Freemasons Franklin, Mozart, Mesmer and the Glass Armonica

India D’Avignon, California Polytechnic State University – San Luis Obispo, CA

This paper presentation explores a connection between Freemasons Benjamin Franklin, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Franz Anton Mesmer and the glass armonica. These Freemasons are involved in the history of the armonica from its invention to its demise. Data have been collected from published records, archives, and my own personal experience with the instrument.

Franklin became involved with glass music during his stint as the American colonies ambassador to England. In 1761, in Cambridge, and after having become a Freemason, Franklin invented the glass armonica, which is now considered to be the first musical instrument invented by an American.

Mozart knew of the armonica through his acquaintance with Mesmer who premiered one of Mozart's works at his home. Mozart became so enamored with the instrument that he composed for solo armonica and included a significant armonica part in his last chamber work. Mozart's style of composition is sometimes referred to as "humanist" that aligns with the Masonic view of music.

Infamous Freemason Franz Anton Mesmer used the armonica for his hypnotic séances. He was regarded as a charlatan in the medical community, and a commission headed by Franklin eventually exiled him from Austria. By this time, the armonica was already mired in international mystique, and Mesmer's disgrace and association with the instrument helped force it into disuse.

This presentation will demonstrate a detailed historical timeline emphasizing the pivotal contributions of Freemasons Franklin, Mozart, and Mesmer in the development of the glass armonica. I will supplement the narrative with illustrations and musical recordings to present a holistic account of my research.

Keywords: Franklin, Mesmer, Mozart
World Conference on Fraternalism
Including Ritual, Secrecy, Freemasonry, and Civil Society
The Bibliothèque Nationale • Paris, France
May 26 – 27, 2017