because of how Haydn was able to convey the story without text. In order to conceptualize this introductory part of the oratorio, Haydn met with the British astronomer William Herschel to

¹⁰ Smither, 507. ¹¹ Smither, 498.

learn how the cosmos were formed.¹² Haydn supposedly told Silverstrolpe after an initial performance of the Representation of Chaos, "You have certainly noticed how I avoided the resolutions that you would most readily expect. The reason is, that there is no form in anything [in the universe] yet."¹³ According to F.S. Silverstrolpe, nobody, not even Baron van Swieten, could foresee the massive chord on the words "and there was light". He described the effect as being so captivating for the audience that even the performers had to stop for several minutes before going on with the performance.¹⁴

According to Nicholas Temperley's analysis, the movement is overall in sonata form. The chaos within the movement lies not within the form, but rather with the fragmentary themes, quick scales and arpeggios, ambiguous harmonies, and above all the denial of what would be expected.¹⁵ Specifically, to represent chaos, Haydn chooses to start with a unison C. In the absence of harmony, it is impossible to distinguish the tonality of the piece. As the piece progresses, varied rhythmic patterns appear and imply notions of movement within the chaos. As Mark Berry notes, the triplet figures and the ebbing and flowing dynamics suggests the tides, and the longer notes represent the sturdy earth. As the instrumental representation of chaos continues to build, there is a back and forth between chaos and order as the world is being shaped ¹⁶. Also famous is the first Recitative and Chorus, "In the Beginning God". Nicholas Temperley remarks that Haydn was happily given the opportunity to emulate some of the drama of Handel's choral writing, which made way for what is considered to be Haydn's greatest stroke of genius, the

¹² Geiringer, 311.

¹³ Temperley, 32.

¹⁴ James Webster and Georg Feder, "Haydn, Joseph," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed December 4, 2017,

http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/44593.

¹⁵ Temperley, 83.

¹⁶ Berry "Haydn's Creation…", 32.

"Light Chord". To extenuate the power of text, Berry points out, the first words sung in *The Creation* are in C major, the first definite tonality in the piece, and also sung at a fortissimo.¹⁷

In the recitative "And God Made the Firmament", there are numerous occasions where Haydn uses masterful text painting to represent the weather. Through our analysis, we found that in m. 7, shown in Example 1, when Raphael first states that God made the firmament and divided the waters, the idea of water is reflected in the orchestra through rising and falling sixteenth notes beginning in the first violins. He takes it a step further in m. 13 when portraying the raging storms, giving the strings and winds ascending then descending scalar lines. These lines enter at different moments, creating a sense of confusion which is then broken up shortly after when Raphael sings about the strong winds moving the clouds. Haydn has all instruments rest at during Raphael's phrase here, leaving his line exposed. He then eases back into two measures of scalar 16th note runs in the winds for the following two measures. Beginning in m. 22, we observed Haydn's foreshadowing of the coming thunder with descending lines in the violins that reflect the rolling thunder discussed by Raphael. "Dreary hail" is also reflected in m. 38, with eighth notes on the beat in the violas and second violins, and offbeat eighth notes in the first violins.

In the beginning of the recitative "Rolling in Foaming Billows", Haydn brings back the water representation in the strings with the rising and falling sixteenth note figures. This time, he also represents waves in the dynamics, with an ebb and flow between forte and piano every two measures. When Raphael enters, we observed a wave-like contour which belonged to the second violins. When Raphael sings "uplifted roar the boisterous sea", the winds and all the other strings play longer notes which rise with the vocal line. The imagery then moves to the clouds and the mountaintops, with Haydn cleverly displaying it through rising scales in the cellos, and then followed by rising and falling scales in the lower strings, reflecting the shape of a mountain.

¹⁷ Berry "Haydn's Creation...", 34.

Beginning in m. 53, Raphael sings "serpent error rivers flow", in which we noticed that Haydn symbolized the river through alternating sixteenth note runs between the first and second violins, representing its curves and bends.

In the air "Now Vanish Before thy Holy Beams", when Uriel sings the words "gloomy shades", the vocal line descends chromatically with the orchestra following suite. Haydn, starting in m. 39, reflects the feeling of order. We observed this as a direct juxtaposition to the chaos idea that opened the whole work. When Uriel begins to sing about hell's affrighted spirits fleeing into the deep dark abyss, Haydn foreshadows the frightened spirits by loud and accented descending eighth note figures in both the strings and the winds. Reflecting on the deep dark abyss, Haydn sets the vocal line to move down chromatically with the strings.

