

Clamor grows for return to Verdi's musical pitch

by John Sigerson

The Schiller Institute's battle to revive the natural principles underlying all classical beauty took a great step forward during early October, when professional musicians and classical music lovers assembled in three cities on two continents to debate—and enjoy—the benefits of discarding the modern high tuning-pitch in favor of a return to the tuning of C=256 cycles per second, as demanded not only by all the great classical composers up through Giuseppe Verdi, but by the universe itself.

A two-day seminar held in New York City on Oct. 10-11, a two-day "Ibykus Festival" held in Munich, West Germany on Oct. 13-14, and a gala C=256 concert held in Houston Oct. 7, all underscored the fact that despite the defeat, earlier this year, of the Schiller Institute-backed legislation in Italy to reinstitute the "Verdi A" of 432 Hz (equivalent to C=256 Hz), an increasing number of classical singers and instrumentalists, musicologists, and instrument-makers are determined to make it the standard worldwide—legislation or no.

Debate among musicians in New York

About 25 musical professionals attended the intensive seminar at New York's Merkin Concert Hall. Presentations were made by the celebrated vocal coach Armen Boyajian; voice teacher and author Dr. Oren Lathrop Brown; "original instrument" flautist Helen Velanza; conductor Anthony Morss, and Schiller Institute speakers Jeanne Percesepe, Dennis Speed, and John Sigerson.

Conference organizer Jeanne Percesepe, in reviewing the recent campaign to return to the "Verdi" pitch, discussed the crucial role of scientist and political economist Lyndon LaRouche in presenting the hypothesis which led to the present campaign. She cited ongoing historical research which documents the work of a grouping of scientists and compos-

ers who in the 19th century sought C=256 as the tuning pitch in France and in London, 40 years prior to Verdi's sponsorship of the Italian government's 1884 decree setting A=432 as the standard pitch. These people strove against the romantics who claimed that there is no such thing as natural law, and opted for the sensual gratifications of the higher tuning. The latter faction included Alexander Ellis, the translator of Hermann Helmholtz's misguided and now entirely discredited book, *The Sensations of Tone*.

Percesepe also explained that one of the main reasons why conventions in London and Paris finally adopted A=435 as a "compromise," which was generally adhered to up through the time of Verdi's death in the early 20th century, was "financial considerations," a mistake that should not be repeated this time.

Dennis Speed demolished Helmholtz's theory of acoustics, in a speech titled "Why C=256," showing how the entire electromagnetic spectrum is characterized throughout by a "register-shift" precisely between "F" and "F-sharp," a shift which could not occur unless middle C is set at almost precisely 256 Hz.

Following his talk, flautist and flute collector Helen Velanza gave a musical demonstration of classical and baroque flutes, tuned to A=415, A=435, one almost at A=432, and A=440. Through the demonstrations, the audience was able to clearly hear the warmth of sound at the mid-tunings, the piercing quality at A=440, and the somewhat unclear, less organized tones at A=415.

One of the highlights of the seminar was the showing of a pre-recorded presentation by vocal coach Armen Boyajian. Interviewed while seated at a piano in his studio, Boyajian gave 13 musical examples, to demonstrate that tuning down even less than a quarter-step would have a dramatic and

beneficial effect for the singer and audience, especially in the crucial *passaggio* area of the voice, where it must shift from the "central" to the "head" register. He decried the all-too-frequent modern-day "travesties" in opera, to stage directors who try "to paint moustachioes on the Mona Lisa," and argued for returning to more traditional aesthetics.

The second day of the symposium was opened with the viewing of a videotape a demonstration of the superiority of C=256 made in Munich last year by Norbert Brainin, formerly first violinist of the Amadeus Quartet, on his 1736 Omobono Stradivarius. This was followed by a report from John Sigerson on research on the effects of high tuning on the Stradivarius violins, conducted by Prof. Bruno Barosi of the Cremona Violin Building Institute in Italy (see *EIR*, Sept. 29, 1989, "The Geometric Secret of Stradivarius"), and on research into the history of the violin, which indicates that the circles of Leonardo da Vinci (one of the finest singers of his time), were also responsible for the early development of the violin.

Dr. Oren Brown, a voice teacher at the Juilliard School of Music, who spent 13 years at the Washington University Hospital in St. Louis working with damaged voices, spoke of the ill effects of high tuning on the larynx, and made an appeal to lobby for a standardized, lower tuning pitch in America.

A further session was devoted to "nuts-and-bolts" test performances of vocal musical examples. Lyric soprano Kathleen Cuvelier sang passages from two arias, beginning with Giacomo Puccini's "Quando m'en vo" and later Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Dove sono i bei momenti," first with a piano tuned at A=440, and then with a second piano tuned at C=256. The singer was first asked how the same passage felt in the voice at the lower tuning. She said that she found that, unexpectedly, her middle register felt more secure, and natural, and that the *passaggio* notes were able to be fully sung. The singer noted that she had been analyzing what she was doing as she sang, and requested that she be allowed to sing the entire aria "with the benefit of the lower tuning." Following this, she told the audience that whereas before this experiment she had merely been a "supporter," now she was a "true convert" to the campaign to lower tuning.

