

Observations and Remarks on Music in the *Bahnson Manual* of 1892

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In the late 19th century, the Grand Lodge of North Carolina's efforts to ensure a uniform ritual throughout North Carolina Masonry resulted in the production of the *Official Standard of the Work* (hereafter "OSW") and in 1892, the *North Carolina Lodge Manual* (hereafter "Bahnson Manual"), authored by Assistant Grand Lecturer Charles F. Bahnson. The OSW consists solely of encoded ritual, and is supplemented by the Bahnson Manual's overt ritual text and music directions. In his 1892 review of the Bahnson Manual, Grand Lecturer and Custodian B. W. Hatcher described it as 'concise and convenient'. 125 years later, it is still an indispensable component of North Carolina Masonic ritual work.

The Bahnson Manual is the principle source and authority for vocal music during ritual. It proffers minimal guidance about music by specifying one song (or 'ode') each for opening and for closing the lodge, one for the first degree, one for the second degree, and three for the two sections of the third degree, a total of just seven odes.

The singing of music in our ritual is a long-lost tradition. To revive a lost tradition, one must 'get into the heads' of those who practiced the tradition when it was current. The restoration of sung odes during ritual work must begin by examining and understanding what the Bahnson Manual actually inculcates regarding musical practices, thereby putting the music into its historical context, to understand its content and purpose. That is the objective of this paper.

Terminology

To avoid confusion, a few terms will benefit from a bit of clarification. The Bahnson Manual's 'Odes' are vocal pieces consisting of two distinct parts: the words and the music. The complete song in performance (both words and music together) is hereafter called the **ode**. The set of words, without regard to the music, is called the **lyrics**. The music, without regard to the lyrics, is called the **tune**. Every ode therefore consists of a tune and lyrics. **Hymn** refers to a Christian, not Masonic, text with its music, as sung in church.

The Lyrics: Observations

Five of the seven odes, the lyrics of which appear in the Bahnson Manual, contain overtly Masonic words or phrases, such as Brethren, Plumb, and Square. A sixth ode, "*Let Us Remember in Our Youth*", is a paraphrase of scripture, i.e. Ecclesiastes 12, and as such contains no specific Masonic words or phrases. An internet search reveals that these lyrics appear *only* in Masonic publications, beginning in 1846. For this reason, this ode can also be categorized as strictly Masonic. The seventh ode, "Hark from the Tomb a Doleful Sound" is not Masonic, but a Christian funeral hymn. I will therefore begin with the Masonic Odes, and discuss "Hark" separately in this paper.

The Six Masonic Odes

The Masonic character of the first six odes is relevant to this discussion. Unlike hymns that are learned and eventually memorized through repeated exposure over time, Masonic odes are rarely heard with sufficient frequency that their familiarity evokes immediate recollection of the tunes to which they are sung. It is therefore necessary to include with Masonic lyrics information that will help identify at least one suitable tune for singing them. The Bahnson Manual fulfills this need.

The Tunes: Observations

The Bahnson Manual designates eight tunes to which the six Masonic Odes may be sung. Six of these tunes were very well-known Christian hymn tunes, all of which happen to appear in Moravian Hymnals of the time.¹ The remaining two tunes are Scottish folk tunes whose original profane lyrics are poems by Robert Burns, entitled "*Bonny Doon*"² and "*Auld Lang Syne*."

Both instances where the Bahnson Manual proposes Scottish folk tunes for singing two of the odes, they are each supplemented with a familiar Christian hymn tune, ostensibly in case the Scottish folk tune is unfamiliar, deemed too difficult, or otherwise undesired.

Influence of Christian Hymns on the Bahnson Manual Odes

Historically, every hymn tune is given a unique name by its composer, editors, or through popular use, which is usually unrelated to the title or first line of lyrics that may be associated with it. Occasionally, the first line of an extremely popular tune may become synonymous with the tune itself, e.g. "Amazing Grace" whose famous tune is actually named "New Britain." The first tune in the Bahnson Manual is called "Old Hundred", so named because it was the original tune for Psalm 100 in the earliest Protestant psalters (the precursors to hymnals).³ Only in the 17th century was the innovation of singing non-scriptural sacred poems, called 'hymns', permitted by the church.

