



The Organist

Brother , you have been appointed (or elected) Organist of this Lodge, and I now invest you with the jewel of your office. It is your duty to conduct and preside over the musical part of our ceremonies. Your early attendance is desirable.

Installation, Canadian Work, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

There is no doubt that a skillful organist can add an exciting dimension to every Masonic ceremony. Music can play an enormous role in adding emotional depth to any occasion. That's especially true when it comes to Masonic events like officers' installations, degree ceremonies, and even regular lodge meetings. And yet for many Masonic organizations, the lack of a regular organist or musician makes it difficult to tap into the power of musical accompaniment to heighten the impact of the ritual.

Jewel of the Organist - Harp



Historical

The presence of a pipe organ in Masonic lodges still represents to many freemasons a sine qua non in terms of lodge furnishings, and the position of lodge organist remains a prized one. However, while the tradition of appointing a lodge organist flourishes, the heyday of the pipe organ in English masonic lodges (c.1850-c.1950) is long gone and pipe organs have been steadily disappearing from lodges, to be replaced by an electronic keyboard, or even just a CD player. Of course, English masonic lodges are responsible only to themselves for the management of their estate and are free to make their own decisions, but a serious consequence of this shifting musical landscape of disappearing pipe organs is that in many cases the documentary history of an instrument disappears with it. Thus the record of a significant slice of English masonic heritage, and of England's musical history, is steadily being eroded and lost to posterity.



Traditional Pipe Organ

Music has been integral to freemasonry from its establishment in the early years of the eighteenth century. The inclusion of songs set to music in James Anderson's first edition of *The Constitutions of the Freemasons* (1723) is clear evidence for this. Less well known is that in London during the 1730s and 40s freemasons pioneered the use of marching bands. These were used to accompany each year's newly-elected Grand Master in a spectacular procession of freemasons through the streets of Westminster and the City of London to the annual Grand Feast, held in a City livery hall.

At other times the singing of Masonic songs, led by celebrated Masonic actors, was a well-documented feature of London freemasons' annual night out at the theatre during the same period, no doubt with the theatre orchestra playing its part. Despite eighteenth-century English freemasonry's exuberant public music-making, musical instruments were unknown in the privacy of the Masonic lodge, which by tradition in those days met in the private, upper room of a tavern. Here music-making was restricted to a relatively small repertoire of songs, sung to simple unaccompanied harmonization's, not only during the work of the lodge, but during the shared meal at the mid-point of the meeting, and in the informal time after the lodge closed.

From 1772 the influential Masonic writer William Preston (1742-1818) advocated an elaborate formal role for orchestral instruments and groups of singers in Masonic lodges in his

Illustrations of Masonry (which ran to many editions in his lifetime), but there is no evidence that Preston's grand design for Masonic music-making was ever adopted. The scale of Preston's musical aspirations was unrealistic and impractical for the vast majority of eighteenth-century English lodges. The pipe organ made its first appearances in English freemasonry with the advent of regional Masonic halls in the late eighteenth century, but the impetus for the inclusion of an organ in these halls was commercial rather than Masonic. It must be remembered that to pay their way these purpose-built halls occasionally had to double as public spaces available for hire.

So for example, in the new Freemasons' Hall, London, an organ was not originally part of the plan for the building, and for the hall's inauguration in 1776 it was a hired organ that accompanied the choir and orchestra in the newly-commissioned celebratory ode that marked the event; the same ode was used two years later for the opening of a new Masonic hall.

It was not until 1812 that the national (though largely symbolic) role of Grand Organist was created for the influential Catholic musician Samuel Wesley (1766- 1837). It is worth noting here the significant contribution that Masonic halls made to the development of public sociability in late eighteenth-century England. The 'Masonic audiences' were well known for their orderly and civilized behavior, and people's experience of concerts in Masonic halls played an important role in the development of the modern concert audience.

A unique Masonic hall organ surviving from this period is the substantial instrument built in 1785 by north-east organ builder John Donaldson (d.1807), which is still to be found in its original position on a gallery in the Grade 1 listed Masonic hall that opened in Sunderland in 1785, the second hall on this site.

