

Hidden gems: The Masons, an 1895 organ and Bach

"I take my fundamental cue from John Coltrane that says there must be a priority of integrity, honesty, decency and mastery of craft." – Cornell West

What do the Masons, an 1895 tracker organ, and J.S. Bach have in common?

In a few words – the geometry of proportion and mastery of craft.

At 4 p.m. Sunday, June 24, 2018, in the Masonic Temple located in the Nashua Masonic Building, 200A Main St., organist Michael Joseph will play Bach, Buxtehude, Couperin and more on the historic 1895 Woodbury & Harris Pipe Organ in a concert entitled "Unveiling One of Nashua's Gems." The Masonic Temple is a hidden gem – as is its organ.

Masonic scholars attribute the roots of the Masonic tradition to medieval stone mason guilds as the language and symbols used in the fraternity's rituals come from this tradition and era. The oldest document of the Masons is an epic poem called "Regius," dating to 1390, though it



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was actually a copy of an earlier work. One line reads: "On this manner, through the good wit of geometry/began first the craft of masonry...."

Indeed, "the good wit of geometry" made it possible for the stone masons – with their unique long-view attention to detail, precision and classical beauty – to build the greatest cathedrals in the western world.

Did geometry itself and the mastery of craft lead the stone masons to apply their craft to a philosophy of life? The lessons of geometry involve the nature of perspective, inherent principles of proportion,

ratio, balance, harmony in design – not bad lessons to apply to living life.

Indeed, Freemasonry developed into a (secret) worldwide fraternity emphasizing personal study, self-improvement, and social betterment via individual involvement and philanthropy. In 1717, four Mason Lodges formed in London, creating the First Grand Lodge of England. During the 1700s, the Masons were one of the organizations responsible for spreading ideas of the Enlightenment – the dignity of man; the liberty of the individual, the formation of a democratic government, the importance of public education. Colonial America's most famous masons included George Washington; Benjamin Franklin; John Hancock; Paul Revere; and John Paul Jones.

Here in Nashua, the Rising Sun Lodge No. 39 was instituted in 1822 in Dunstable, with meetings originally at the residence of John Hunt.



Photo by D. QUINCY WHITNEY

Michael Joseph shows off the organ at the Masonic Temple in Nashua.