

# The reluctant organist

This is a quick guide for those who can play the piano or electronic keyboard and who have been asked to play for a Masonic ceremony.

The purpose of music in Freemasonry is to add dignity, to provide a structure and atmosphere to the ceremony and to help everyone take part by singing the words of Odes.

## Getting ready.

First gather together some music from your youth. Those marvellous simplified editions of Golden Hours and other selections that have popular tunes and hymns are ideal. Go for something easy, where you feel comfortable with the music.

## Time each piece of music

See how long it takes you to play, so that you can easily turn to a short or long piece, when needed. Write the duration down.

Alms collections and ballots take much longer than a perambulation from JW to SW, for example. You might find it better to choose an unknown tune than the Brethren won't notice if your rendition of My Fair Lady is less convincing than Julie Andrew's.

## The Organ

Experiment with the instrument when you are not surrounded by well wishers. Find how to get the sound right. Make a note of a loud setting, suitable for processions, and a quiet setting suitable for background music. There is more about this in the second paper about "Odd and Awful Organs in our Temples".

Before the ceremony, play quietly to gain confidence with the instrument, and to provide a contrast when things start.

## Processional music

For processions choose music in 2:4 or 4:4 as a waltz music tends to upset higher ranking brethren when they are in procession. Play boldly and with conviction as soon as the Brethren are called to order. This sets the scene. Remember the incoming procession goes on after the WM has reached his chair, so don't worry if the music is not yet finished. Keep going - then repeat, if possible more quietly, if there is time needed for the JD and SD to reach their posts, and the DC to get back to his position. Fade away if the music does not conclude with a suitable cadence.

## Opening and closing Odes

Immediately find your next piece of music. If this is to be an opening ode, play it over clearly, so that Brethren hear the tune. Then add some more volume as you strike up after the 'play-over'. So Mote it Be can be a bit quieter if you can reduce volume at that moment.

The main problem with the closing ode is that some WMs ask for the last verse, other want all the verses. Make sure you hear that instruction.

## Wallpaper music

This is the general background 'anything' music that covers perambulations and other non-speaking periods in a ceremony. Make your own selection of easy-to-play music. Be quietly confident. You are the only person present who can play, and the odd wrong note will not be noticed.

An important tip is to know when to shut up. Keep your eye on the Master's gavel, particularly remembering that if you are watching him through a mirror, he's going to do this with his left hand. If he get near picking it up, diminish the volume and get ready to stop. But immediately turn to the next music and have it ready. Also select the next setting, so that you are loud when you want to arrest the attention of brethren and quiet when you are just setting the atmosphere for the next part of the ceremony.

Best of luck - now have a look at "Odd and Awful Organs in our Temples".

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