This hall, which is surprisingly small by modern standards, had a public use when not being used for purely Masonic purposes, just like other Masonic halls of its type. Certainly, from what we know of eighteenth-century English freemasonry the Sunderland organ was not designed for the day-to-day work of the freemasons who met in the hall.

Nonetheless, this is by any standards a valuable, historic English instrument; it is the only surviving work by Donaldson in its original location, and since the Sunderland hall records are intact, this organ's history is available, (though not yet fully researched), thus making accurate restoration possible in the future.

During the nineteenth century, numerous English Masonic lodges moved from meeting in taverns into their own local, purpose-built Masonic halls where a pipe organ was considered as standard. This was not so much a reflection of the tradition of the organs found in the regional halls that had been established in the eighteenth century, but was rather a reflection of the

Victorian vogue for pipe organs which by then were installed across England in every ambitious church, chapel, meeting hall, Masonic lodge and stately home.

The shift from tavern to purpose-built lodge premises not only reflected the rapid spread of freemasonry among the burgeoning well-to-do urban middle classes who were able to contemplate owning their own lodge premises, but also reflected newly-emerging ideas about male respectability and propriety that excluded the tavern and valued sobriety.

These numerous local Masonic halls did not normally have a public function, as had been the case with the few regional halls of the eighteenth-century.

The tradition of lodge music, with its echoes of tavern culture, was ill-suited to the new lodge environment, and so the process of appropriating a new musical repertoire from the unimpeachable sources of church and chapel began. Christian hymns and psalms, and new music inspired by them, expressing sentiments thought to validate freemasonry's fraternal tenets, began to dominate

Inexpensive, commercially produced editions of lodge music from the middle of the nineteenth century until the zenith of such publications in the early decades of the twentieth, and the enlightened, convivial and inclusive song culture of eighteenth-century English freemasonry was completely erased. Such a shift was inevitable given that lodge organists were de facto already church or chapel organists, and that an invigorated Christianity provided the framework for English notions of social order and respectability.

The pipe organs that were installed in England's new wave of lodge premises were by any standards modest. They were not designed as concert instruments but designed simply to support corporate singing, and to create a suitably solemn atmosphere that was quite distinct from the convivial Masonic bonhomie of tavern lodges.

The tonal consistency of these modest English instruments, by whichever organ builder, across many decades and in all parts of the country, makes it possible to view these Masonic pipe organs of the nineteenth and early twentieth century's as a distinct type. They not only represent a significant part of English freemasonry's cultural heritage but, arguably, they also make a distinctive contribution to the nation's wider cultural heritage.

Modern Music in Canadian Lodges

We do know of the Grand Organist and Lodge Organist office coming into being and that cost to maintain organs and skilled Masons to play has dwindled the use of music to the lodge.

We are not a religion but the atmosphere that is portrayed in lodges is one of sanctification, hallowed. As such the choice of music in a lodge should be carefully considered. Different from music that would be reused at a festive board.

Opening odes and closing odes as well as music for each of the degrees has gone....sad to say. We should perhaps consider writing these in this document. (I have the Haida Lodge set of odes to assigned specialized times through the degrees. Haida opened in 1955 (56 consecration - when I attend in 1974 the cards were not being handed out. (18 years come and gone!)

In most cases the odes were written with a specific hymn tune in mind. And you have hinted to that with the Organist being a member of the church and playing an organ on Sundays. The name (title of the tune) suggested to accompany the ode might also be worth adding. If we want to return to some traditions of lodges then such details should be recorded.

In our second degree it is the time the candidate is reminded (introduced) to be seven liberal Arts and Sciences. Music is one of them. We should certainly remind us all of the value music gives to the candidate

Ancient - Music teaches the art of forming concords (Concord Lodge No 79 GLBC&Y) so as to compose delightful harmony by the mathematical and proportional arrangement of acute, grave and mixed sounds.

Canadian - not much is mentioned but that Music is one of the 7 Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Emulation - Similar to Canadian Ritual.

Thus perhaps to the Ancient work we should identify some of the characteristics of music played in lodge - producing delightful harmony both in sound and within the connections of Mason with Mason.

There is little doubt that music enhances the messages of the degrees. Recall the candidate being blind in the opening hears much more.

Choice of music has to be carefully made.

