

## **TOWARDS A CREATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR CHORAL CONDUCTING IN CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP PRACTICES**

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### **Abstract**

Choral conducting in church often follows routine and conventional methods, with the conductor's hand as the primary tool for shaping musical expression. However, conducting can transcend function to become an artistic and aesthetic act that enhances the performance. Music is vital in Christian worship, and when performed with excellence, it reflects divine beauty. This study applied a creative approach to conducting selected choral pieces to enrich worship experiences. The research utilised both descriptive and analytical methods. Descriptive research focused on applying creative techniques in live performances, while analytical research examined the structure and text of selected choral works. Data were gathered from bibliographic sources, discography, score analysis, and performance observation. The study also examined how various conductors employ creative interpretation to enhance musical expression. Findings revealed that a conductor's emotional insight significantly influences performance quality. Practical interpretation transforms written music into expressive sound, communicating the composer's intent and emotional depth. Beyond the written score, the conductor must animate subtleties not overtly notated, offering listeners a more profound worship experience. The study concludes that incorporating creativity in choral conducting brings vitality to music and enriches worship. It recommends that church music schools develop curricula to support flexible and contextual creative approaches. Further scholarly research is encouraged to explore the depth and impact of creative conducting in sacred music settings. Creativity in choral leadership stimulates emotional engagement and fosters a deeper spiritual connection among worshippers.

**Keywords:** Creative Conducting, Choral Music, Worship, Interpretation, Sacred Performance

## **Introduction**

Choral conducting in Christian worship has traditionally followed conventional patterns, with conductors relying on hand gestures, baton techniques, and eye contact to guide choirs and communicate musical intent. These gestures serve essential functions such as indicating tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and articulation. However, conducting holds significant aesthetic and artistic potential beyond these functional roles. Conductors do not merely direct musical elements; they act as vital intermediaries between the composer, the performers, and the audience, shaping musical experience in both expressive and spiritual dimensions.

In Christian corporate worship, music is pivotal in facilitating spiritual engagement and emotional response. Creativity, as a component of aesthetic value, underpins the effectiveness of music in these contexts. It reflects artistic beauty and interpretive depth, contributing significantly to the communicative power of choral performance. Thomas (2004) asserts that ethnography of performance is inherently process-oriented and participatory, positioning participants as active subjects rather than passive objects of research. This framework acknowledges a dynamic relationship between performance and audience, wherein listeners are not merely observers but engage in value-laden interpretations that influence their spiritual and emotional experiences.

Creative conducting, therefore, enhances the beauty and impact of choral music by combining musical accuracy with expressive interpretation. Skilled conductors creatively interpret compositions, applying imaginative techniques to convey the composer's intentions and evoke meaningful responses from worshippers. Just as a painter mixes colours to portray mood and narrative, a conductor shapes sound to deliver a powerful, often transformative message. The conductor's ability to bring the music to life with clarity, sensitivity, and dynamic

variation determines the success of the performance. This study explores a creative approach to conducting selected choral pieces in Christian worship. It draws upon Green's (1981) assertion that creative conducting should be grounded in solid technique and expressive intention. As Green notes, the conductor must "catch the spirit of the music" while maintaining clarity and avoiding capricious gestures. This principle guided the researcher's practical application of creative techniques during performance.

While the effectiveness of creative conducting has been observed in the work of notable Nigerian choral conductors such as the late John Aina (Apostolic Faith Church), late Col. T.C. Eru (Nigerian Army Band), late Prof. I.O. Idamoyibo, Dr Dayo Oyedun, Dr. Julius Dele Ogunlade, John Nwokedi (Nigerian), Dr. J.O. Ofosu (Ghana), Mathew Stainton (Toronto, Canada), and Ariel Merivil (Atlanta, U.S.A.), etc, scholarly research on this subject remains limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on conventional conducting methods, with little attention given to creativity as a driving force in choral leadership. This paper addresses this gap by examining how creative conducting can enrich musical performance and enhance worship in contemporary Christian settings.

