

# Mozart and Masonry

## MOZART AND MASONRY

By Paul Nettl

Reviewed by Bro. Michael Adam Neulander

Ever since I was a child, my father told me that “music soothes the soul of the savage beast.” When I was ten years old my father was attending the University of Miami, and one of the classes he was enrolled in was music appreciation. He would take me with him to the music library to listen to records of classical music as part of his studies. I was surprised that I actually enjoyed the music since it was not the popular music of the day. However, I think I really enjoyed the bonding time we shared between the two of us. I wound up learning to play trumpet in school and played in the school orchestra for several years. I have become a lifelong listener to classical music and opera; Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) being my favorite composer. My father passed away over thirty years ago; however, whenever I think of those times or listen to classical music I smile and have fond memories of that time we spent together. Therefore, when I joined Freemasonry over thirty-six years ago, I was pleasantly surprised to learn in the Fellowcraft “stair lecture” the prominent place Freemasonry placed on music in its philosophical teachings. In fact, music is one of the essential components to the classical system of education; known as the “Seven Liberal Arts.” Developed during the classical times in ancient Greece; the “Seven Liberal Arts” were the dominant and oldest form of education for all scholars in Europe. These arts were classified into two groups: the *trivium*, or lower studies—grammar, rhetoric, and logic —and the *quadrivium*, or higher studies—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The ancient Greeks considered knowledge of the “Seven Liberal Arts to be essential for all free men to properly take an active role in civic life.<sup>[1]</sup> Thus, I am not surprised that the founders of “speculative” Freemasonry continued to emphasize the importance of the “Seven Liberal Arts;” which were even taught in the “Old Charges” dating back to 1390 CE to the “operative” stonemasons.

Unfortunately, very few Freemasons practice what they preach today. Only a precious few Freemasons have any working knowledge in any of the “Seven Liberal Arts.” For example, I was disappointed to find out that the Grand Lodge of Tennessee does not even have the position of Lodge Musician as an officer in the Lodge. The Grand Lodge of Virginia, where I spent most of my Masonic career still does. As the saying goes, “the good Lord works in mysterious ways,” was brought to my attention recently. I have just recently rejoined Scottish Rite Freemasonry and attended the Nashville “Fall Reunion” recently. I was pleasantly surprised that music, both instrumental and vocal, played a central role in many of the degree conferrals. It was instant proof to me how the music literally increased the “spirituality” of the words and ritual lessons conferred. Thus, my recent experience reinforced my belief that most Freemasons have no knowledge of how important music was to our lodge proceedings up until the mid-twentieth century. In addition; most Freemasons have no idea that one of the greatest classical composers of music, Mozart, was a Freemason and composed beautiful music specifically for use in the Masonic Lodge. For this reason, I am writing a series of book reviews devoted to Mozart the Freemason in hope that I will spread “more light” regarding this most remarkable composer and Freemason. In addition; I do believe the quote my Dad used about music soothing the soul of the savage beast, was correct and is another

way of my Brethren learning how to use music to help “circumscribe their desires, and keep their passions within due bounds.” I am starting my spread of musical “light” with the German musicologist Dr. Paul Nettl’s (1889-1972) book, *Mozart and Masonry*.

