



Masonic Music

Benjamin Bolden

I live in a very old house. Its east wall is a broad expanse of stone with only one second-storey window. As I stand in the brisk wind of a grey November afternoon, I contemplate my wall.

(Such an arrogant perspective, to claim it mine! As though I could 'own' something that has existed for so long, something so splendidly sturdy... I did not design its structure, painstakingly stake out its dimensions and position, nor construct the wooden frame to brace it steady. I did not cut, haul, or lift those heavy stones into place. I did not climb the scaffolding, mix the mortar, re-shape the awkward rocks with hammer and chisel. I did not stand back finally finished, wipe the limestone dust from my brow, feel the slow glow of pride and nod softly in satisfaction.)

The building inspector told me the wall was 'bowed'. That it sagged outwards. To sag a little at the age of one hundred and fifty-two hardly deserves such a remark. In any case, I am not concerned. The wall is three feet thick.

That gentle bow is just one of the wall's idiosyncrasies. Each time I gaze upon it I find something new, divine a new understanding of my strong and silent friend. The stones vary greatly in size, fifty shades of yellow, brown, and grey. Some are pock-marked. The stones are bordered by mortar, like divisions between mapped states. Varied colours and textures of mortar represent different bouts of patching and repair. Shoring up the wall. Re-pointing. Sometimes the masonic work is beautiful in its craftsmanship, caressing the wall back to health. In other instances, well intentioned yet poorly informed, cement is evident, the hard and unforgiving substance forced in where, ironically, porousness and flexibility would provide the wall greater strength. Various pieces of metal protrude from the stones and mortar, attaching the wall to who knows what, who knows when? The stones are darker in two vertical columns where the dual chimneys, long out of use, run up inside the center of the wall. There is a diagonal mark, where the roof of a lean-to butted up.

All things I now know about my wall.

The wall is steeped in history. It wears the symbols and scratches of the life it has lived, the experiences it has known. The decades of winter gales, the havoc of moisture – little pockets of water freezing, expanding and bursting their stony confines. Being impaled with nails and bolts. Being leaned on. Facing dawn, bathing in the pink glow of sunrise. Being repaired. Being contemplated. Being loved. Suffering the wrinkles, rewards and ravages of time.

You may ask why I write about my wall in this context. The

connection I offer is that like the wall, we bear the marks of our experience and are constructed from them. Our histories build us.

And those histories are alive with the singing echoes of music.

Music has left its mark on each of us. Musical encounters have changed us. Music has blown up against us, and run us through. Musical experiences have healed, hurt, and shaped us.

In turn, we mark others with the musical experiences we bring to them, and bring them to. We change them with music. The marks may remain for an hour, a week, or a lifetime. The changes wrought may be good, bad, or imperceptible. We may pause to wonder: will our musical ministrations be tolerated, re-sented, appreciated, remembered?

As musicians and educators, we are a bit like masons, working to build lives with music.

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