## **Creativity in choral conducting**

Creativity in choral conducting represents more than artistic flair—a crucial attribute distinguishing expressive and impactful performances from mere technical execution. It embodies the conductor's imaginative capacity to approach musical interpretation with originality, flexibility, and vision. As Franken (2014) defines it, creativity involves "the capacity to come up with or identify concepts, options, or opportunities that can help resolve issues, engage others, and amuse ourselves and others" (p. 396). He identifies three primary motivations that drive creative behaviour: the need for novel and complex stimulation,

the need to communicate ideas and values, and the need to solve problems. These motivations resonate powerfully in choral leadership, where the conductor manages musical elements and mediates emotional and spiritual experiences within communal worship.

A creative conductor must be capable of interpreting musical scores beyond conventional parameters. This includes the ability to infuse the performance with dynamic variation, emotive gestures, and spiritual depth elements that may not be explicitly inscribed in the musical notation. Mezquita (n.d) articulates this notion, asserting that creativity involves “thinking outside of society's norm” and expressing the self through diverse artistic forms. In worship, such creativity becomes a spiritual act, enriching the performance's musical and devotional dimensions.

Durrant (2009) emphasises that “consideration of what counts as effective conducting gesture and communication skill can promote better conducting and, consequently, more expressive singing.” This suggests that the conductor’s gestures are not merely technical signals but communicative tools that shape how singers express and internalise the music. Creative conducting thus becomes a performative act that transforms the score into a living, emotionally resonant experience for both choir and congregation. Odusanya (2015) and Ojo (2017) underscore the evolving complexity of choral conducting in modern worship. Odusanya highlights the need for conductors to go beyond “counting beats,” stressing the importance of expressive gestures that reflect an intimate understanding of musical phrasing, dynamics, and textual interpretation. Similarly, Ojo (2017) notes that contemporary choral conducting demands an integration of musical, aesthetic, and communicative competencies. Conductors must comprehend the structural elements of music, such as rhythm, articulation, tempo, and expression, and possess the creative

intuition to guide the ensemble toward a spiritually uplifting performance. Alluding to this fact, Odusanya. et.al (2025), while referring to Ogunrinade, observes that currently, African women increasingly assume leadership roles in church choral ministries, using innovative approaches to overcome historical and cultural barriers. Women conductors and choir directors have emerged across various denominations, shaping congregations' musical and spiritual lives.

It is therefore imperative to note that, applying these insights, the researcher-conductor approached selected choral pieces not simply as a performer of written music but as an interpretive artist. By employing creative gestures and imaginative interpretation, the conductor sought to transcend the printed score and evoke a deeper level of engagement from the choir and the congregation. This approach affirms that conducting, when guided by creativity and sensitivity, becomes a dynamic means of spiritual and artistic expression within the framework of contemporary Christian worship.

### **The Conductor’s Effective Communication with Choir Members**

There are numerous means of communication that a successful conductor employs both in rehearsal and performance. Naturally, the essential communication style in a concert or other performance context will be non-verbal. In contrast, verbal and non-verbal strategies will be used in the rehearsal to instruct, provide feedback, motivate, correct, and praise. Choral conductors tend to verbalise their instructions during rehearsals, such as questioning, modelling, directing, providing video feedback, criticism, and praise. One must emphasise the importance of singers receiving reinforcement and qualitative knowledge through verbal and visual feedback. Singers of all ages are curious to learn about the function of their vocal mechanism while singing. The

qualitative knowledge that conductors can offer includes using various vocal techniques without damaging their voices, promoting acceptance of individual skill differences, and motivating personal skill development. Singers are usually appreciative of quality feedback.

Indeed, individual feedback can be an essential motivational technique in drawing attention to singers' musical and personal development and providing them with detailed feedback on individual progress and ensemble effort. A high-magnitude conductor maintains *eye contact* with the group and individuals throughout rehearsals; frequently walks or leans towards a chorus or particular section (*closeness*); has wide range of volume and speaking pitch; the voice conveys energy and enthusiasm (vocal volume and modulation); the arms and hands are used to help with musical phrasing; the body is highly varied and changes the size of conducting patterns to indicate phrases, dynamics, and similar things (gestures); the face conveys strong contrasts between approval and disapproval. Approval is expressed by grinning, laughing aloud, raising eyebrows, and widening eyes. Disapproval is expressed by frowning, knitting brows, pursing lips, and narrowing eyes (*facial expression*). Lastly, high-magnitude conductors have a "rapid and exciting" rehearsal pace: quick instructions, minimal talking, less than one second between activities, and frequently instructing the group while it is singing (Yarbrough, 1975, p. 138).