As a historian, I believe in looking at history through the hermeneutic “lens” to understand historical events, and the motivations of historical personages. Hermeticism is essentially defined by historians and philosophers as the necessity to immerse oneself in the entire social milieu associated with a historical epoch to fully understand its significance on a particular historical event. Thus, modern historians are just waking up to the importance that Freemasonry played on social history during the Age of Enlightenment; some prominent ones are Margaret Jacob, David Stevenson, and Francis Yates. Nettl in this book clearly understood Freemasonry’s importance to the Age of Enlightenment when he wrote in 1957, “Among Intellectual forces of the eighteenth century, none is of such fundamental importance as Freemasonry. It is significant because it combined all of the humanitarian teachings of its time, systemized them, illustrated them, with symbols, and made them generally available in a coherent organization.”<sup>[2]</sup> I found Nettl’s quote a most beautiful and apt description of Freemasonry’s influence on one of mankind’s greatest intellectual movements in history. As a historian and classical music connoisseur I believe Mozart was the most influential music composer of the “Age of Enlightenment.” A brief synopsis of Mozart’s life is in order to understand my statement and the social and religious factors that acted to mold his life and music. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1756; his father Leopold Mozart was a renown violinist and composer in his own right. Leopold recognized his son as a child prodigy. Already, at the age of six, he performed for the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa. In fact, the young Mozart would travel throughout Europe to perform for several “crowned heads” during his lifetime. The young Mozart was a sensation throughout Europe. At the age of seven, the young Mozart gave a concert in Frankfurt Germany where one of the greatest luminaries in the field of literature during the Age of Enlightenment, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, was in attendance. Goethe was spellbound by the young prodigy’s performance and befriended Mozart throughout his life. Interestingly, Goethe an ardent Freemason, would be greatly influenced by Mozart’s passionate music, and Mozart would be influenced by Goethe’s passionate literature. By 1770, Pope Clement XIV bestowed the “Order of the Golden Spur” on the fourteen-year-old prodigy. It is necessary for me to point out that every author on Mozart has remarked on how important his Roman Catholicism was to his character formation from an early age. In addition, all authors have also acknowledged that it was Mozart’s fervent religious beliefs along with his zeal for learning and living Freemasonry’s philosophical teachings that acted as the “rule and guide” for his musical compositions. At fifteen Mozart directed his first opera, *Mitridate, Re di Ponto* in Milan Italy, to critical acclaim. At the ripe old age of sixteen, Mozart received the appointment as Salzburg Austria’s *Konzertmeister*. In 1781, at the age of twenty-five, he married Constanze Weber and they are blessed with six children. However, he would feel heartbreak four times in his short life since only two of his children lived to reach adulthood, these losses will be an influence on his music as well. At the age of twenty-eight Mozart “takes his first step in Freemasonry.” Initiated in the Viennese Masonic lodge “*Zur Wohltätigkeit*” (“Beneficence”) on 14 December 1784. He was passed to the Fellowcraft degree on 7 January 1785 and became a Master Mason shortly thereafter. Mozart also attended the meetings of another lodge, named “*Zur wahren Eintracht*” (“True Concord”). When Mozart’s father Leopold came to visit him in Vienna in 1785, he was initiated a Freemason in his son’s Lodge. Mozart would meet Brother Emanuel Schikaneder who collaborated with Mozart in writing the libretto for Mozart’s great opera

*Die Zauberflöte The Magic Flute*; which premiered on 30 September 1791 at Schikaneder's theatre. Its debut was only two months before the premature death of Mozart at thirty-five years old.[3] I will now write about some of the inspired Masonic works composed by Mozart.

Freemasons have used music in their ceremonies since their inception. Katharine Thomson in her book *The Masonic Thread in Mozart* uses a quote from the imminent German musicologist, L.F. Lenz, on the purpose of music in the Lodge that I think is quite spiritually uplifting. "The purpose of music in the [Masonic] ceremonies is to spread good thoughts and unity among the members so that they may be united in the idea of innocence and joy. Masonic music should inculcate feelings of humanity, wisdom and patience, virtue and honesty, loyalty to friends, and finally an understanding of freedom." [4] The essence of Masonic philosophy is centered around the notion of each Freemason improving themselves to become better men. One of the principal ways of doing this is through inculcating the feeling of humanity in each member causing them to liberally provide charity to not only the initiated, but to all they find less fortunate than themselves. Nettl astutely wrote that Freemasonry inculcates: "a positive attitude towards man and life, and broad affirmation of G-d. It is the realization that beyond the dark and material world there is a realm of light towards which all men must strive." [5] It is this "Masonic light" that so attracted Mozart to Freemasonry and inspired him to produce such works of musical grandeur that humankind had never heard before. It is time to explore in more detail two of Mozart's most wonderful works.