Since churches were many but musicians were scarce, it was customary in most churches that the congregants memorized a variety of tunes.

¹ Private communication from Worshipful Brother Joey Transou, a Moravian musician and member of West Bend Lodge #434. NB: Charles F. Bahnson was Moravian, his father a minister and later, Bishop in the Moravian Church.

² Bahnson's extraordinary spelling "Bonny" rather than the usual and correct "Bonnie" is a clue to the

Hymn singing then began by calling out the name of the tune and the number or title of the hymn.

Hymn tunes named in the Bahnson Manual are (in order of appearance) "Old Hundred", "Nearer, my God, to Thee", "Arlington", "Portuguese Hymn", "Hamburg" and "Pleyel's Hymn", all very common and familiar hymn tunes. In 1892, churchgoing Masons would know them by name. They were selected because of this widespread familiarity, so that any lodge could instantly sing the odes without any difficulty and with complete confidence.

To this end, one tune is *not* identified by the tune's name but uncharacteristically by the *first line* of the hymn to which it was (and still is) ubiquitously sung; "*Nearer, my God, to Thee*." The actual name of this famous tune by Lowell Mason is "Bethany." Why was this done?

"*Nearer, my God, to Thee*" leaves no room for doubt about the intended melody for singing this ode. The tune's actual name, "Bethany", could be misleading because there happens to be more than one tune by this name; the other "Bethany", by Henry Smart, does not fit these lyrics, and any attempt to use it would be disastrous. The title "*Nearer, my God, to Thee*" removes all doubt about the intended tune for singing this ode, even though it is technically the first line of the hymn, not the tune's name. Again, by choosing only familiar tunes, the intent is clearly to promote singing of the odes with as little confusion and few obstacles as possible.

Another detail appears in the Bahnson Manual that is easily overlooked as inconsequential but extremely relevant to this examination. After

source material used in preparing the Bahnson Manual, namely Malmene's "*Freemason's Hymnal*" (St Louis, MO: 1875)

³ The tune "Old Hundred" is now typically referred to as "The Doxology" because of its regular use in Christian churches exclusively to those lyrics.

the name of four of the six hymn tunes, the 'meter' of each is indicated, e.g. "Old Hundred- **L.M.**", "Portuguese Hymn- **11s**", "Hamburg - **L.M.**" and "Pleyel's Hymn - **7s**". Understanding its true significance requires a little background in basic psalmody (the study of hymns).

Every hymn text (again, the lyrics) began life as a poem with a fixed pattern of syllables in each line and lines in each verse or stanza. This pattern of beats in each line and lines in each verse is called its meter. Every meter can be numerically encoded or, with a few very popular meters, assigned a nickname.

The most common of these meters contains four lines in a pattern of eight, six, eight and six syllables or beats per line. This pattern can be abbreviated as 86.86. "Amazing Grace" has this meter. Since this is the most common meter in all hymnody, instead of numbers to designate it, it is simply called "Common Meter", abbreviated C.M. Another frequently encountered meter has four lines of eight beats, numerically 88.88., is called Long Meter, and is abbreviated L.M.

The 'L.M.' that follows two of the hymn tunes in the Bahson Manual, "Old Hundred" and "Hamburg," identifies them as being in Long Meter. The other two tunes whose meters are indicated are "Pleyel's Hymn --**7s**", shorthand for four lines of seven beats each (77.77.), and "Portuguese Hymn - **11s**", with four lines of eleven beats each (11.11.11.11.) This begs the question, what purpose is addressed by the Bahson Manual's inclusion of the tunes' meters?

Most congregations (and many lodges) in the 18th and 19th centuries had neither musicians nor instruments to accompany singing. Its members memorized an assortment of tunes with different meters to which any chosen hymn might be sung, without concern that the same

tune would be employed for different lyrics. (To see how simple this is, interchange the words and music for "Amazing Grace", the theme song from "Gilligan's Island", and "House of the Rising Sun.") To this end, most early hymnals (and Masonic songbooks) contained only lyrics *and* the meters' notation, a visual layout that enhanced literary comprehension by allowing lyrics to be read as a poem, instead of being disjointed and interwoven within a music score.