Effective communication is an essential attribute of the choral Conductor; the importance of developing an adequate gestural vocabulary is put forward by Durrant (2003). For choral gestures to be

meaningful, they must be linked with the vocal outcome. Inappropriate gestures can give misleading messages to the performers and can also distract the audience from the enjoyment of listening to the music. Other pedagogies have applied Rudolf Laban's theories on movement to choral conducting gestures to develop "stylistic artistry" through creative movement for musical expression. Their work argues that the joy of movement in conducting stems from the critical roles conductors have in influencing and shaping the sound of their ensembles. Studies on expressive conducting and its impact on musical and vocal outcomes have contributed to our understanding that non-verbal communication through thoughtful conducting gestures is a convincing way to elicit healthy and efficient vocal behaviour and expressive choral singing.

An obsession with technical instruction by the Conductor can hurt singers' perceptions of the music, as it is a series of technical exercises to master, and produce mundane performances that often fail to capture the music's expressive character. Expressive singing is more likely the result of expressive conducting, with the Conductor dealing with the expressive character of the music rather than just the technical. Even when learning new music, the Conductor needs to communicate the musical character to the singers and attend to learning the notes. Imagery and analogy are significant tools in communication. As part of non-verbal communication, movement from the Conductor and the singers is a tool for activating the "kinesthetic" approach to musical expression. Many choirs have movement as a natural part of their musical understanding in rehearsal and performance, notably in African choral singing contexts.

## Harnessing the Power of Creative Expression in Choral Conducting

### Curwen Hand Signals



*Do* – Make a fist with your hand facing down.



Straighten your fingers; bring your hand up to make a 45-degree angle with the thumb pointing up.



*Mi* – Keep the same hand shape, but move your hand so it is parallel to the ground.



*Fa* – Make a loose fist with your four fingers (palm facing downward), extend your thumb and point it down, almost perpendicular with the rest of the hand.



*Sol* – Straighten your fingers so the hand has the same shape as in *mi*, but tilt it so your palm faces you directly.



*La* – Curve the hand gently, with hand and fingertips facing down.



*Ti* – Make a loose fist; point the index finger upward at a 45-degree angle with the ceiling and back to *Do*.

The Solfege system dates back to the 1800s and has become a technique of teaching singing and aural skills. One of the popular music teaching methods is the Kodaly Method, developed in the mid-twentieth century by Hungarian composer and music teacher Zoltán Kodály. The Kodaly Method involved various educational purposes and subjects and was primarily designed to make music education in Hungary's elementary schools effective. Kodály borrowed most ideas about teaching music from some pedagogues, including some theorists in Britain and Switzerland. A theorist, in particular, Englishman John Curwen, gave Kodaly ideas about solfege. The Kodaly method uses movable-do solfege and adds one fantastic tool to the

system: the solfege hand signs. The solfege hand signs (called *Kodaly hand signs* or the *Curwen hand signs*) were initially developed by John Curwen but popularised through their usage in Kodaly methods. The idea behind the solfege hand signal is simple: each tone of the seven-note solfege system is given a shape for the singer to make with their hands when singing. All the hand signals can be produced using one hand and can be helpful for singers new to the solfege system. Using the solfege hand signs requires keeping one hand free while singing. These techniques are vital in conducting, too, as they can help the Conductor in his gestural approach.

To demonstrate effective communicative conducting during the performance, the conductor brought to the bare impressive interpretation of the selected pieces according to some musical signs and commands indicated by the composers and some new ideas introduced by the conductor after a careful study of the text, punctuation, melody, and harmony of the pieces. The conductor demonstrates how Creativity can equally be applied to interpret the selected choral pieces in a well-expressed and dynamic performance suitable for worship.