The second part of *The Creation* mainly covers the creation of different type of animals. The first large movement within this part is the Air "On Mighty Pens". We observed numerous moments of symbolism of birds and the sky throughout this movement. The first instance of symbolism shown in this piece is the genre of the piece itself. It could be a coincidence that a piece about birds would be arranged as an air, but it doesn't seem that Haydn with his skill of symbolism would do this on accident. This air is orchestrated using only the strings and woodwind instruments to give the piece a floating and light sound. We noticed many ascending runs and overall melodic lines that represent the moving air as well as the upward representation of flight. This piece also contains a lot of bird call imitations throughout, usually in the oboe or flute parts. Mm. 58-59 imitates the lark, mm. 66 and 71 imitates two doves. However, the most drawn out imitation was the Nightingale in mm. 137-142 which is repeated several times. The nightingale song is played in a relaxing legato section of the air. The bird imitations do not stop with instruments, in m. 190 the soprano herself imitates birds using trills and grace notes to

represent their short calls. Haydn does not just use the text and aural representation he also uses visual representation in the physical music. We also saw this in the Terzetto "Most Beautiful Appear" when the tenor sings the word "rainbow" not only does the melody create an arc, so does the music on the page, Example 2a. The second instance he says rainbow, several other instruments imitate a similar rainbow shaped melodic line, Example 2b.

The next important piece of the second movement is the Recitative "Straight Opening Her Fertile Womb". This piece describes an animal which is immediately represented by the orchestra. The first three lines of text are introduced with loud phrase with unison strings. A softer repeat of the phrase is then suddenly cut off by the "roar" of a lion, depicted by a low Ab for the trombones and contrabassoon accompanied by a string trill that is on a dominant seventh in third inversion¹⁸. The two quarter notes proceeding the tied whole note figure in mm. 7-10 imitate large beasts stomping. There is also representation of lions, and tigers. The stag gets grace notes and eighth notes to represent their frolicking. Following a tonal shift from Bb to Db, and then a shift to A, Haydn bridges into the cattle and sheep. Haydn here executes a compositional feature reminiscent of pastorals, adding a flute and a bassoon who play a light melody that is accompanied by pizzicato strings. Temperley notes the pause on measure 53 encourages Raphael to make an imitation of a "bleating" noise¹⁹. In measures 54-57, there is a swarm of bugs represented by strings with repeating 16th notes. The most comical part of the piece is the reference to the worm. The accompaniment slows down, and the note values get longer. We observed how the worm is represented with low notes sung by the bass soloist as well as a motive that could be described as a worm moving as seen in Example 3. The joke of this part comes from the smallest creature getting the longest and most drawn out introduction.

¹⁸ Temperley, 65.
¹⁹ Temperley, 66.

Of the secco, or simple, recitatives in The Creation, "Our duty we have now performed" is the longest by far being 39 measures in length. Falling between the two largest movements, it is the only recitative of its kind in the whole work that addresses any sort of human action.²⁰ Following Adam's opening of the recitative of "Our duty we have now performed", the tempo picks up after a double bar and an *Allegro* direction. The bass figures in measures 4 and 7 is a reference to the bass from the air "In native worth". In this new tempo, Adam and Eve speak of the unknown joys that they believed lied ahead for them. Adam urges Eve to follow him, to which she replies that his will is her command. A new tempo marking of *Andante* at this point reflects Eve's statement that it is God's command rather than her desire to explore the joys of physical love. On the word "Freude", joy, Eve sings a brief coloratura passage. Haydn clearly is not embarrassed to have the topic of sex in his work. This is not the case when The Creation was translated to English however, where certain moments were toned down.²¹

The impact *The Creation* had was monumental on the Western classical world. The first performance of the oratorio was a for a group of select people, rather than an open audience. Haydn conducted the work himself, and the impact was so great that the audience could not help but think about it for many days afterwards.²² Every performance of *The Creation* was extremely well received and highly profitable. Haydn even received a gold medal to commemorate one of the performances.²³ Well received by the public during Haydn's time, *The Creation* garnered a lot of respect from future composers, writers, and philosophers. French Romantic composer Hector Berlioz, who spent much time as a music critic wrote very highly of Haydn's skill as reflected in *The Creation*. In an essay detailing Berlioz's opinion on imitation in music and what

²⁰ Temperley, 65.
²¹ Temperley, 66.

²² Geiringer, 145.