To assist this tradition of singing, around 1700, virtually all English and American Protestant hymnals included indexes of tunes according to meter, the 'metrical index'. In some early hymnals, instead of a metrical index (requiring costlier printing of additional pages), all the tunes with the same meter were simply grouped together in the hymnal, the most common meters at the front, the least common toward the back. Both systems facilitated identifying tunes with the same meter to which the hymn could be sung. This flexible method for choosing appropriate tunes is described in the following preface to the very popular 19thc. hymnal *Harmonia Sacra*, published in Virginia in 1869.

*"Moreover, as the principal motive and intention in bringing out this work is to promote the cause of religion and devotion, and a solemn, dignified, and expressing style of singing in the Church of God, we have, for the greater convenience of worshipping assemblies divided it into two parts. The FIRST PART containing a variety of the most appropriate tunes and hymns, of the various kinds of metres to be sung in the time of public worship. And these are arranged in metrical order, forming a series of meters from Long Meter, or Metre First, throughout all the different kinds of poetic measure up to Metre Eighty. This order and arrangement of the metres will be found **very convenient for the chorister, in selecting suitable tunes for the psalms and hymns which are to be sung by the congregated worshipers.**"⁴*

⁴ Funk, Joseph. *Harmonia Sacra*. Rockingham, VA (1869)

The modern notion that hymns must be sung to specific tunes originated in the 20th century; it did not exist for two centuries before the Bahnson Manual's compilation. As late as 1892, the singing of most hymns to specific tunes was unknown in rural churches.

There is only one possible reason to indicate the meter; it allows identification of other tunes to which those lyrics can also be sung. By including metrical notation, the Bahnson Manual is therefore *facilitating and authorizing* the singing of the odes to other tunes than those named therein. The emphasis, again, appears to be on assisting the Brethren to incorporate music into the ritual with as little difficulty as possible.⁵

A secondary advantage for identifying the meter is that a lodge would not be helpless if they could not identify the tune named therein. For instance, if they do not know "Portuguese Hymn" and cannot find it in a hymnal because this tune is often called as "Adeste Fideles", they could refer to the metrical index for "11s" (or 11.11.11.11.) to find another tune with that meter. Identification of the meter is a user-friendly method that provides musical options.

⁵ I must mention an anomaly concerning indication of meters in the Bahnson Manual, namely the two instances where the meter has not been indicated for hymn tunes. Dismissing the possibility of simple oversight, I can only conjecture as to why this was done. "Nearer, my God, to Thee" has as its meter (10.10.12.10.), a rare and unusual meter. It is unlikely that indicating the meter would be helpful in identifying other tunes, as there are few other familiar tunes to which this ode could be sung. In other words, the absence of a meter may suggest an effort to prevent the brethren from substituting another tune. The other instance where the meter is absent is "Arlington", the alternate tune for "Auld Lang Syne" for singing the ode "Behold, How Pleasant". The meter for "Arlington" is Common Meter, (86.86.), while the meter for "Auld Lang

Reflection on the Six Masonic Odes

Because all the *spoken* texts in the Bahnson Manual are to be read verbatim, one might understandably presuppose that this applies to the odes as well, i.e. the only music to be sung during the ritual are these particular odes to these tunes. The designated tunes, I have shown, are actually the most convenient suggestions, but other tunes may be employed. In this light, the rigid adherence only to the tunes designated in the Bahnson Manual, to the exclusion of any others, constitutes an innovation unintended by its author and the Grand Lodge of 1892.

The Seventh Ode: "Hark, from the Tomb"

"*Hark from the Tomb a Doleful Sound*", appears in the second section of the Master Mason degree, where the Bahnson Manual states, '*Or the following may be used*'. This is the only instance where an alternative ode is offered, in place of the usual Masonic ode, "*Solemn Strikes the Funeral Chime* [Pleyel's Hymn--7s]".