### **Conducting Gestures**

Bulwer (1944:1) states that "gesture is a form of non-verbal communication in which visible bodily action communicates particular messages in place of or in conjunction with speech. Bulwer's concept of gesture encompasses body language, thus transcending the use of hand signals in communication. Specifying when a body language is gestural and/or super-gestural is important. According to Brechet (1992:2), "gesture is a function of physical motion and attitude." Again, Brecht's view presupposes spiritual motion, as the idea of physical motion suggests the possibility of spiritual motion. According to Hatten (2004:4), "gesture is a movement that may be interpreted as significant, influenced by documentation, and an understanding of execution, style, and fashion." Although a conductor's gesture may be inspired by musical notation, style of music, and performance practices, Hatten's usage of "maybe" implies that his view is still under consideration.

In a study on meaning in music gesture, Iazetta (1997:7) states that "gesture is a form of body movement that can communicate" Bandt et al. (2007:16) in a study on interdisciplinary writing on sound, place, time and culture, similarly define gestures "emergent gestalts that convey effective motion, emotion and agency by fusing otherwise separate elements into continuities of shape and force" It is

noteworthy that it is gesture's ability to communicate or convey intentions that underscore its usefulness in conducting. These concepts of gesture reviewed in this study underscore that gesture in conducting is a form of body language aimed at communicating specific musical intentions and that it helps evoke specific musical responses from ensembles. While the relevance of these concepts is noted, it could be said that the literature has not specified the details that constitute gestures used in conducting.

The core skill of a conductor comprises different kinds of gestures, or somewhat different types of gestures that take place on different levels of gestural communication. These levels become apparent during the whole process of conducting, from studying the score to performance. In other words, what a conductor looks for in getting to know the music is what they intend to achieve in the end, in a sounding form during a performance. In the rehearsal process, the conductor endeavours to bring the music written down in a score on the one hand and its execution on the other, as close as possible. It seems to be a widespread belief that gestures are a self-evident matter when talking about conductors and conducting. Gestures are often understood through presuppositions. Nothing seems more evident than saying that a conductor works with and communicates through gestures. In addition, it seems that there are several very complex levels of gestural communication on which to operate that lie behind the movements of a conductor's hands, which are often understood as "choral conducting."

Conducting gestures can be understood either as a type of musical and performance gesture or as an individual activity someone is conducting. It is, of course, true that, in reality, the gestures of a conductor will, through training and professional experience, become automated. Eventually, conductors do not pay much attention to

beat patterns or how each musical thought becomes a gesture. They may not even realise precisely what they do to achieve a particular effect; an inspiring and personal interpretation would probably be impossible if they did. Knowledge of the technique becomes part of their natural language and expression. A conductor is not only one musician but a musician with an instrument consisting of as many as a hundred other musicians. There are different types of gestures; the technique of beating time, which can be learned with practice, is called *technical gestures*.

Technical gestures are the basic tools or physical material for a professional conductor to begin working. Taking the gestures to the next expressive and interpretive level, where they become what has been called *expressive gestures*, is a much more complicated matter. A fundamental difference can be seen between the technical and the expressive gesture. Every conductor is expected to master technical gestures, but there is also the chance that the expressiveness of the communication is not there. The conducting does not extend beyond mere time beating.

There is always the fact that the technical and the expressive/interpretational are very difficult to separate from one another in the first place. For one person, the technique is the way to express what there is to say; for others, any waving of hands passes as conducting. The different gestural levels shouldn't be seen as separate from each other; rather, the gestural levels are intertwined and together make an essential part of the process and the musical outcome. Marjaana Virtanen has come to a similar conclusion:

...exploring the gestures of the score can awaken images of the physical playing gestures, which indicates that gestures at different levels are in some sense inseparable. During the gestural negotiations of performers in rehearsal, the merging of these

different manifestations of gestures is apparent... (Virtanen 2007:26).

Gestures are inseparable. They are interwoven and used interchangeably. Together, they make an essential part of the process and the musical outcome.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that draws from performance theory, creativity studies, contextual theology and indigenous Practice. It provides a comprehensive lens through which creative choral conducting can be critically examined and contextualised within Christian worship. This study adopts insights from performance theory, particularly the works of scholars like Richard Schechner, which consider performance a ritualised, embodied, and communicative act. Although not directly cited, performance theory helps frame the conductor as a technician and cultural performer. In the choral context, the conductor mediates the sacred text (musical score) and the audience's experience, shaping the communal and spiritual atmosphere through intentional gestures. Odusanya (2015) supports this view in his examination of conducting as a dynamic performance that involves gestural symbolism, cultural meaning, and theological depth, especially within the African Christian tradition.

