



PAPER

Masonry and Music

Summary: The importance of music in Freemasonry.

Brethren, one of the first things experienced by someone joining freemasonry is that proceedings are most often framed with music. A skilled organist will play an array of accompanying music to enhance ceremonies. It is also a tradition that we sing to our ladies and newly Installed Master as well as someone who joins as an Entered Apprentice.

It is not surprising that music was originally created against the backdrop of nature. Historians would argue that there is evidence of early music through the artefacts found at early Stone Age sites, for instance, bones in which holes had been pierced and which have been identified as primitive flutes.

The earliest written records of musical expression are to be found in India, where 4,000 year old instruments, such as the seven-holed flute and various types of stringed instruments have been recovered from archaeological digs. In China, the traditional history of music stretches back some three thousand years. Music was also an important part of cultural and social life in Ancient Greece; musicians and singers had a prominent role in ancient Greek theatre in the 9th century.

The history of music amply demonstrates that it has been a truly progressive science although, much like Freemasonry, its earliest origin is somewhat clouded. However, enough has been discovered to trace, with comparative certainty, its advance from crude beginnings to its present form.

So, what then is music? According to different perspectives music embraces elements of science, mathematics, foreign languages, history and physical education. Music is undoubtedly all of these things, but, most of all, it is the art of arranging tones in an orderly sequence so as to produce a unified and continuous composition which is agreeable, pleasing and harmonious; as produced by musical instruments or by singing.

Other, less definitive answers can range from the cynical to the visionary:

- *'Music is the costliest of rackets'* – Dr. Samuel Johnson
- *'Music is the brandy of the damned'* – George Bernard Shaw
- *'Music provides a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without'* - Confucius
- *'Without music, life would be an error'* – the German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche
- *'Music is the art which is most nigh to tears and memory'* - Oscar Wilde

The composer Ralph Vaughan-Williams, who, it was suggested, was a Freemason, defined music as being, 'A reaching out to the ultimate reality by means of ordered sound'. Behind this statement is the concept of vision, a quest, a searching for something beyond us which we wish to contact; which may also be seen as a Masonic concept.

Being one of the seven liberal arts and sciences, music is commended to a newly passed Brother on his becoming a Fellowcraft. It bears an affinity to Freemasonry in several ways, and its careful study, apart from its practise, will repay the diligent craftsman whose talent lies in that direction. As a combined art and science it is comparable in one respect to both architecture in its operative form and speculative Freemasonry, having an exact science as its basis, and being dependant on art for its beauty and adornment. William Preston, one of the foremost Masonic scholars of his generation, said '*Music teaches the art of forming concords, so as to compose delightful harmony.*'¹

We are all aware that music and atmosphere go together. We might play relaxing music for a quiet peaceful evening, or listen to something livelier while socialising in larger groups. Recent studies show that listening to fast music whilst driving increases the rate of car accidents; and the 'Mozart Effect', that of listening to his music, is said to aid relaxation and increase intelligence. There have also been reports of farmers who increase milk production by playing music to their cows. While some claims may be exaggerated, there is no denying that music can suggest and affect our state of mind.

Freemasonry and music can be seen as comparable, because both are world languages, and a means of communication between peoples. It is a fact that peoples of different nationalities have their own distinctive music, and this can also be said of their Freemasonry as well.

Music would appear to have had a place in Freemasonry for many years. The first *Book of Constitutions*, compiled by Dr James Anderson and published in 1723 included four songs, and subsequent editions and pocket companions all contained a selection of similar songs. These songs would, however, be set to popular tunes, or airs, of the day and, when performed at a Masonic function, the brethren who would probably be sitting around a table with their song books open would sing unaccompanied. In 1725, a Masonic musical and architectural society was founded in London. The opening pages of a minute book contain a dissertation on the Seven Liberal Arts, and especially Geometry, Music and Architecture. Here is a short extract:

*'Musick and Architecture, the Happy produce of Geometry, have such Affinity, they Justly may be Stil'd Twin Sisters, and Inseparable; Constituting a perfect Harmony by Just Rules, Due Proportion & Exact Symmetry, without which neither can arrive to any Degree of Perfection.'*²

Bands of instrumentalists are known to have taken part in processions of the Annual Grand Lodge Feast. They were however prohibited by Grand Lodge in 1745 because of harassment from the so-called Grand Procession of Mock Masonry, whose members wore mock Masonic regalia and had instruments consisting of cow horns that were blown, frying pans and salt boxes which were beaten.

The manuscripts of the first orchestral music used at the dedication of the original Freemasons' Hall in 1776 are preserved in the Grand Lodge Library, although there is no reference in Lodge minutes of the use of organs, or other keyboards, until the latter part of the 18th century.

There was also a religious element with Masonic music, in that most of the early references would appear to be in connection with ceremonies of that nature. Church hymns and anthems obviously formed a part of Masonic meetings in the 1800's. We know this because their use became the subject of much discussion in 1895, from which the general consensus of opinion was that too many innovations were being introduced and that use of music from religious services was contrary to the non-sectarian spirit of Freemasonry. This view led to the edict that:

*'Grand Lodge is of opinion that instrumental or vocal music at Masonic meetings is not per se objectionable during Masonic meetings; indeed it has never objected to the use of Opening and Closing Hymns, the National Anthem, and Hymns, Responses, and Anthems at Consecrations; but care must be taken that vocal music is such that it is not identified exclusively with a particular form of divine worship and that it does not offend the susceptibilities of a particular creed since Masonry is open to the adherents of every faith which requires a belief in a Supreme Being...'*³

In Masonry many are searching for lost secrets, lost words. We are building a temple of our own body and spirit which will often need something outside and beyond itself to be complete. That quest is partly served by music in the Lodge room, not only the odes or hymns, but ceremonial music which can convey joy or sorrow but especially calm and dignity. Processional march music on entering a Lodge can create a dignified atmosphere and provide a suitable background for the Master and his Officers. Good music will also stimulate the mental harmony and so assist the Brethren to enjoy the ceremonies they are performing.⁴

As one of the liberal arts and sciences, whose beauties are inculcated in the Fellow-Crafts degree, music is recommended to Masons because as the *'concord of sweet sounds'*⁵ elevates the generous sentiments of the soul, so should the concord of good feeling reign among Brethren, that by the union of friendship and brotherly love, active passions may be lulled, and harmony exist throughout the Craft.

References

1. Preston, W., (1829), *Illustrations Of Masonry*, Whittaker, Treacher & Co., London.
2. Speth. G.W. (Ed), *The book of the Fundamental Constitutions and Orders of the Philo Musicae et Architecturae Societas*, London, 1725–1727., (1900), The Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No. 2076, London.
3. Board of General Purposes to Grand Lodge, *Information for the Guidance of Members of the Craft*, (2017), p. 44, United Grand Lodge of England.
4. Pearmain, A.I., *Music and Masonry*, (1988), Prestonian Lecture.
5. Shakespeare, W., *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 5, Scene 1.



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- Read at home for private study
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 - Followed by 'any questions'
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 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary

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*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version unless otherwise specified.

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling's dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his 'serving men', as follows: *'I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who'*. Rudyard Kipling

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