"*Hark from the Tomb*" is not a Masonic lyric, but an extraordinarily popular and famous Christian hymn. Its original title was "A Funeral Thought." First published in 1707, it appeared in several hundred American hymnals in the 18th and 19th

Syne" is also Common Meter, but twice as long! The longer form is usually abbreviated C.M.D., which stands for Common Meter Double. One might posit that leaving out the meter "C.M." for "Arlington," prevents the brethren from seeking out another tune, (as was done for "Nearer, My God, to Thee") but this makes little sense. C.M. is the single most common and the easiest meter to substitute. Since the Bahnson Manual *does* indicate a meter in the parallel situation for the hymn tune "Hamburg", the alternate tune to "Bonny Doon", and "Auld Lang Syne", like "Bonny Doon", is double the length of "Hamburg". I can offer no reasonable explanation as to why the meter for "Hamburg," was not indicated in the Bahnson Manual.

centuries, only falling into obscurity during the 1920s, a victim of the movement against Victorian 'doom and gloom' in favor of more uplifting and hopeful Christian funeral music.

"Hark" was a very prominent funeral hymn and dirge throughout the United States, especially beloved by both White and Black Southern Baptists. In the Southern United States, it was universally sung or played in funeral processions to gravesites, as the following accounts reveal:

*"From the church to the grave ritual wailing filled the air. Music at the funerals, especially the popular hymn "Hark from the Tomb a Doleful Sound," illustrated the older style of slow a cappella singing with the verse couplets read out by the preacher."*⁶

*"The virus of treason and the mortification of military defeat had cast a wet blanket of sorrow and sadness over all. The country looked not unlike a desolated country graveyard, and the people not unlike the sad spectres flitting among the tombs. I almost thought I could realize the solemn emotions of the immortal Watts when he indited his famous funeral dirge, "Hark! from the tombs a doleful sound."*⁷

Described as both famous and popular, "Hark" was sung in George Washington's funeral procession, an association that cannot have escaped 19th c. Masonic attention. It appears in headstone inscriptions across the nation. By the 1850s. it was synonymous with the expression, "It's your funeral!" Mark Twain used it three times, including in "Huckleberry Finn."⁸

I says to myself, *this* is a girl that I'm letting that old reptile rob her of her money!
Then Susan *she* waltzed in; and if you'll believe me, she did give Hare-lip hark from the tomb!
Says I to myself, and this is *another* one that I'm letting him rob her of her money!

Abraham Lincoln used it in the Douglas debates.⁹

Francis E. Browne, in his "Every Day Life of Lincoln," tells of a most laughable retort, on one occasion, which he made to Douglas.

Douglas said in the course of his speech, "The Whigs are all dead."

When Lincoln's turn came he said, as he continued to arise from his chair, higher and higher:

"Mr. Douglas has told you the Whigs are all dead, so you will now have the novelty of a speech from a dead man, and I suppose you might say, 'Hark! from the tomb a doleful sound.' This set the audience wild with delight.

The Masonically-informed reader requires no explanation concerning this ode's place as a Christian funeral dirge and its placement in our Masonic third degree. It is included in the Bahnsen Manual (as well as by a few other Grand Jurisdictions¹⁰) for its real-life authenticity in this otherwise arcane allegorical drama.

The Bahnsen Manual specifies no tune for "Hark." Specifying a tune for such a familiar hymn was as redundant then as it would be today for "Amazing Grace". Also, because it was sung in various places to other tunes, naming a single particular tune, such as 'Hague—CM'¹¹ might have been deemed unduly restrictive.

Its prominence as a funeral dirge has completely vanished. How then should NC Masonry today address its relevance, if any, to our ritual? Several possibilities that come to mind include: (1) eliminate it, (2) retain it without comment,

⁶ Harvey, Paul. *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925*. UNC Press (2000): p. 25.

⁷ Conser, Rev. S. L. M. *Virginia after the war. An account of three years' experience in reorganizing the Methodist Episcopal Church in Virginia at the close of the Civil War*. (1891)

⁸ Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1899). P. 241.

