

# Mozart the Freemason

## MOZART THE FREEMASON: THE MASONIC INFLUENCE ON HIS MUSICAL GENIUS

By Jacques Henry

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 ending my spread of musical “light” with the third and last book review on this genre of history by French musicologist Dr. Jacques Henry’s book, *Mozart the Mason: The Masonic Influence on His Musical Genius*.

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. Henry in this book clearly recognized Freemasonry’s importance to the Age of Enlightenment when he wrote: “Among the currents of thought of the period, freemasonry stands out as one that has most deeply influenced intellectual society. In Mozart’s time, the Masonic order assembled everything that Europe considered brilliant. Thinkers and artists fully supported the great principle of Masonic thought, the betterment of man through the respect and observance of ideals of a rigorous morality.”<sup>[2]</sup> I found Henry’s quote a most incisive description of Freemasonry’s influence on one of mankind’s greatest intellectual movements in history. I am not surprised by his understanding of Freemasonry’s influence on the Age of Enlightenment since he: “Understood that in order to rigorously evaluate the influence of Masonic symbolism, it would be necessary to study it not from the outside but to live in it in its context within the fraternity and above all to practice the rite and its ceremonies.”<sup>[3]</sup> Henry elaborates on this sentiment in his thesis for the book. He essentially takes a “deep dive” in analyzing the initiatory symbols and Masonic philosophy to “see” the “light” they projected on Mozart. Similar to Paul Nettle and Jacques Chailley whose books I have previously reviewed; Henry fully understood how the light of Freemasonry had a profound influence on Mozart’s music.

As a historian and classical music connoisseur I believe Mozart was the most influential music composer of the “Age of Enlightenment.” I will skip writing a brief synopsis of Mozart’s life in this book review since I did so in the review of Dr. Paul Nettle’s book *Mozart and Masonry*. However, for this book review it is necessary for me to point out two important moments in Mozart’s life that not only influenced his music, but also allowed him to influence two other institutions of the day, the Monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church. I think that unlike any other Freemason of his time Mozart was uniquely suited to be the best spokesperson for the Fraternity to allay the fears that the Austrian government and the Roman Catholic Church held regarding Freemasonry. I think that there are two examples from Mozart’s early age to prove this point. Mozart throughout his life was a staunch supporter of the Austrian monarchy. The precocious six-year-old performed for the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa and then climbed up onto her lap and kissed her on the cheek. From that time until his death, he was always a welcomed visitor at court not only by the Empress, but by her two sons who reigned after her. At the age of fourteen, Mozart had already composed beautiful religious music and performed for Pope Clement XIV. The Pope was so moved by the religious fervency this child prodigy displayed that he bestowed on him the monastic “Order of the Golden Spur.” Thus, from an early age, Mozart’s zeal for his Roman Catholicism never waned; he was composing spiritually uplifting music for his Church until his death.<sup>[4]</sup>

All three authors whose books I have reviewed 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. Thus, at the age of twenty-eight Mozart "took 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 met two Lodge Brothers that had a profound influence on Mozart's musical works. Emanuel Schikaneder was an actor, theatre owner and playwright. He would become very friendly with Mozart, producing many of Mozart's operas in his theatre and he wrote the libretto for Mozart's great opera *Die Zauberflöte*, *The Magic Flute*. Thus, Schikaneder as a fellow artist like Mozart really served as a "kindred spirit" in helping Mozart produce Masonic music. Mozart was drawn into Baron Ignaz von Born's, "orbit of influence" soon after he was initiated a Freemason. Born was the General Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Austria and was one of the great luminaries of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. Mozart obviously admired Born so much that he composed a cantata in his honor. *Die Maurerfreude Masonic Joy* K. 471 was composed to honor Born on April 20, 1785. I will write more about this composition later in this review. Born was a major progenitor of the idea that much of Freemasonry's rituals were borrowed from the ancient Egyptian Mysteries. There is no doubt most of the Masonic knowledge and philosophy that Mozart learned came from the very close relationship Mozart had with Born. Thus, it is not surprising that both Mozart and Schikaneder would rely heavily on Born's intellect and why the opera is "dripping" with Egyptian motifs.[\[5\]](#)

Freemasons have used music in their ceremonies since their inception. However, Henry's studies of Mozart's Masonic compositions showed him how Mozart transcribed the Masonic symbolism he had learned from Born and in the Lodge into spiritual inspiration which is so evident in his musical compositions. "It is miraculous how Mozart understood the esthetic and spiritual potential of this transcription, realizing perfectly the appropriateness between the message contained in the symbol and the inspiration carried by the music."[\[6\]](#) Henry had a list of several compositional devices that Mozart used to transcribe Masonic symbolism into spiritually uplifting Masonic music, I include a few of the following from his list. "The key with three sharps or three flats. The march, always slow and of a processional character. Beats (or beating: the 'knocks' of Masonic ritual."[\[7\]](#)