²³ Geiringer, 148-151.

merit it holds, he compares Haydn's ability to text paint to that of Beethoven and Handel. Initially, he cites a letter by another historian who is discussing the value of imitation. This historian uses an example to essentially argue that imitation is valuable in music and art because while it can never be a perfect imitation, it is still an artistic expression and therefore is important. Berlioz appears to agree with this argument, however he goes further to make a distinction between artistic imitation and meaningless and poor imitation done simply for the sake of imitation. Evidently, Berlioz was less than pleased with examples of imitation in Beethoven and Handel's work. He believes that a poor use of imitation in their work lowered the quality of their music. For example in Handel's oratorio Israel in Egypt, Handel attempts to mimic the sound of the locusts in the string section. Berlioz believed that this imitation was "surely a regrettable" one and unworthy of music and of the genre of Oratorio. However, Berlioz is more than pleased with the way Haydn uses imitation in his work. He believes that the way Haydn used imitation and text painting is well done, because it follows the text and is quite agreeable.²⁴ While Berlioz believed that Handel and Beethoven had provided poor examples of text painting, he highly approved of Haydn's ability to text paint. Furthermore, Gustav Schilling believed that there was no greater sublimity in music than when Haydn wrote the "and then there was Light passage". He writes that this moment when God created light was a miracle and the music makes a marvelous impression as well. Haydn, deeply moved by it, once cried out at this point, "That did not come from me; it came from above!"²⁵

It is clear that the *The Creation* had a large impact on the Western classical world. Ripe with ingenious musical symbolism and talent, it was well received by every audience and critic it was performed for, and also held a special place in Haydn's personal religious beliefs as well.

²⁴ Le Huray, Peter and James Day, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1981, 484.

²⁵ Ibid., 474.

Haydn combined many elements of the natural world and carefully transferred them into the musical, in order to give his audience an immersive and almost supernatural experience. From the text Haydn pulled out what he thought was important, and even comical to hook the audience into the musical drama of the creation of the world. This piece, as well as Haydn, teaches modern generations that drama can be derived from anything. Using the correct musical tools, such as symbolism, text painting, and the like, any text can be brought to life in a magnificent way. Drama holds a listener's attention, and without it a piece such as this would not be as widely successful as it has been over the years. Haydn truly shows what it takes to be a dramatic composer through his work *The Creation*.



Example 1

Haydn, Joseph. The Creation, Hob.XXI:2. 1859. ISMLP. 2017. Web. 9 Feb. 2018.



Example 2a

Haydn, Joseph. The Creation, Hob.XXI:2. 1859. ISMLP. 2017. Web. 9 Feb. 2018.



Example 2b

Haydn, Joseph. The Creation, Hob.XXI:2. 1859. ISMLP. 2017. Web. 9 Feb. 2018.



Example 3

Haydn, Joseph. The Creation, Hob.XXI:2. 1859. ISMLP. 2017. Web. 9 Feb. 2018.

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Berry, Mark. "Haydn's Creation and Enlightenment Theology." *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2008): 25–44. doi:10.1017/S0667237808000035. Print.

Berry discusses Haydn's *The Creation* and how it embodies the Enlightenment in the way Haydn composed it. The author states that Haydn's composition techniques, along with his lifestyle, strongly support Enlightenment philosophy. He argues why people should view this piece as a progression to more Romantic ideas. This article is a great benefit to the paper because it provides in-depth discussion on *The Creation* and its many creative aspects, including descriptions of the text painting that Haydn composed through the whole piece. The author is a professor in England at the Royal Holloway, University of London. He has written five books and 107 articles about varying topics on music.

Geiringer, Karl. Haydn. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1946.

Geiringer's work covers Haydn's life in two parts. The first part is about his life with each chapter covering chronologically important commissions he received and locations where he resided throughout his lifetime. The second part is about his works which are separated into five periods of his compositional skill. The author wrote this biography because he believes that every few years a biography of a composer should be updated with more current research and information. This source is very beneficial to the overall paper because it contains information about Haydn as a person, as well as his major accomplishments. This book elaborates upon many different aspects of *The Creation* from performances to an analysis of the different movements. Some of the information mentioned in this book about *The Creation* include performance dates and performers, as well as how it was received by critics and the general population. Geiringer was a musicologist who got his doctorate from the University of Vienna. In addition to this biography about Haydn, he has written biographies on many other composers.

Le Huray, Peter and James Day. *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1981. Print.

This text by Le Huray and Day is a collection of writings about music from important authors, thinkers, and composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The author's intention was to outline the ideas and debates about music that were prevalent and popular, as well as outline examples of the attitudes of the music being composed. This collection contains many references to Haydn's *Creation*, and the composer. This information is particularly important because it represents how the society of this time regarded Haydn and what they thought of his dramatic elements. It is useful to understand how Haydn's peers regarded his

dramatism, as how well he appeals to his audience is an important aspect of his career. Le Huray was an organist and musicologist from St. Catherine's, Cambridge College.

