

# MASONIC SIGNS IN MUSIC

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## Introduction

Music is the most mathematical of the arts. It is closely related to numbers and ratios between them.

Aristotle defined the Astronomy as *The Music Of The Spheres*. So there is no wonder that we can find plenty of Masonic Signs in Music.

Musicians and educated listeners often talk about the architecture of the music. A great work of J. S. Bach, for example, impresses us like the visit of a great Cathedral.

## Description

*MASONIC SIGNS IN MUSIC* can be sought after and found in two levels. The higher level can be described as *Masonic Signs in the Works by a Specific Composer*, for example: Mozart *Die Zauberflaute* or Haydn *The Creation*. Those pieces abound of, sometimes very explicit, Masonic Signs.

Another level for the research of *MASONIC SIGNS IN MUSIC* is in the way the basic musical elements such as notes, intervals and so on, are created, named and codified by theorists of early western music.

This is the topic of the present paper.

Is there any Masonic signs in the music itself in a very basic level, in the notes themselves? This paper will present some basic acoustic definitions, historical facts and ideas on the symbolism of numbers.

## Basics

First of all we will imagine a string tensioned on a rigid surface, like a string of guitar.

If we pluck that string, it will play a sound whose pitch depends on the length and the tension of the string and whose character (timbre) depends on the material of the string and the surface that is resonating, for example the body of a guitar.

It is known from early antiquity, and Aristotle has formulated the fact, that if a stretched string, when plucked, gives some particular note when we cut that string in half, it will play another higher sound that is very harmonious and similar to the previous one.

This is known as the **octave** interval.

In a scientist's point of view this is simply the double frequency (Hertz).

Those octave interval sounds are so similar and harmonious to each other that they are named with identical names: DO-DO, RE-RE and so on.

Pursuing the experiments, Aristotle has found that the ratios of the lengths of the strings are in direct relation to the sounds created. More or less harmonious intervals have been found following that rule: if those ratios are simple integer values like 1 to 2, 2 to 3, 4 to 5 .. the resulting sounds are harmonious.

On the other hand, expanding the ratios to values like 9 to 11 or 12 to 25 and so on gives non-harmonic and unpleasant sounds.

So, a close relationship between music and numbers (arithmetics) was found and known since the very early antic time. The evolution of the music and the styles of the (unknown) composers remained confined to intervals within those simple arithmetic ratios (like 1 to 2, 3 to 4, 4 to 5) for several thousands of years until approximately the tenth century.

Musicians know this as the "natural intervals scale".

Until the 10<sup>th</sup> Century there were no way to name precisely the notes and therefore no way to write down and conserve the music on paper for future generations.

Around years 900 to 1000, Franciscan monasteries were very much concerned about a way to notate and conserve the music sung at the masses and various religious occasions. Those early musics were learned, practiced and sung only by ear and there were no way to write them and file them for future generations. So arose the need to create a musical notation and the first objective was to name the notes.

## **The Scale**

A famous hymn, estimated of Carolingian origins and commonly attributed to Paul the DEACON, has been the source of the notes names in the musical scale, as we know them today. That most important event of the musical history: the creation of the musical scale occurred around year 700. That famous hymn is:

**Ut** quéant làxis

**Resonàre** fibris

**Mira** gestorum

**Famuli** tuorum

**Sòlve** pollùti

**Làbii** reàtum

**Sàncte** Joannes

See them now singing  
 Open throats resounding  
 The best they are able  
 Voices of thine recalling  
 Pleadance thou of evil  
 Lift up which to praise thee  
 Saint John our Baptist!

The notes named after that hymn are UT, RE, MI, FA, SOL, LA, (sà) SI.

Please note that “UT” is the original name for “do” which was substituted later for singing only, one cannot sing with the word “UT”. As well as the last syllabus **Sàncte** that was transformed to the note **SI** as we know it today.

The octave interval and its harmonious character were known for a long time and few notes were more or less defined within the interval of the octave. The notes having been named in an hymn dedicated to **Saint John**, which is regarded as the western Christian Mason’s Saint, the proper intervals delimiting each note were still to be defined and that took place in the years 1000 to 1200 mostly in the Carolingian and Franciscan monasteries. However here I will not dwell into the details and history of this, which is of more interest to professional musicians and return to my main subject.