In furtherance, Odusanya (2024), while quoting Richard Wagner's submission that the concept of conducting emphasises the expressive nature of music, transcending and setting the appropriate tempo for interpretation and expression. In agreement with this, He also reiterates that Davey (2009:2) states that 'conducting is an expression of music that uses the whole body, conducting transcends keeping the beat'. However, Davey's idea of conducting as an art that involves using the entire body fails to specify how the body is deployed in conducting. Therefore, there is a need to

clarify how the entire body is used in conducting.

The study of creativity provides a psychological and cognitive framework for understanding the conductor's interpretative agency, which was also adopted. Drawing on Franken's (2014) work, creativity is viewed as a cognitive-emotional process that enables the individual to reframe problems, synthesise existing knowledge, and produce novel solutions. For the conductor, this means reimagining the score not as a rigid script but as a flexible guide that invites interpretive engagement. Green (1981) cautions that such creativity must be grounded in technical mastery, noting that "creative conducting is safe only when a state of genuine poise and confidence has arrived" (p. 240). This balance between freedom and control, imagination and discipline, is central to the theoretical grounding of this study.

Finally, this framework incorporates a contextual theological perspective, which recognises the importance of local culture and identity in shaping religious expression. In African worship settings, where music is inherently participatory and expressive, the role of the conductor is inseparable from the liturgical and cultural context. Ojo (2017) and Odusanya (2015) emphasise that African choral conductors must adapt global models to suit indigenous performance realities. This theory affirms the legitimacy of creative deviation from Western norms, favouring contextual relevance, spontaneity, and spiritual authenticity.

Integrating these theoretical strands of aesthetics, performance, creativity, and contextual theology, this study positions creative choral conducting as an artistic and a theological act. It highlights the conductor's interpretative role as a creative agent who shapes sound, meaning, mood, and spiritual resonance within worship. The framework thus provides a foundation for

analysing the practical demonstrations and interpretative choices observed in this study.

### **Analysis / Case Study of Creative Conducting in Worship Performance**

This case study explores the practical application of creative conducting techniques in a live worship. The performance occurred at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, during a corporate worship service on 7th June, 2024. The conductor-researcher led the Choral Ensemble in the presentation of three choral works, each selected for its expressive potential and theological resonance: *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing* (arr. R. Kingsley), *Be Still and Know* (SSA, Contemporary arrangement), and *Hallelujah, Amen* from Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus*. Each piece was chosen to demonstrate different aspects of creative conducting: hymn re-interpretation, meditative silence, and rhythmic articulation. The performance was structured to build from quiet reflection to celebratory affirmation, echoing the liturgical flow of Christian worship.

- "O for a Thousand Tongues" was conducted with extended phrasing and dynamic swells beyond the notated score. Breath cues and rubato were introduced in key cadences to reinforce the lyrical theology of divine praise. The conductor utilised expansive gestures and meaningful eye contact to elicit more emotionally driven choral responses.
- In "Be Still and Know," the conductor relied heavily on gesture minimalism to reinforce the text's spiritual stillness. Phrases were extended with visual breath markings. One notable adaptation occurred during a rest in measures 20–21: a silent pause longer than written was maintained through a

fixed, calming gesture that deepened congregational reflection.

- “Hallelujah, Amen” was presented with modified tempo and rhythmic emphasis inspired by African musical traditions. While the score reflects Baroque style, the conductor creatively infused the performance with a syncopated articulation and expressive dynamics. Vocal entries in the fugato section were cued with layered hand gestures to heighten clarity and intensity.