Prunières, Henry, and Theodore Baker. "Musical Symbolism." *The Musical Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1933): 18-28. http://www.jstor.org/stable/738820.

The main point of this article is that music, similarly to other arts, has a large amount of symbolism. The author is aiming to explain the more intricate details of music to an audience that may not know its specifics. It explains different aspects of music and how they can be symbolic. This source discusses many components of music including rhythm, key signature, instrumentation, lyrics, as well as others, explaining what they represent when used in certain ways. This is a good source for discussing Haydn as a dramatist, although it does not specifically reference him. It is also a useful reference of what tools Haydn used in his piece. Baker was an organist and musicologist who studied in the Leipzig Conservatory and frequently wrote for the *Musical Quarterly*. Prunières was a French musicologist who wrote many articles about music.

Smither, Howard E. *A History of the Oratorio*. Volume 3: The Oratorio in the Classical Era. The University of North Carolina Press: United States of America, 1987. Print.

Smither features an in-depth history on Haydn and his work *The Creation*. The section on the piece goes into to detail on how Haydn found text for the work, the text's modification for text setting, Haydn's use of text painting, where his influences came from, and the public receptions of his oratorio. A particular aspect that the author emphasises *The Creation* is how similar the text-painting and orchestration style resemble Handel, and the way Handel was an influence on Haydn. These aspects of *The Creation* are important to understanding Haydn as a dramatist. This source offers valuable information about Haydn's process of working on the piece, and his influences and styles. The author is the James Gordon Hanes Professor Emeritus of the Humanities in Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Smither, Howard E. "Oratorio." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed December 4, 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20397.

Smither elaborates on the history and the development of the oratorio over the course of the past few centuries. The author discusses in detail about different types of oratorios, highlighting important composers or groups of composers who brought those oratorios to life through various compositional methods and influences. Throughout the article, Haydn's *Creation* is mentioned and brought into the context of the time it was written, and the importance it played in the compositional realm. This article is helpful for our purposes because it puts Haydn's oratorios, including the *Creation* into a light where it can be viewed in a more historical

context amongst other oratorios of the same time period. The author is the James Gordon Hanes Professor Emeritus of the Humanities in Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Temperley, Nicholas. *Haydn: the Creation (Cambridge Music Handbooks)*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Print.

In this book, the author offers many analyses into the origins and compositional methods of Haydn's *The Creation*. Temperley covers all bases in this resource, providing information about the origins of the work, details about Haydn's life, *the Creation's* overall design, compositional methods and styles used, and information about the piece's reception by critics. This book contributes a lot of very important information about Haydn as a composer, while also explaining how many factors of his life helped *the Creation* come to be. This source supports our causes for this project because it supplies a great deal of analysis of the music itself, and delves into the symbolism and compositional styles employed in the piece that attribute to the drama that Haydn brought to his works. This book is a part of a series of books about famous composers titled *Cambridge Handbooks*, also including books about composers such as Bach, Berg, and Handel. Nicholas Temperley is a professor of music at the University of Illinois located in Urbana-Champaign. He has written several other works on other composers and time periods in the history of music.

Webster, James and Georg Feder. "Haydn, Joseph." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed December 4, 2017, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/44593.

In this article, the author discusses key stylistic choices, aesthetics, and important compositional methods utilized within Haydn's works. Webster claims that within many of his works, Haydn often portrayed stylistic dualities of various moods or expressions, often contrasting them within his works rather than making them work in tandem. Haydn's rhetorical practices are also explained, focusing on his portrayal of characters and use of musical imagery in his compositions. This article is beneficial to use for the project because it explains in detail Haydn's overall compositional and stylistic methods. It includes multiple examples of preferences and strategies used in many of his larger-scale works including *The Creation*. Webster is the Goldwin Smith Professor of Music at Cornell University, and also has served as President of the American Musicological Society.

Wheelock, Gretchen A. Haydn's Ingenious Jesting with Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humor. Schirmer Books: New York, New York, 1992.

Wheelock highlights in this book the ways that Haydn created humor in his music. By discussing several of Haydn's pieces show in the different approaches Haydn took to add humor to various genres. She also defines the idea of a musical joke and humor within music. While Wheelock does not specifically mention *the Creation*, or does so very briefly, this source is useful in understanding what to look for in the Creation, to catch some of Haydn's humor and wit. Understanding Haydn's humor is important to us because this humor is another example of Haydn incorporating drama and *Affekt*. Wheelock is Professor Emerita of Musicology at Eastman School of Music from the University of Rochester.