The **Masonic Signs in Music** were clearly established in the epoch of Operative Free-Masonry well before the establishment of the Great Lodge of England in 1717. I will now investigate on the following symbols related to Freemasonry as they are found in the above-mentioned Gregorian hymn.

First of all, we have a strong symbolism related to numbers: the division of the octave has been made for **7** degrees, which is a very evocative Free-Masonic number. The scale’s main degrees are set to **3** and **5**, which also clearly shows its Free-Masonic meanings of the musical scale. Inside those 7 degrees, the scale is further divided into 12 parts. All those numbers are clearly evocative for a Freemason. Furthermore there is the name of **Saint John** associated with the above Hymn for the establishment of the musical scale.

## Numbers Symbolism

As we get deeper into the structure of the musical scale we are always stunned by the amount of deep Free-Masonic symbolism it contains.

First of all lets consider the **OCTAVE**. The octave is the unity which comes after the number **7**: UT, RE, MI, FA, SOL, LA, SI and UT again but in another level. That new UT comes one octave higher it has the same name as the unity note, it sounds very similar to that unity note but it is the double in frequency (Hertz).

The unity, symbolized by the number **1** is where everything returns at the end, the musical scale starts and finishes with the unity. The number **1** is also what comes after the **7<sup>th</sup>** grade and all progressions starts and returns to the unity.

The second most important number in our musical scale's symbolism is the number **7**.

The creation of seven intervals into the octave reveals the most important Masonic sign in music. Seven is the most important Masonic number. It is the Masonic age of the Master Mason. The Temple of Solomon is built in seven years. Seven is considered the number, which unifies the Earth and the Sky. The earth is described as Orient-Occident-North and South (4 poles) and the sky is described (in the Christian tradition) with the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit (3). So the unification of both the earth and the sky is 7 (the sum 3 plus 4) and 12 (the product 3 times 4).

Other numbers of significant importance in Music and Freemasonry are **3** and **5**. The **3<sup>rd</sup>** and **5<sup>th</sup>** degrees of the musical scale (Mi and Sol by reference to Do) define the tonality center of the music. When assembled together, they form the perfect harmony, which is referred to it as the *perfect chord* or *perfect major triad* in the musical language.

There is also an important point in the subdivision of the scale into 12 parts (do, do#, re, re#, mi, fa, fa#, sol, sol#, la, la# and si). Why 12? Because 12 is also a highly symbolic number. The product of 3 by 4 it has a very special meaning especially in the Christian world. 4 is the number of the Earth and 3 the one of the Divinity. So 12 make the assembly of both. Here we are again in the presence of the number 7, since 7 is the sum of 3 and 4 and 12 is the product of 3 by 4.

Twelve Judaic tribes, the 12 gates to Jerusalem, the Hittite's underground divinities number is 12, Jesus Christ's 12 apostles, Jacob had 12 sons and there are certainly many other examples of the symbolic nature of the number 12 through all different civilizations.

## **Saint John and The Freemasonry**

The last verses of the hymn that served as the basis for our musical notes reads as this:

**Sò/ve pollùti**

**Làbii reàtum**

**Sàncte Joannes**

*Cleanse thou of evil*

*Lips with which to praise thee*

*Saint John our Baptist!*

Those verses can also be read as "Clean from the Evil's influences the lips which praise Saint John our Baptist"

I would like to discuss now about the very special place Saint John has in the Free-Masonic symbolism. The following information is borrowed from a lecture given by my Godfather, Brother Marc Dethier presented in my mother Lodge of Brussels UNION n.1.

**Saint John**, in his Evangel, puts the “LIGHT” as the beginning for everything else in the universe. This metaphor is truly a Free-Masonic one.

The Solstices of Summer and winter, the dates of **24 June** and **27 December** are also dates with a strong Free-Masonic meaning and symbolism in them.

Those dates represent the longest daylight (24 June) and the shortest daylight time during the year (27 December).

The Saint John's Day of winter (27 of December) is the time traditionally used for the installment of the elected Worshipful Master in his functions by western lodges.