In all three works, the conductor departed from conventional beat patterns to employ a combination of expressive gestures, including:

- **Palm-over-heart gestures** to signal tenderness or reverence
- **Circular wrist motions** to indicate phrase continuation
- **Raised eyebrow or facial expressions** to mirror textual mood (e.g., awe, joy, solemnity)
- **Staggered cueing** of choir sections to encourage dynamic layering

These non-verbal cues reinforced the music’s emotional content and allowed the singers to internalise the theological messages beyond technical accuracy.

Feedback was collected informally through post-performance interviews and written reflection notes from choir members. Most choristers reported heightened emotional connection and greater musical sensitivity during the performance. Several noted that the conductor’s expressive gestures and flexible tempo adjustments enabled them to “breathe and feel the music more deeply,” encouraging more than technical execution, they felt spiritually immersed in the act of musical worship. One soprano remarked, “It was not just singing, it was as if the conductor was pulling the music out of our hearts.” Another tenor noted that the visual

cues helped him anticipate emotional transitions even before they were sung, allowing a more unified and expressive delivery.

The congregational response was equally revealing. Worshippers were visibly moved during the performance, responding with silence, tears, raised hands, and audible affirmations such as “Amen” and “Hallelujah.” During the concluding section of *Be Still and Know*, a prolonged silence fell over the chapel, as no one moved or spoke until the final cadence faded, a moment described by attendees as “holy stillness” and “spiritually weighty.” This level of engagement suggests that the performance transcended its musical form to become a vehicle for deep personal and collective encounter with the divine. These responses affirm Franken’s (2014) assertion that creativity fulfils a communicative function, satisfying the human need to express and receive emotional and spiritual values. Furthermore, it validates Odusanya’s (2015) argument that conducting African Christian worship must be culturally attuned, symbolically rich, and spiritually evocative. In such settings, the conductor serves not merely as a time-keeper or technician but as a spiritual facilitator whose interpretive choices can mediate profound moments of connection between music, message, and the worshipping community. Integrating movement, emotion, and theology through creative conducting is an effective conduit for spiritual transformation and musical excellence.

## **Addressing Challenges and Overcoming Obstacles**

While the creative conducting approach produced significant aesthetic and spiritual benefits, its implementation faced several challenges. These ranged from resistance to deviations from conventional rehearsal routines to limitations in choristers' interpretative readiness and institutional expectations favouring predictability in worship settings. A primary challenge was the resistance from choristers trained in rigid, beat-driven conducting methods. For many, creative conducting was perceived as inconsistent or lacking structure. Flexibility in tempo, phrasing, and visual cueing created discomfort, as it deviated from the norms they were familiar with. To address this, the conductor adopted progressive rehearsal strategies starting with traditional interpretations and gradually integrating expressive elements. As Green (1981) observes, creative conducting must stem from technical mastery and poise. With this in mind, the conductor-maintained clarity and structure while introducing new interpretive dimensions, fostering gradual acceptance and confidence among the singers.

Another notable challenge involved varying skill levels among choristers, particularly in interpreting rubato, staggered breathing, and non-verbal cues. Additional rehearsal time and sectional practice were required to reinforce expressive phrasing and encourage interpretive ownership. Reflective post-rehearsal discussions helped choristers articulate their emotional engagement with the music, strengthening their connection to the conductor's gestures and intent.

Institutional constraints also posed obstacles. Worship environments, especially in academic or denominational settings, often value time-conscious programming and traditional delivery. In such contexts, creative expression may be

viewed with scepticism if it disrupts established liturgical norms. The conductor had to carefully negotiate the performance structure with service coordinators to ensure that expressive liberty did not interfere with the service flow. This reflects Odusanya's (2015) emphasis on the need for conducting models that balance artistic expression with contextual appropriateness.

A broader issue lies in the lack of structured training for creative conducting within African music education. Curricula often prioritise Western classical techniques while neglecting indigenous or improvisational approaches. As Ojo (2017) notes, many African conductors face complex performance demands without adequate pedagogical support. The conductor in this study relied on self-directed learning, score analysis, and informal mentorship from experienced Nigerian conductors like John Aina, Col. T.C. Eru, Dr. Julius Dele Ogunlade, Dr Dayo Oyedun, Prof. I.O. Idamoyibo, John Nwokedi, (Nigerian) Dr. J.O. Ofosu (Ghana), Mathew Stainton (Toronto, Canada), and Ariel Merivil (Atlanta, U.S.A.), etc to develop creative strategies. The writer-conductor found that a creative conducting approach is meant to improve the quality of expression to enhance musical interpretation and communication in worship. Through adaptive pedagogy, intentional leadership, and interpretive openness, the conductor fostered trust and artistic risk-taking. Ultimately, creative conducting is affirmed as a disciplined, context-sensitive practice rooted in empathy, musical insight, and spiritual intentionality.

