



Internet Lodge 9659
United Grand Lodge of England
Province of East Lancashire
<http://internet.lodge.org.uk>

Short Papers Competition 2007

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Paper 26/2007

Title **Was Beethoven a Freemason?**
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Many famous composers can be confirmed as Masons from Lodge records, but Beethoven remains a puzzle. He was probably a Freemason but no record exists of him joining a Lodge or attending meetings. He wrote two Masonic songs, "Maurerfragen" (Masonic Questions) and "Der Freye Mann" (The Free Man). The Adagio of his Seventh quartet bears the superscription: "A weeping willow or an acacia over the grave of my brother" and Schindler, one of his biographers, mentions a handshake when visiting the composer: "... a grip of our hands said the rest". A song, published in 1806, "What is the Mason's aim?" was written for the 'Loge des Frères Courageaux à l'Orient de Bonn'.

Surely, he must have been a Mason but we cannot say for certain that he was initiated into the Craft. Three of Beethoven's biographers state that he was a Mason, but none give any further information. However during this period Masonry was oppressed in Central Europe, and most Lodge records were either destroyed, or not kept in the first place

According to the Grolier Encyclopaedia, he was a Freemason and entertained mystical thinking. "His thoughts are often deeply tinged with mysticism, sometimes also with a strange wildness, and their vast range sometimes tends to overwhelm the medium of their expression."

Beethoven had several influential individuals closely connected with him who were also Freemasons, notably, his mentor. He went to Vienna in 1792 to study under Josef Haydn; his teacher; his early compositions were under the tutelage of Christian Neefe and his doctor, Dr. Wegeler.

On the other hand, his personal life hardly reflected the principles of masonry: he was constantly "in love" but tended towards the wrong women. They were either aristocrats, married or both! One letter titled 'Immortal Beloved' (dated 1812 and presumed unsent) was to the only woman that is thought to have loved him in return. She was Antonie Brentano (1780-1869), the wife of a Frankfurt merchant and a mother of four. Hardly the actions of a follower of Masonic Principles! He was said to be a "slob" in his personal habits. His personal life was a mess. He neglected his appearance so badly that he was once mistaken as a tramp and arrested.

Beethoven's God was music. He said "Music is a higher revelation than all wisdom or philosophy". This potentially elevates his "art" above the wisdom of God! Would The Craft recognise music as belief in "A Supreme Being"? On March 26, 1827, he went into a coma. There was a violent thunderstorm, and for a moment, Beethoven opened his eyes, raised his right hand and clenched his fist defiantly to the heavens, then collapsed forever. Again, hardly the gesture of a Freemason approaching the Eternal Light of the Great Architect! Beethoven's gravestone was a suitable monument to his possible membership of Freemasonry. It is an obelisk adorned with the symbol of the bee; he left us with the puzzle unsolved – was Beethoven a Freemason?

Bibliography:

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<http://geocities.com/Vienna/Choir/3228/Beethoven/carl.html>

Grolier Encyclopedia

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