The summer Saint John's Day (24 of June) is the anniversary of the foundation of the Great Lodge of England in 1717. The summer Saint John's Day, 24 of June, is the time when most of the Earth is illuminated by sunlight. Two third of the daytime is seen under the sun. The establishment of the Great Lodge of England, the 24 of June, 1717 is a date with strong symbolism.

One and Seven in Latin numerals are **XVII** which is an anagram of **VIXI** which means “*I Lived*” in the sense “*I saw (it)*” or “*I experienced (it)*”

So the famous date of 24 June 1717 can be thought as the day when the earth is most illuminated on the seventeen-century and the seventeen year.

The number **17** does not stop here in its profound symbolic meanings and reveals us a lot more of symbolism. In the classical Pythagorism, 17 is a number specific to the letters of the Greek alphabet.

In the Shiism and the epico-religious literature of Anatolia, 17 is the magic number. The fraternity initiated by ALL numbers 17 corporations of crafts.

In the “Book of the Balance” by the Sufi Gâbir Ibn-Hâyyan, 17 is the number of the resuscitated ones and is the form of everything in the cosmos.

I do not have yet the knowledge to go further deep in explaining that very heavy symbolism but I think the above information, which is only the top of the iceberg, is enough to demonstrate the symbolic nature of the numbers **1** and **7** as well as the Free-Masonic patronage of Saint John.

## Symbolism Of The Musical Language

Our Brethren of before the establishment of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717 were building cathedrals.

It is known that a Cathedral can be read as an open book by whom that knows the “*Secret Art and The Knowledge*”.

“Reading into a Cathedral, by interpreting the numbers, the proportions, the meaning and the location of various sculptures is possible after proper “*initialization*”.

In each grade, the Freemason is able to understand new levels of reality through the symbols. Exactly so is the musical language.

To a person un-initiated to the art of music, a musical score is a collection of meaningless signs and symbols.

For a beginner musician, a musical score can be read as a collection of notes only. When the artist advances in the knowledge of the art, a musical score starts to reveal him many more things; it even reveals information, which cannot be seen on the printed-paper.

A properly educated and experienced artist is able to understand the style of the composer, the mood of the piece, the influences of other composers to that particular piece of music and countless other things while the beginner can only decipher the notes and the non-musician can see only strange symbols.

Isn't it the same with the symbolic language of the Masonry? An un-initiated person will see the furniture and decoration, which surround us, as simple furniture and decoration. Our ritual words and phrases will also sound meaningless for him.

As we advance in the Craft of Freemasonry and we keep thinking about our symbols and ritual phrases, we start to see more information in them, we start to make some connections in our mind, we understand more and more.

So not only the numbers, the notes' names and the very origins of the art of music is full of Freemasonic signs but also the way a novice gets into music (and in general into any form of Art) is very comparable the way one gets into Free-Masonry.

## Conclusions

Now it should be easy to conclude our main subject: *Masonic Signs in Music*. As we have noted above, the whole musical tradition of the western world is created on the numbers **1** and **7**. One is

the unity note, the “*tonic*” note. All classical western music starts and ends with that unity note which can be selected among any of the 12 notes scale.

Seven is the number of principal tones in our scale. After the seventh note we have the unity note again, but in another octave. The octave interval is the double pitch frequency (Hertz). Any note sounds in perfect harmony with itself in any octave, the harmony is so perfect that all notes in octave relations are named with the same names (do-do-do .. re-re-re ... and so on).

Inside those 7 main degrees, our musical scale is subdivided into 12 half steps. Again the number 12 is wearing a heavy freemasonic signification.

Finally the hymn, which has given our notes their respective names, is praising Saint John, the Godfather of western Freemasonry.

In the French language one often uses the term “initiated” to say for someone who knows about a form of art. For example for a child starting learning music one uses the term “initiated to music”. This is an old usage typical of the French language, it may be well coming from the Operative Age of the Masonry when Brethren were **initiated** to the craft of building and architecture.

As a musician, I think the ways both to Music (or Art in general) and to Freemasonry are very similar to each other.

When we talk about symbols, initiation, apprentices, fellow crafts and masters, when we talk about hard work, personal fulfillment and assiduity we are definitely talking about a form of art.