

Masonic Music Of The 18th Century Tavern

By

David M. Gardner, Williamsburg Lodge #6 AF&AM

Presented to A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Lodge of Research, #1949

On

November 30, 2013

The opinions presented in this paper are strictly those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Master and Wardens of the A. Douglas Smith Jr., Lodge of Research #1949 or the official views of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia.

Masonic Music Of The 18th Century Tavern

by
David M. Gardner

The 18th century was a rich period for music. Most people who wanted music needed to make it for themselves. Thus the popular music of the time reflected what people played for themselves. The Masonic brothers of the 18th century would have been familiar with many of the songs and tunes common in the taverns. Being that many of the early Masonic lodges met in rented private rooms in taverns, the tavern music naturally spilled into the ritual work.

Because of many factors, Scottish music had become the popular music of the time. English songs had a strong influence as well, but the dance music of Scotland was published extensively outside of the confines of the Scottish nation. Many collections of popular music published outside of Scotland contained large numbers of Scottish tunes. Thus when looking for masonic music of the later part of the eighteenth century, it is the Scottish collections that bear the most fruit.

When looking at the records of the 18th century through advertisements in the various regional papers, it can be seen that many of the people that were selling printed materials were not only getting their products from Scotland, but they were themselves either from Scotland or their families were.

One of the most popular collections of tunes sold in America was a six volume set of books published in Glasgow, Scotland in 1781 called "A selection of Scotch, English, Irish and Foreign Airs", by James Aird.

Several tunes are definitively masonic, others are probable. Those familiar with the craft will see a possibility in some of the less obvious titles.

Following is a list of tunes contained in Aird that show masonic connections:

The Token, The Masson Laddie, Pleyel's Fancy, Genl. Washington's March, The Tyler's March, The Free Mason's March, The Free Mason's Anthem, The Brothers.

Other individual songs and tunes from the 18th century have become standards over the years. Some have deep masonic roots. One such song is The Star Spangled Banner. Every step of the way, our national anthem has been touched by the craft.

The origin of the melody of the Star Spangled Banner is from a popular drinking song: The Anacreontic Song. The music for the song is believed to have been written in the mid 1760's by Brother John Stafford Smith from the Inverness Lodge #4 in London.

In the year on September 16, 1814, Frances Scott Key who is believed to have been a freemason wrote the poem "Defence of Fort McHenry" and specified that it could be sung to the tune, "To Anacreon in Heaven".

Looking forward in history to November 3, 1929, famous entrepreneur, amateur anthropologist and publisher, Robert Ripley, drew a panel in his now legendary cartoon, *Ripley's Believe it or Not!* saying that "Believe It or Not, America has no national anthem". In an opinion published in 1931, Brother John Philip Sousa of Hiram Lodge #10 in Washington D.C related that "it is the spirit of the music that inspires" as much as it is Key's "soul-stirring" words. President Herbert Hoover signed a law on March 3, 1931 making "The Star-Spangled Banner" the official national anthem of the United States of America.

Besides Brother Sousa, many well-known composers have contributed to the masonic musical tradition including: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Liszt, and Johann Christian Bach (son of Johann Sebastian Bach), Jean Sibelius, Joseph Haydn, and Ignaz Pleyel. Probably the most influential masonic composers during the 18th century were Mozart, Haydn, and Pleyel. Mozart's extensive masonic works can fill volumes. Another Austrian Brother, Ignaz Pleyel's music became standard fare in masonic temples in both Europe and in America. Pleyel's masonic Hymn can be found in nearly every Masonic musical compendium.

Another luminary in masonic music is the Scotland's national muse, Brother Robert Burns. Robert Burns was initiated into the craft on July 4th 1781 at St. David's lodge #174 in Tarbolton, Scotland and was raised October 1, 1781. Burns' poetry and songs are rich with masonic references and themes. Many lodges close with Burns' now classic Auld lang syne. The sentiments expressed are of friendship and brotherly love. Many of his other songs express the importance of freemasonry to improve the general lot of mankind through acts of charity. In Burns' own words:

Who formed this frame with beneficent
aim
whose sovereign state is order,
Within this dear mansion may wayward
contention,
Or withered envy ne'er enter
May secrecy round be the mystical bound
And brotherly love be the centre.

Much music surrounded the life of his Excellency Brother George Washington. Along with countless marches and songs written in his honor, one air stands out above all the others in beauty and solemn emotion. Although not specifically written for him, the Scottish Air "Roslin Castle" has become indelibly tied to Washington and masonic funerals. First published by William McGibbon in 1746 it

became a standard funeral dirge from then on. It was played for Br. Washington's funeral in 1799.

Unfortunately, many masonic lodges today do very little with music. Many of the earliest speculative lodges met in Taverns filled with music. Thus in a society that values tradition and history, music should be infused wherever possible. After all, one of the seven liberal arts of our craft is music.