

“Cosmopolitan Capital: Musicians, Masonic Affiliation, and Social Class in Late 18th-Century Paris”

In 1785, Michel-Paul Gui de Chabanon, a writer who played violin in the *Loge Olympique* orchestra, described Europe as a “commerce of fine arts.” As a freemason, Chabanon was keenly aware of this artistic circulation. Historians including Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire have identified eighteenth-century European Freemasonry as a decidedly cosmopolitan endeavor. Kenneth Loiselle has recently argued that a cosmopolitan rather than universal ideology marked the fraternity of Masonic lodges in pre-revolutionary France. This cosmopolitan spirit, which promoted a harmonious accord with brothers from around the world, also inspired a desire to cultivate musical worldliness. Lodge concerts welcomed composers, performers, and even compositions—such as Haydn’s “Paris” symphonies—from across Europe. Therefore, Parisian lodges came to adopt musicians as *frères à talents*, admitted as members despite their social inferiority because of the crucial musical skills they could provide.

The membership of musicians in the Masonic lodges of pre-revolutionary Paris reveals a rapport between cosmopolitanism and social class on the eve of the French Revolution. Membership allowed musicians to mingle across Old Regime social hierarchies and to develop professional networks with one another. In this paper, I consider documents founding the *Loge Olympique* orchestra and writings by musician-masons and their contemporaries in relation to statistical data on musicians’ lodge affiliations to ask: how did lodge membership affect the social conceptions and mobility of musicians?

This question leads to the Paris Conservatoire’s deep Masonic roots, particularly in the *Loge Olympique*. Mobilizing William H. Sewell, Jr.’s recent theory of pre-revolutionary “interstitial capitalist abstraction” and Loiselle’s concept of classical republicanism in lodges, I argue that these roots represent not a Masonic conspiracy, but an opportunity for social advancement offered by the cosmopolitan spirit of pre-revolutionary lodges. For musicians, Masonic cosmopolitanism would later translate into both the national and universal rhetoric of the new conservatory’s curriculum.

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