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Album Reviews



MOZART
Masonic Music
(Complete)
Heo Young-Hoon, Tenor
Kassel Spohr Chamber Orchestra • Roberto Paternostro

MOZART, W.A.: Masonic Music (Complete) (Heo Young-Hoon, Kassel Spohr Chamber Orchestra, Paternostro)

Naxos 8.570897

- [Allmusic.com, September 2009](#)
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- [Gramophone, August 2009](#)
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- [American Record Guide, May 2009](#)
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- [MusicWeb International, April 2009](#)
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- [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 2009](#)
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James Manheim
[Allmusic.com](#), September 2009

This album is not a collection of performances from the Naxos catalog, but a freshly recorded survey of the music Mozart wrote for the Masonic organizations of which he was part in Vienna, much of it of fascinating personal significance. The musicians seem to be mostly associated with performing organizations in the German city of Kassel; Korean-born tenor Young-Hoon Heo is a company member of the Kassel Stadttheater. Still, pulling together the collection of vocals, orchestral musicians, and wind chamber players heard here is a noteworthy accomplishment. And, although all of these pieces have been recorded elsewhere, several are quite rare, and it's extremely instructive to hear them all together. Mozart inherited his interest in Freemasonry from his father and stuck with it through periods in which it was banned; during the last part of his life the sect benefited from the positive attitude of Emperor Joseph II, the dedicatee of a couple of the little choral pieces here. It would be interesting to know the background of the main performers and of annotator Heinz Sichrovsky, for there is at least one unusual addition to Mozart's Masonic canon here: the *Adagio and Fugue in C minor*, K. 546, played by an orchestra, is ruled in because its seemingly ordinary main theme "is based on an anapestic Masonic signal." Most of the music, however, was clearly written for specific uses in Masonic ceremony; one the *Lied zur Gesellenreise*, K. 468, was intended for Mozart's own promotion to the rank of Entered Apprentice in 1785. The music consists of choruses, small wind pieces, pieces for a small orchestra, among them the famed *Maurerische Trauermusik*, K. 477 (Masonic Funeral Music), and little dramatic works, notably *Eine kleine Freimaurer-Kantate: Laut verkünde unsre Freude*, K. 623 (A Little Masonic Cantata: Loudly We Proclaim Our Joy), conducted by Mozart himself at his lodge three weeks before his death. Its text is by Mozart's friend Emanuel Schikaneder, author of the libretto to *The Magic Flute*, and one thing the listener is apt to take away from this recording is a new appreciation for just how Masonic that opera is. The male choruses, otherwise not much found in Mozart's output, are beautifully wrought and seem to look forward to Schubert's pieces of this type. An essential item for the Perfect Mozartian, never less than adequately performed; Heo's voice is of just the right dimensions for this music. Notes are in English only, texts in German only, with English translations available on a Naxos webpage.

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Richard Wigmore
[Gramophone](#), August 2009

The hidden Mozart: a valuable collection of his music for the secret society

Freemasonry was crucial to Mozart in his later years, both for its liberal, enlightened ideals and for the social advantages it brought. This disc assembles his work with specific or putative Masonic associations, most of them post-dating his initiation to the lodge Zur Wohltätigkeit (Beneficence) in December 1784 and imbued with that mingled solemnity and homely simplicity characteristic of his Masonic style. They include a clutch of songs with or without male chorus and three attractive cantatas, *Dir, Seele des Weltalls* (left by Mozart as a fragment), *Die Maurerfreude* and *Eine kleine Freimaurer-Kantate*, the last work he entered in his thematic catalogue. Masonic connections are more speculative with the two touching, little-known pieces for wind ensemble (K410 and 411), and probably non-existent in the case of the C minor Adagio and its magnificently craggy Fugue.

The other out-and-out masterpiece here is *Maurerische Trauermusik*, music of remote, austere beauty that incorporates ancient plainchant. Roberto Paternostro's driven tempo rather undermines the work's hieratic dignity, though he encourages the hard-working Kassel strings (cellos and double bass well to the fore) to a notably brusque, angry performance of the C minor Fugue. The chorus sings with aptly robust enthusiasm; and Heo Yong-Hoon fields a pleasing, compact tenor... this is a useful survey of music that remains largely unknown to all but the most dedicated Mozartians.

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William Trotter
[American Record Guide](#), May 2009

It was a splendid idea to collect all of the known and surviving "Masonic pieces" into a comprehensive anthology; the result is fascinating and rewarding. The works range in length from 1:45 to just over 12 minutes, and I suspect that none but the most dedicated Mozartian will be familiar with more than two or three of them. Many will know the *Masonic Funeral Music* (K 477) or the magnificent *Adagio and Fugue* (K 546), which sometimes appears as a stand-alone concert work on orchestral programs—or at least used to. Many of the unfamiliar selections here are "lodge songs", never intended for public performance but designed to add a touch of ceremony to meetings, banquets, initiations, and more esoteric rites. They were composed for very small forces: usually a male soloist accompanied by organ, piano, and—in a few cases—a handful of wind instruments; sometimes there's an optional part for small male chorus, too, if a particular lodge had the singers for it. It is known that Mozart composed 13 such "internal" pieces, but five of them seem to have vanished. The surviving eight are here (see also May/June 1995).

