

## FREEMASON COMPOSER OF THE OLYMPIC ANTHEM

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**F**ORWARD. It is great pleasure to share this article with the membership of Lodge of Research 200 of the Irish Constitution, and those visiting this Web-site whom may not be members of Lodge of Research 200 of the Irish Constitution. This article was forward by one of the newest members of our lodge, who resides on the Island of Corfu, and became a member of the lodge in the year of our lord 2019.

This article covers one renowned Composer and a Freemason, namely **Spiros Samaras** During the 19th century, he was renowned composer of music in the field of Greek and Italian Opera. Spiros Samaras, is given today recognition for his work in composing the music of the “Olympic Anthem”

On a personal basis, having read this article, I was very delighted in learning of this renowned individual of his talents of a music composer and had the time to become a Freemason. Which on a personal basis, I have gain further light and knowledge regarding our wonderful fraternal history of Freemasonry.

Therefore; hopefully you will enjoy this article as much, take care, god bless.

Well done Bro C.C.

Worshipful Bro Ian MacIntyre, Treasurer of Lodge of Research 200, Irish Constitution.

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### **Author of Article - Brother C.C. 0**

The advent of 2020 marks the beginning of an Olympic Games Year, this time in Tokyo. Nonetheless, it is not widely known that the composer of the *Olympic Anthem*, performed in every Olympic event, is both a Greek and a freemason.

Bro Spiros Samaras (1861-1917) was known during his lifetime as a prolific opera composer and was the most distinguished Greek celebrity of his time. Born in Corfu, Samaras, after studying in his hometown, Athens, and Paris, he commenced his professional career in Italy, and became an established as an important representative and pioneer of the so-called “giovane scuola” of Italian opera, rivalling such composers as Giacomo Puccini or Pietro Mascagni. His operas, such as *Flora Mirabilis* (1886), *La martire* (1894) or *Rhea* (1908), thrilled the opera audiences of Italy, Paris and beyond. However, his name retained a place in posterity mainly because in 1958 the *Olympic Anthem* that Samaras composed in 1896 for the Athens Olympiad was adopted as the official Hymn of the Olympic Games.



Samaras's participation in freemasonry is an aspect of his life that was until recently unknown; He was initiated in 1889 during his staying in Corfu for the Greek premiere of his first and long-standing success, the opera *Flora Mirabilis* (premiered in Milan, May 1886). The lodge of his initiation was “Le Phenix”, a Greek-speaking lodge (still active and being the oldest active lodge of Greece), which between 1843 and 1931 was under the auspices of the Grand Orient of France and followed the French Rite.

The news of *Flora Mirabilis* success reached Corfu immediately through the period's Italian press. Nonetheless, Corfu had the opportunity to stage it almost two years later, on February 17<sup>th</sup> 1889. Samaras came to his hometown and stayed for several weeks to prepare *Flora's* Greek premiere and its subsequent performances.

On February 18<sup>th</sup> 1889, a day after the opera's premiere, the Worshipful Master of lodge “Le Phenix” read three reports recommending the “Profane Spiros Samaras to be initiated into Freemasonry”.

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The ballot brought the lodge's unanimous approval and Samaras, had secured for his initiation into the Craft a week later, on February 25<sup>th</sup> 1889. The imminent departure of Samaras from Corfu, to commence his activities in Italy, was the main cause that led to his rapid advancement into the grades of the Fellowcraft and the Master Mason during the lodge's meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1889.

This practice was common also during the 19th century for individuals, who moved away from their mother lodge's town or who were not permanent residents within location of the mother lodge. Samaras departed from Corfu in the early days of March 1889 and his masonic certificate as served through passage of time, is currently exhibited in the museum of his mother lodge.

In the autumn of 1889 Samaras returned to Greece, this time in Athens, in order to stage *Flora Mirabilis*. The Athens premiere took place in November 1889 with the support of Timoleon Filemon, the mayor of Athens and future Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Greece. Filemon was also actively involved in the organization of the Athens Olympiad in 1896 as member of its central committee, which approved the commissioning of the *Olympic Anthem's* composition to Samaras. It is also worth pointing out that the preparation for the performance of the *Olympic Anthem*, as well as its instrumentation, were entrusted in 1896 to the charismatic military bandmaster, Iossif Kaissaris, also a Corfiot and a freemason (initiated in Athens).

### SAMARAS'S RELATIONS TO FREEMASONRY BEFORE HIS INITIATION

However, Samaras had, indirect or less indirect, encounters with freemasonry already prior to his initiation. His first teacher in Corfu was Spiridon Xyndas, who was one of the first initiated in "Le Phenix" in 1843. One more musician initiated in the same lodge in 1869, the military bandmaster Andreas Seiler, supported Samaras in 1879 during his early compositional endeavours in Athens. In 1886 following the success of *Flora Mirabilis* it became and officially known to the Corfu Philharmonic Society by another freemason of the lodge "Le Phenix", Stylianos Dorias Prosalendis. The earliest wind-band arrangement of the same opera, was created by the fore-mentioned Iossif Kaisaris in 1886. Then in 1887 and in 1889 such arrangements were performed in Corfu under the direction of Leonidas Raffaelovits, also a member of "Le Phenix" (initiated in 1879) and student of the important composer Dionyssios Rodotheatos (the latter being a member of Corfu's "Pythagoras" n.654 lodge under the auspices of the United Grand Lodge of England).

### SOURCES

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George Leotsakos, *Spiros Samaras*, Athens: Benaki Museum, 2013  
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"Three military bandmasters and freemasons", *To Seistron tes Isidos* n.42, March 2019, p.9-10

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