

Schiller Institute at the Cini: Let's go with the Verdi tuning!

by Claudio Celani

The Cini Foundation hosted on June 20, on the island of San Giorgio in Venice, a conference organized by the Schiller Institute and the Italian Harpsichord Association on the topic of Verdi's tuning fork. The event took place at the impetus of Mrs. Egida Sartori, who presides over the Harpsichord Association and who organizes courses on early music every year at the Cini Foundation.

This year, it was decided to hold a seminar on the Verdi concert A to kick off the courses, that A set at 432 vibrations which the Schiller Institute has repropounded and which has been supported by over 2,000 musicians from all over the world. Unhappily, in the meantime the Italian Parliament disgraced itself by passing a law that sets the tuning of the concert A higher—at 440 cycles per second—touching off a wave of protests from the opera world and other branches of music which the Venice meeting recorded and amplified.

The question is a simple one: The height of the pitch is the reason behind the lack of new great voices and, as the famous baritone Gino Bechi, who was present at San Giorgio island, explained, it makes it impossible to train others. Bechi struck two tuning forks which he pulled out of his pocket: one which went back to the beginning of his career, and another which he acquired at the end. The difference was impressive—it added up to a half-tone! Certainly, the other problem is the lack of good teachers, but at least, Bechi asserted, by recovering the “low” tuning fork, we will give teachers the potential to train voices in their proper placement, respecting the natural registers.

But the problem is not merely, as Father Pellegrino Ernetti, the music expert of the Abbey of San Giorgio, explained, that of lowering the tuning fork to 432 for Verdi's work because Verdi wanted it that way; it is a question of establishing that this really is the right tuning, that it is scientific, and that it corresponds to the physical organization of the universe and that it is good for voices. In this regard, Father Ernetti quoted Helga Zepp-LaRouche, president of the Schiller Institute in West Germany and founder of the international Schiller Institutes, when she said, “Man, whose reason (the microcosm) reflects the laws ordering the creation of the universe (the macrocosm) is the ‘crowning of creation’; i.e., what all other organisms in the universe do more or less unconsciously, man does consciously, and in freedom. It is man's duty, as *imago viva Dei*, the living image of God, to imitate the noblest activity of God the Creator, and thus to

continue creation within the universe. Man is therefore the only creature who can freely, yet lawfully, extend the order of creation.”

“This,” Father Ernetti stated, “is the essence of music.” In a beautiful metaphor, the Benedictine scholar related the explanation of sound and light as electromagnetic phenomena to the beginning of the book of Genesis. In fact, he said, the present translation, “And God said, Let there be light,” is wrong. The original Aramaic language uses a word which ought to be translated: “God sang: Let there be light.” Therefore the first act of creation was sound, which preceded light in the spectrum of electromagnetic radiation. The entire universe vibrates and in vibrating, “sings the praises of the Lord.” But at what tuning pitch?

While Father Ernetti tends to seek the response in the organization of the “natural” scale, which preceded the well-tempered system, the mathematical physicist Jonathan Tennenbaum gave a rigorous response by deriving the tuning fork to which the universe is tuned, from the curvature of physical space-time. Thus, the measurement of time and the calculation of the second derive from astronomical cycles, and it is from the second that the period of oscillation of middle C at 256 cycles derives; this in turn corresponds to a concert A of no higher than 432, which is the Verdi tuning fork.

Musical aesthetics

The presence of Helga Zepp-LaRouche at the conference on the island of San Giorgio undoubtedly enriched the proceedings. The Schiller Institute founder and wife of American scientist and statesman Lyndon LaRouche, who initiated the campaign on tuning, explained how the raising of the tuning pitch falsified musical interpretation and the poetic text set to music. Recalling how Schiller correctly attributes the highest moral responsibility to the artist, because he acts upon the deepest aspects of the human soul, Mrs. LaRouche used the example of Beethoven's *Lieder* to demonstrate how a change in register occurring to early or not occurring at all, undermines the interpretation.

Liliana Celani, of the Italian Schiller Institute, then went over the history of the initiative on the tuning fork, which began in America when Mozart's “Coronation Mass,” at Lyndon LaRouche's suggestion, was performed with the orchestra tuned to a middle C of 256 cycles. Then in Italy, at

the Milan Conservatory, the text of the law approved in 1884 establishing an A corresponding to that same middle C was discovered, and it turned out to have the backing of none other than Giuseppe Verdi. Then in April 1988 there was the historical conference in Milan with Renata Tebaldi and Piero Cappuccilli, where baritone Cappuccilli performed two different Verdi arias with the Verdi tuning and a higher tuning.