It is quite evident that Mozart deployed all the resources of his mature skills in even the briefest of these works. Nothing sounds tossed-off; the man took his lodge membership seriously and gave his brother Masons first-rate music. The confirmed Mozartian will discover here a considerable body of excellent, if necessarily small-scale, gems. The Spohr Chamber Orchestra is new to me, but a welcome discovery. Kassel is the ensemble's hometown, and Spohr was the most famous composer born there. It produces an ideal sonority: modest in weight, yet warm in tone, with exemplary balances and unforced transparency—just right. Conductor Paternostro (a pupil

of Karajan, Dohnányi, and the ubiquitous Hans Swarowsky) leads polished, energized readings that also seem ideal.

He never leans into anything for effect, yet he seems effortlessly to extract every scintilla of poetry or ritualistic dignity from each selection. The vocal soloists (and the small but well groomed male chorus) don't have any big numbers to grab hold of, but they also make a sizable contribution to the overall excellence of the music-making—especially the fine young tenor, Heo Young-Hoon.

I really prefer to hear the *Adagio and Fugue* (one of my favorite short orchestral works by Mozart) dug into by the full symphonic compliment of strings (there's a long-vanished early Klemperer recording that makes this noble music sound hewn from polished marble), but this ensemble's modest body of strings perform it very beautifully. Indeed, every track is played with an ideal blend of style and sensitivity, and the Naxos engineers have done their part by framing the music with a sonic ambience than is warm, fairly close-up, and that reveals every detail without ever sounding too analytical.

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The best-known work here, sometimes included on its own as a filler for performances of Mozart's Requiem, is the short orchestral *Mauerische Trauermusik* or *Masonic Funeral Music*, K477. Roberto Paternostro on the new recording takes this work at a rather faster pace than usual... but he maintains much of its essential dignity.

Paternostro's tempi in the opening *Dir, Seele des Weltalls* (trs. 1–2), are also rather faster than Schreier's or Kertész's. This works well in this short cantata of praise to the sun, soul of the whole universe and provider of fruitfulness, warmth and light. The opening section is for choir, the second an aria for tenor, thanking the sun for the return of spring. The men of the Kassel State Opera Chorus acquit themselves well and Heo Young-Hoon's light tenor voice is very well suited to the aria, fully worthy of comparison with Walter Krenn on the Kertész recording. By coincidence, too, though Paternostro takes just 3:04 for the opening chorus against Kertész's 3:40, both take 4:22 for the tenor aria.

The Naxos recording closes in jubilant mood, as it began, with the Masonic cantata *Laut verkünde unsre Freude*, K623, proclaiming the joy of belonging to the brotherhood (trs.14–17)... Young-Hoon's singing in this work is matched by that of Lars Ruehl, second tenor, and Jürgen Appel, baritone.

The two Adagios (trs.3-4) could well pass as movements from the wind serenades. Both receive performances which fully justify their inclusion here when the rival complete recordings omit them. The Adagio and Fugue, K546 (trs.11–12) also receives a good performance from the Kassel Spohr Chamber Orchestra. Otherwise, with the exception of the *Trauermusik*, all the items are vocal. Young-Hoon and the chorus, separately or together, acquit themselves well and are supported in style by the pianist, Alberto Bertino, and the orchestra. As in the final *Laut verkünde*, the earlier *Die ihr des unermesslichen Weltalls ehrt* (tr.10) is a shade slower than Kertész or Schreier, without seeming in any way too slow, while all three take *Die Mauerfreude* (tr.8) at a similar pace.

The recording is good throughout. The presentation, too, is fine, with excellent notes and a readable English translation. The German texts are provided, but not English translations, though the paraphrases in the notes are certainly helpful. I'm pleased to see at least the German texts when I've criticised Naxos—and others—recently for making libretti available only online... With its price advantage over the mid-price Kertész and the downloads of the 3-CD Schreier recording, the new Naxos CD may be safely recommended. It comes, too, with a bonus download track from Haydn's Farewell Symphony.

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[Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#), March 2009

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The works are mostly vocal, from simple Lieder (German songs) with piano to more elaborate cantatas with chorus and orchestra, according to what combination of performers was available in the lodge at any particular time. The extended aria for tenor, “Mason's Joy” is particularly appealing. Among the instrumental pieces, the Adagio and Fugue in C Minor (K. 546) was adapted from an early 2-piano piece, while the Masonic Funeral Music must stand as one of the composer's most profound outpourings.

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Tim Ashley[Guardian](#), February 2009

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