To demonstrate effective communicative conducting during the performance, the conductor brought to the bare impressive interpretation of the selected pieces according to some musical signs and commands indicated by the composers and some new ideas introduced by the conductor after a careful study of the text,

punctuation, melody, and harmony of the pieces. The conductor demonstrates how Creativity can equally be applied to interpret the selected choral pieces in a well-expressed and dynamic performance suitable for worship.

### **Discussion of findings**

The study revealed that a conductor's emotional depth and expressive ability play a crucial role in shaping the quality and impact of choral performance. Each conductor brings a distinct emotional energy and interpretive style that enlivens or flattens the musical experience. Conducting extends beyond maintaining tempo and giving cues; it is an act of musical authorship involving the sensitive interpretation of phrasing, dynamics, articulation, and tone. More importantly, it includes bringing to life the nuanced, often unannotated, expressive intentions embedded between the notes of the musical score.

As shown in the findings, creativity in conducting is not simply a stylistic embellishment but a reflection of the conductor's imaginative engagement with the music. Creative conductors reimagine familiar pieces by altering dynamics, adapting rehearsal strategies, or modifying phrasing to suit a particular performance context's emotional and spiritual dimensions. This interpretive flexibility demands artistic courage and contextual awareness, allowing the conductor to move beyond the normative to achieve deeper aesthetic and spiritual outcomes.

The transformative impact of creative conducting was most evident within Christian worship. By departing from rigid, mechanical patterns and adopting expressive techniques such as rubato, silence, and minimalist gesture, the conductor enabled the choir to connect more deeply with the music's emotional and theological content. This affirms

Franken's (2014) assertion that creativity meets fundamental human needs for expression and meaning. It also aligns with the insights of Odusanya (2015) and Ojo (2017), who emphasise the importance of cultural fluency and contextual interpretation in African choral leadership.

Moreover, the conductor's gestures functioned as technical signals and invitations into a shared emotional and spiritual space. The responses of choristers and congregants, including reflective silence, tears, and vocal affirmations, demonstrated the potential of creative conducting to elevate worship beyond performance into a meaningful spiritual encounter.

Despite these outcomes, challenges persisted. Resistance to change, varied performer readiness, and liturgical expectations posed difficulties. Additionally, lacking formal training in creative conducting remains a gap in many music programs. Nevertheless, these obstacles were managed through adaptive rehearsal methods and reflective engagement, reinforcing the conclusion that creative conducting is a disciplined, contextually grounded art form that integrates innovation, structure, and theological insight.

### **Conclusion**

Creative conducting has emerged from this study as a vital, though often underutilised, strategy for enriching choral music in Christian worship. Far beyond the mechanical function of keeping time, it positions the conductor as a theological interpreter, cultural mediator, and emotional guide. Through intentional gestures, facial expressions, and interpretive decisions, the conductor shapes not only the sound but also the spiritual atmosphere of performance. This expressive leadership transforms choral music from a technical act into a sacred experience, allowing performers and

worshippers to encounter the divine through sound and shared emotional engagement.

The findings reveal that when creativity is applied purposefully and contextually, it enhances the artistic integrity and liturgical depth of choral performance. Conductors who embrace creative approaches such as rubato, interpretive silence, dynamic gesture variation, and text-sensitive phrasing can communicate more effectively with choir and congregation, fostering

emotional resonance and spiritual connection. This study, therefore, calls for a reevaluation of choral conducting pedagogy, especially within African Christian contexts, advocating for training that emphasises creativity, emotional intelligence, and cultural fluency. Anchored in technical skill and interpretive insight, creative conducting is both an artistic and spiritual act that merits greater investment, scholarly exploration, and integration into the future of sacred music leadership.

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