⁹ Powell, Julia Mygatt. *Flashlights of Abraham Lincoln*. (Los Angeles, 1921); p. 41.

¹⁰ J. R. Martin "The Lost Masonic Dirge" in *Transactions, Texas Lodge of Research* Volume XXXVI at Pages 47-55.

¹¹ The working draft shows "Hague-CM", a strangely jolly tune for this somber text that was abandoned.

(3) retain it and specify at least one historically-appropriate tune, (4) retain it with one or more tunes *and* a footnote describing its origin and purpose in the Bahnson Manual, to foster an appreciation of its role in 19th century Masonry. This matter warrants further consideration.

Summary and General Discussion

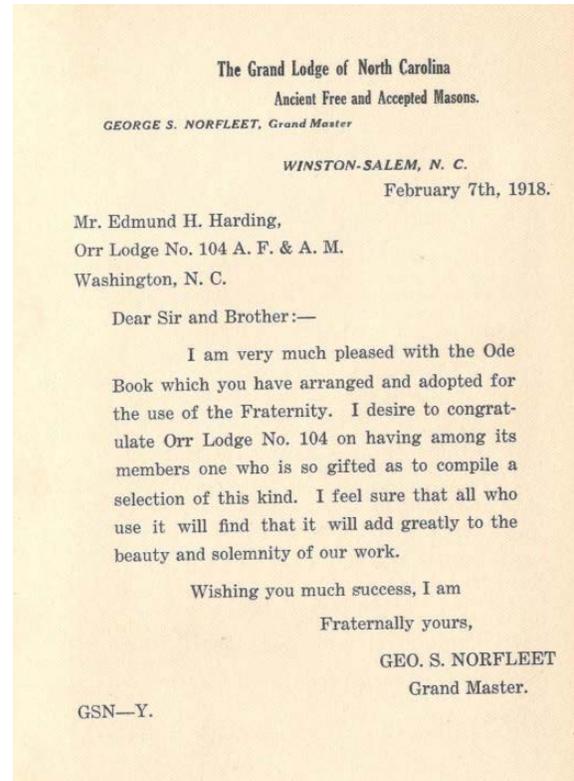
From this survey of the Bahnson Manual, several important aspects concerning the use of Masonic odes in North Carolina lodges circa 1892 have emerged. Rather than being restrictive about the tunes for singing these odes in lodge, the Bahnson Manual is apparently permissive.

By indicating just one ode per ritual, and naming the most familiar tunes to which each could easily be sung, the Bahnson Manual provides the 'bare bones' minimum and simplest information, "concise and convenient" as the Grand Lecturer himself wrote. The Bahnson Manual was clearly designed to assist even the least urbane lodge to employ simple music at appropriate times during each part of the Masonic ritual.

Given the freedom that the designation of meters denotes for identifying other tunes to which the odes could be sung, one might wonder if the same freedom applied to the choice of other *odes* as well, as these abound in Masonic songbooks and *Ahimon Rezons* of the time. Was the introduction of other Masonic odes than those in the Bahnson Manual acceptable to the Grand Lodge? The answer, though not indicated in the Bahnson Manual, is a robust 'Yes!'

A mere quarter century later, in living memory of the Bahnson Manual's introduction, Orr Lodge #104 published its own "*Orr Lodge Ode Book (1918)*". It consists of 47 different Masonic odes (lyrics only), for use in both ritual and non-ritual portions of Masonic lodge work. For example, while the Bahnson Manual suggests one ode for opening the lodge, the "Orr Lodge Ode Book" gives seven. Most remarkably, the "Orr Lodge Ode Book" was praised by Most Worshipful

Grand Master George S. Norfleet for its promise to "add greatly to the beauty and solemnity of our work."



Had the 25-year-old (in 1918) Bahnson Manual been intended to restrict lodge music to the odes and tunes contained therein, the "Orr Lodge Ode Book" would not have received such praise.

In summary, the Bahnson Manual, examined in conjunction with other contemporaneous documents, shows that North Carolina Masonic lodges actually enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom in the selection of appropriate musical odes for the lodge's ritual work a century ago.

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The author welcomes questions and comments.