Musical instruments - A classical guitar playing appropriate music is excellent, even bringing to music from the 18th century - if a lodge has a brother so skilled. Oh how I wish I could play like Segovia, Julian Bream, even Linda Boyd.

Organs - You mentioned modern organs now all electronic and the sounds technology is

producing is so close to real pipe organs is very difficult to hear the difference. Read about Allen Organs. Likewise with Keyboards which have sound keys for harpsichord, guitar, organ, and grand piano - one would be hard pressed to know the difference from the real instrument.

I have strong background of Cathedral Choirs and organ music. Have about 30 CDS of organ music and even some old LPs as well. Would be willing to help with choice of music, but only if the Lodge agrees. Do not wish to interfere with lodge life.

The use of a Bose speaker and Bluetooth technology, it is amazing what can be produced to return to that true atmosphere of a lodge room.

Key are two decisions - a brother who has the background with music and the traditions of a lodge. Personally I would not attend a lodge where the organ plays honkey-tonk music even as the brethren gather. The atmosphere within the sacred space is paramount. However, fix the lodge just wants music, best of luck that what is offered enhances the sacred ceremony of the lodge, whether opening, closing, and degrees conferred.

Position of Organist (Director of Music)

The position of organist gives you a better understanding of where the office came from. When you consider that several composers of music have been masons – Haydn, Sibelius, Mozart, - and what music they may have played at Lodge meetings, one may begin to understand the impact of music in a lodge meeting.

Rituals offer little information on Music in a lodge. In all cases Music is referred to in the list of the Severn liberal Arts and Sciences and incidentally through discussion of the five senses (hearing)

It is to the Ancient work that there is a little more understanding of Music.

“Music teaches the art of forming concords (accord, consensus, concurrence, unity) so as to compose delightful harmonies by the mathematical and proportional arrangement of acute, grave and mixed sounds.”

There is nothing there to suggest information given to an officer in the position of Director of Music, but the use of ‘harmony’ as a descriptive word could suggest that the Director’s purpose is to build the harmony of the lodge room in preparation for certain rites and ceremonies about to be conducted.

It was the custom – and believed to still exist in several lodges the singing of verses and odes during the opening and closing, and the conferring of degrees. Music of such was created during the 19th century with a strong influence of the Church. Thus tunes used were for popular tunes used in singing hymns.

Choice of Music.

Opening Ode – Tune (7.7.7.7.)

*Hail, Eternal! by Whose aid
All created things were made;
Heav'n and earth Thy vast design;
Hear us, Architect Divine!*

*May our work, begun in Thee,
Ever blest with order be;
And may we, when labours cease,
Part in harmony and peace.*

*By Thy glorius Majesty,
By the trust we place in Thee;
By the badge and mystic sign,
Hear us, Architect Divine!*

So mote it be. [from Irish Freemasonry website]

Perhaps today newer music is requested and desired. So here is where the Director can help.

It is rare that a lodge will have a brother who plays an instrument. IF a lodge is lucky it should seek the brother's help to create music for the lodge meetings.

As much as there might be wishes for modern music – popular tunes from recent decades to be included in the choice of music for a lodge meeting, there will be times when perhaps the choice does not fit with the intended mood of the meeting at certainly times. The Director should carefully select music accordingly. He has the choice of playing it himself or perhaps using a CD track from a personal collection which gives to the meeting that further dimension of sanctity.

Musical instruments

Although organs are not an instrument that all lodges use, some will have electronic organs while others may be fortunate to have a full 88 note keyboard with several alternate voices available when being played – organ, harpsichord, guitar. Any music that fits with the environment of the ritual or ceremony will be helpful.

Alternatively, with the fast development of electronics and the easy access to all music through iPhones, a whole new dimension becomes available. Bose has a series of loudspeakers which can be connected electronically through blue-tooth. The speaker can be placed in any part of the room and be controlled through an iPhone. It could be that a brother has a CD of suitable music, which can be downloaded on his personal iPhone and to be played in the lodge room. This kind of creative use to achieve music for a lodge meeting has begun to bring back the importance of Music in our work.

Assignment

Locate a Masonic Organ within your jurisdiction and write its history

Refernces

English Masonic Lodges, Pipe Organs and National Heritage
Andrew Pink, January 2007
<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/2484/1/2484.pdf>