

BROTHER WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Article by W. Bro. Rob Lund

During the eighteenth century, Freemasonry in Austria had a strong political side. Its members included many highly placed politicians and ecclesiastics whose ideal was the regeneration of humanity by moral means. It was hated by the Catholic Church and certain despotic political authorities who deemed it dangerous, both to religion and the well being of the state.

Such was the Masonic scene when Wolfgang Mozart became a Mason in 1784 at the age of 28 years. He must have been greatly inspired by his experience and almost immediately composed his Freemason's Funeral Music and his music for the opening and closing of a Lodge. He then composed his opera, Don Giovanni, and his three great symphonies: the E flat; the G minor; and the C major; as well as a great number of concertos and chamber-music works.

His last great opera, The Magic Flute, commonly referred to as "The Masonic Opera", opened in Vienna on September 30, 1791. Mozart conducted the first two performances but was overtaken by his last illness. He lingered on while the opera had an unprecedented run of more than one hundred consecutive performances. It is said that, in his sick bed, watch in hand, he would follow, in his imagination, the performance of The Magic Flute in the theatre. He died after its 67th performance.

The Magic Flute makes no mention of Freemasonry as such, but it has always been accepted as a Masonic opera. Musicians assert that even the music has much Masonic significance, beginning in the overture with its three solemn chords in the brass. It depicts the ancient mysteries, and presents much Masonic symbolism. To the Viennese of that day, The Queen of the Night was clearly the unfriendly Empress Maria Theresa; the good Sarastro was Ignas von Born, an eminent scientist and Masonic leader; the hero Tamino was the good Emperor Joseph; and the heroine Pamina, represented the Austrian people themselves. While the oriental decor and magical effects are taken from a fairy tale, underlying this are pervasive references to the mysteries of Freemasonry.

Mozart assisted by Schikaneder, a fellow Mason of a different lodge, had embodied much of Masonic teaching and symbolism in this opera. In using the symbols and references to the actual rituals of Freemasonry, they may have intended to make subtle demonstration of the society's high-minded purposes. It seems that the opera was intended, in part, as a defence of Masonry.

The number three has a deep significance for Masons, and it keeps occurring throughout The Magic Flute: Three Ladies, Three Boys, three temples, and so forth. A drawing of Schikaneder's revival production of 1794 shows that, in the opening scene, the Three Ladies kill the serpent by cutting it into three pieces. The opera's home key of E-flat (suggestive of virtue, nobility, and repose) was often used by Mozart for his Masonic compositions because of its signature of three flats. Prominent in the Overture is the three-fold repetition of the Masonic rhythmic rap (short-long-long), also heard in Act II of the opera itself. Also Masonic in origin are the inscriptions on the three temples: "Wisdom," "Reason," and "Nature." Freemasons in the audience would have recognized the symbolic armour of the guardians during the initiation trials, the earth-air-water-fire symbolism of the trials themselves, the Ladies' silver spears, Papageno's golden padlock, Sarastro's lion-drawn chariot, Tamino's death-like swoon, and the Queen of the Night's defeat by the powers of light. The trials of the opera's second act, and much that leads up to them in the first act, are modeled on actual Masonic initiation rituals. Even an apparently unrelated incident like Tamino's fainting spell in the opening scene, for instance, is interpreted as a reference to the beginning of certain rituals.

There are questions as to why two Masons, Mozart and Schikaneder, felt it necessary to portray so many of the society's secret symbols and beliefs in a public entertainment like The Magic Flute. The answers are to be found in the revolutionary cross-currents of that turbulent era, and in the involvement of many of the Masons, even many of the highly placed aristocrats, in activities that threatened the thrones of Europe.

In 1790 the Austrian government was becoming exceedingly alarmed about treasonous sentiments in the land and especially in the Masonic orders. Austria was fast becoming a police state. This was the demoralizing situation for Austrian Freemasons when Mozart and Schikaneder decided that their opera would be more than merely light and entertaining, that it would demonstrate the integrity of Masonic teachings. They may have had

hopes of saving the Craft from total suppression, but those hopes were in vain. The imperial government, under Francis II became dominated by conservative advisers and consequently swung even further to the right. In June of 1795 an order came down to close all Masonic lodges and other secret societies and Freemasonry ceased to exist in Austria for more than a century.

So, while their goal was not achieved, the opera lives on to this day, and displays the wonders of music and Masonry.