Over the course of a year, the Schiller Institute's initiative gathered signatures of more than 2,000 musicians from all over the world, but the Italian Parliament ignored them, and passed a law setting the tuning fork at A = 440. One can therefore imagine the justified bitterness and indignation with which almost all the speakers turned to the deputy director of the Tourism and Entertainment Ministry, who came from Rome to participate in the Venice conference.

"I think that our government," Gino Bechi said, "must take charge of the decisive solution if we want to once again have the exportation of singers as in the old days."

"Being an exorcist," added Father Ernetti, "I know about this, and I must say that I have the impression that the footprints of the devil are in this law."

Among the numerous messages sent to the conference (Luciano and Adua Pavarotti, Renata Tebaldi, Piero Cappuccilli, Lucia Aliberti, Raina Kabaiwanska) the protest was reiterated. "We all hope that the law will be changed according to Verdi's wishes," said Elio Manzoni, chairman of the Academy of Verdian Voices of Busseto, who brought the greetings of tenor Carlo Bergonzi.

The ancient instruments

Prof. Bruno Barosi, of the Cremona Institute of Violin Building, showed the results of experiments carried out on Stradivarius violins to discover how the violins would behave, with the changes which have taken place over centuries (lengthening of the neck, reinforcement of the sounding board, etc.) and no longer reversible, if they were tuned to 432 vibrations. With the aid of graphics, Barosi showed that, at 432, the instrument reveals itself to be richer in harmonics and it has its maximum acoustical yield at a C of 256 vibrations—not to mention the damage which accrues from the increased tension of high tuning, which tends to flatten the backs of the instruments. Professor Barosi therefore supported the Schiller Institute initiative and also wanted to publicly thank Lyndon LaRouche, who started it all.

In the afternoon harpsichordist Egida Sartori spoke, drawing the conclusions of the conference, along with Prof. Franco Rossi of the Levi Foundation which cosponsored the event, Luigi Celeghin of the Rome Conservatory, and Pierre Yves Asselin of the Paris Conservatory.

The concert

At the close of the proceedings a concert was held, hosted by the Levi Foundation. The program was mixed: In the first part there were 18th-century pieces by Bach and von Biber,

played by Edward Melkus (violin), G. Murray (harpsichord), and C. Gasparoni (viola da gamba). In the second part, soprano Loredana Romanato and tenor Maurizio Saltarin interpreted Verdi opera passages accompanied at the piano, which was tuned to the Verdi A, by Paolo Ballarin.

A reviewer in *La Nuova Venezia* wrote: "The arias, taken from the Verdi operatic repertoire, revealed a lessened presence of strain, a lovelier sound, and cleaner phrasing. The angelic voice of Miss Romanato, which was clean and impeccably in tune on the high notes, was a real revelation, as was also the tenor's vocalism." A positive judgment on the initiative was also given by music critic Mario Missinis in the main daily paper of Venice, *Il Gazzettino*, who wrote: "It already seems certified, almost chorally, that we ought to get back to the 19th-century tuning fork. . . . We'll see if good sense will prevail."

Rigoletto at A = 432

The major Milan daily, *Corriere della Sera*, ran an article on June 13 announcing, "On next Oct. 11, at London's Albert Hall, a concert version of the opera *Rigoletto* by Verdi will be performed; in the following days this production will be recorded on a disk by a French company. It would be just another event, if it were not the first true proposal to sing an opera, in public, performed according to the Verdi tuning fork (432 vibrations)."

Corriere interviews conductor Michel Sasson, who will direct the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Sofia choir. "This London *Rigoletto*," Sasson said, "is intended to be a demonstration of the potentials of performing the opera in the way the composer desired."

"Piero Cappuccilli, Peter Dvorsky, and Lucia Aliberti," Sasson went on, "will sing the principal roles in the opera, which will be broadcast by British television. In the auditorium there will be many great artists, all those who can be in London on that day, Pavarotti, Domingo, Ghiaurov, and so forth. Those who will be elsewhere will join the demonstration with direct satellite hook-ups.

"The tendency is that of trying to recover the composer's sounds, and so the orchestra will be composed of about 50 players and the choir will be under 40 singers."

Until the A = 432 tuning prevails, he declared, "we will continue to produce performances in this way. For there is a unity of intentions among the singers which could result in a demonstrative strike."