It is time to explore in more detail some 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.[\[8\]](#) I am going to look at some different compositions in this review from what I covered in my previous review of Dr. Paul Nettl's book *Mozart and Masonry*. The first composition I will explore I mentioned earlier in this review; it is *Die Maurerfreude Masonic Joy* K. 471[\[9\]](#) was composed to honor Mozart's mentor Baron Ignaz von on April 20, 1785. The cantata is seven minutes long and is on disc 1, track 8 of the CD. *Masonic Joy*, composed for a tenor, chorus, and chamber orchestra in E flat major, which is a key very prominent in Mozart's other Masonic compositions including his opera *The Magic Flute*. Henry described Mozart's composition as having the air of "heroism" about it. The beautiful words of the poem were written by Brother Franz Petran. The first stanza of which is as follows:

See how nature gradually reveals her face

to the inquiring mind;  
see how she, with great wisdom,  
fills the mind and heart with virtue;  
that is a feast for the Mason's eyes,  
the true, burning joy of Masonry.[\[10\]](#)

Another Mozart composition I draw your attention to was composed as to honor Emperor Joseph II because he allowed Freemasonry to continue to flourish in Austria. *Ihr unsre neuen Leiter, You, Our New Leaders* in G major K. 484, on disc 2, track 1 of the CD. It was composed for a tenor, choir, and organ, it is a little over two minutes in length.

This piece is an homage to enlightened leadership and Masonic morality. It was written at a most prolific time period in Mozart's life. No doubt that he received so much joy from his initiation into Freemasonry and it really got his creative "juices" flowing. Henry aptly believed that: "He delighted in proclaiming his new convictions with pleasure and insistence."[\[11\]](#) The words of the poem were written by Brother Augustin Veith Edler von Schittlersberg. The first stanza of which is as follows:

You, our new leaders,  
we thank now for your loyalty;  
lead us further along the path of virtue,  
so that each can rejoice in brotherhood,  
which unites him with better people  
and sweetens the cup of life.

There is no doubt that this yearning for drinking from "the cup of life" is what so attracted Mozart to Freemasonry and inspired him to produce such works of musical grandeur that humankind had never heard before.

Since Henry is a Freemason, I wanted to bring to the reader's attention a key concept of Mozart's great opera, *Die Zauberflöte, The Magic Flute* K. 620, that Henry so astutely focused on in his book.

I will be writing about the opera exclusively in the book review of Jacques Chailley's book, *The Magic Flute Unveiled*. The best recording, I have found was the two CD set sold by EMI Classics: played by the Philharmonia Orchestra, and conducted by Otto Klemperer, Tenor Nicolai Gedda, Soprano Gundula Janowitz, originally recorded in 1964, digitized and produced on CD 1994. The libretto was written by Freemason Emanuel Schikaneder, and with a fair amount of collaboration from Baron Ignaz von Born, General Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Austria. *The Magic Flute* 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. The opera was a great success, one of its great admirers was none other than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Several years earlier Goethe was spellbound by the young prodigy's performance in Frankfurt 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. Henry reports that: "Goethe, also a freemason, perceived perfectly the profound meaning of the work and the value of its message. He considered *The Magic Flute* to be one of the most beautiful and most noble of opera; even began writing a sequel to it."[\[12\]](#) I think Henry detected the key philosophical concept of the opera, I am sure it was what Goethe saw as well. "Can good vanquish evil? Can any layman be initiated? In spite of the diversity of their culture, their beliefs, or their social standing, all men have a right to attain happiness and love. For such a subject one must have a morality similar to that referred to in the libretto: the man who takes as an ideal the attainment of the light reaches through initiation to a greater, purer happiness and a more perfect love."[\[13\]](#)

In conclusion, I hope that my review of French musicologist Dr. Jacques Henry's book, *Mozart the Mason: The Masonic Influence on His Musical Genius*, 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. I am also hopeful that my review will arouse a curiosity for all Freemasons listen to or view the opera. It is a rare occurrence when any art form takes up the subject of Freemasonry; we should support those endeavors so that it might persuade other artists to do the same. I also hope that the reader gained an appreciation for the musical genius that Mozart was. 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.

1. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans., Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 37.
2. Jacques Henry's book, *Mozart the Mason: The Masonic Influence on His Musical Genius*. Trans., Jack Cain, (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1991), 2.
3. Ibid., XVI.
4. Ibid., 2-14.
5. Ibid., 2-14.
6. Ibid., 18.
7. Ibid., 24.
8. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Mozart: The Complete Masonic Music*, Conductor, Peter Maag, Kurt Equiluz, Tenor, Choir and Orchestra of the Vienna Volksoper, Vienna, 1992.
9. 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.
10. Henry., 4, 25, 28, 55.
11. Ibid., 68.
12. Ibid., 105.
13. Ibid., 110.