First, I draw the reader's attention to how to listen to most of Mozart's Masonic music. The best recording, I have found was the two CD set sold by VoxBox CDX 5055, easily obtainable on Amazon, look at the note below for full details.[6] Nettl's first composition he comments on is under two minutes long and is on disc 1, track 7 of the CD. *Song for the Fellowcraft's Journey*, for voice and piano in Bb major, K 468.[7] The music was composed on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1785, only two weeks before Mozart's father, Leopold, was passed to the Fellowcraft degree. Mozart's composition has the air of solemnity which perfectly matches the beautiful words of the poem written by Brother Joseph Franz van Ratschky. The first stanza of which is as follows:

You who now approach  
a new level of knowledge,  
stay firmly on your path,  
knowing that it is the path of wisdom.  
Only the undaunted man  
can approach the source of light.[8]

The last composition that I want to bring to the reader's attention was used in the 18th degree of the Scottish Rite Fall Festival that I just recently witnessed. This composition is one of Mozart's last, written just six months before his death. *Ave verum corpus, Hail, true body*, K. 618, is a motet in D major composed in 1791. It is a Latin hymnal for choir, string instruments, and organ; which is less than three minutes long on disc 2, track 5 of the CD. Mozart composed the motet to celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi. Musically, Mozart is able to draw one's attention to the suffering of Jesus as depicted in the Latin text. Mozart wrote this motet while composing his famous Masonic opera *Die Zauberflöte, The Magic Flute*. Thus, I agree with Nettl's assessment that this motet perfectly synthesizes Mozart's love for Roman Catholicism and Freemasonry.[9] However, because Nettl was not a Freemason I think he did not understand some of the more subtle symbolism that influenced

this sublime piece. I believe the work is clearly channeling a theme of resurrection for Mozart. First, the motet musically embodied a glorious transcendental quality with a serene motif that perfectly summed up the motet's final line, "Be for us a foretaste of the trial of death."[\[10\]](#) Secondly, this motet was also composed when Mozart's last child was born. Lastly, *The Magic Flute* like Freemasonry is replete with themes concerning resurrection. Therefore, I think all these facts taken together point to the real reason why Mozart's *Hail, true body* motet is the perfect synthesis of Mozart's love for Roman Catholicism and Freemasonry.

In conclusion, I first want to apologize for not writing at all about Mozart's Masonic opera *Die Zauberflöte*, *The Magic Flute* in this review. I will be writing about the opera exclusively when I review Jacques Chailley's book, *The Magic Flute Unveiled*. However, I hope that this review of Dr. Paul Nettl's *Mozart and Masonry* serves to "spark" a yearning for all Freemasons who read it to pay more attention to the advantages that listening to spiritually uplifting music can have on one's well-being. With the ease of using digital music today, we can easily introduce it into our Lodges. Thus, I hope that readers will have an appreciation for how the art form of music can become an added dimension of the Lodge experience by including it in their degree work.

## End Notes

1. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans., Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 37.
2. Paul Nettl, *Mozart and Freemasonry*., (New York: Dorsett Press, 1957), 3.
3. Ibid., 102-125.
4. Katharine Thomson, *The Masonic Thread in Mozart*., (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), 41.
5. Nettl., 4.
6. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Mozart: The Complete Masonic Music*, Conductor, Peter Maag, Kurt Equiluz, Tenor, Choir and Orchestra of the Vienna Volksoper, Vienna, 1992.
7. K 468. The Köchel catalogue (German: Köchel-Verzeichnis) is a chronological catalogue of compositions by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, originally created by Ludwig von Köchel, in which the entries are abbreviated K., or KV. The numbers of the Köchel catalogue is the continuing establishment of a complete chronology of Mozart's works, and provide a shorthand reference to the compositions.
8. Nettl., 46.
9. Ibid., 58.
10. Ibid., 58.