Many additional musical examples were given, but one stood out above the others for its clarity. Lyric-coloratura Audrey Luna sang from two pieces, Gaetano Donizetti's "O, luce di quest' anima" and Mozart's "Durch Zärtlichkeit." She sang exquisitely at the higher tuning. However, at the lower tuning, from the audience Maestro Morss found that the voice was "sweeter . . . and more in character" with the role.

In the final panel, John Sigerson spoke of his experiences in leading a chorus in Leesburg, Virginia, which has been singing consistently at C=256 for two years now, and has even required all individual chorus members to tune their pianos at home to that pitch. He noted a remarkable improvement in the stability of intonation, giving amateur singers the ability to keep the pitch steady for long periods of time even without the assistance of instruments.

Sigerson also noted that, contrary to what one might expect, those people possessing "perfect pitch" have found it remarkably easy to make the adjustment to the lower tuning. This was later confirmed by Morss, who said he recently tested a pianist friend who has perfect pitch, by playing him a recording of parts of Mr. Brainin's demonstration. After hearing the performance at A=432, the pianist reported that even though he recognized the pitch as lower, it had a certain "rightness" about it which did not at all disconcert him, as it does when he hears performances at other tunings.

Maestro Morss, who is musical director of the Lubo Opera Company, especially addressed the question of instruments, and recounted the results of his experiment with tuning at A=435 for a performance of Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and *I pagliacci* earlier this year. He stressed the need for rapidly retooling the woodwind and brass instruments, because instrumentalists with modern instruments are simply unable to "lip down" their notes to anything lower than A=435.

Greetings and short statements were read from Lili Chookasian, former Metropolitan Opera contralto now teaching at Yale University, and father and son baritones Louis and Gino Quilico, performing together at the Metropolitan Opera this season.

Also present was a member of the Board of Directors of the Rosa Ponselle Foundation, who read from an original letter from the famous soprano to the director of Covent Garden in London, requesting that the tuning of the orchestra be kept no higher than A=435 for any performances she was to sing.

Defense of Western culture in Munich

In contrast with the New York seminar, which was aimed at sparking debate in New York's densely populated professional world, West Germany's Private Academy of Humanistic Studies in Munich held a two-day "Ibykus Festival" in Munich centering around reviving fundamental values of Western culture, but also addressing concrete steps for implementing key aspects immediately.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the international Schiller Institutes, stated that despite so many political and economic developments worldwide which seem to indicate the contrary, she is optimistic and convinced that the Schiller Institute's slogan—"Nun kommt die Schillerzeit" ("The Age of Schiller Is At Hand")—is actually true. She cited the examples of the moving scenes that West Germans have been seeing on television, of young people who fled from East Germany, risking their own lives in order to have freedom for themselves and their children. She also reported about events in theaters and operas in East Germany, where, similar to events during the Nazi period, people are ostentatiously applauding after key phrases during performances of Schiller's play *Wilhelm Tell* or Ludwig van Beethoven's operatic celebration of liberty, *Fidelio*.

French violoncellist Eliane Magnan followed with a pre-

sentation on how the performer must approach a musical score, to achieve a true interpretation. She discussed the need to make distinctions among three types of musical lines in a polyphonic composition: those which are melodic, those which are rhythmic in character, and those which are static, and played many examples from J.S. Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart to underline her point.

The second day included a presentation by Muriel Mirak, executive member of the International Caucus of Labor Committees, on classical theater. She counterposed Stanislavski's existentialist "method acting" with the true classical tradition of performance based not on the "feelings" of the performer, but on the thoughts and word of the poet, as exemplified in this century by the work in Germany of the circle around Gustav Grögens.

In the last panel, dedicated to the C=256 campaign, the Schiller Institute's Liliana Celani insisted, along with the initiative's originator Lyndon LaRouche, on the need for an identical approach to musical composition and to physical science. She then introduced Spanish tenor Miguel Berraldes, who sang passages from Verdi's *Requiem, Il trovatore*, and the "Celeste Aida" from *Aida* at both the high and the low tuning. Comments from the audience indicated that this demonstration was just as convincing as the demonstration given by Italian baritone Piero Cappuccilli at the Schiller Institute's very first conference on tuning, held on April 9, 1988 in Milan, Italy.

The event was topped off with two concerts. The first featured three fine Italian singers—soprano Loredana Romanato, tenor Mario Zecchini, and baritone Santi Amati—with arias from Verdi operas, all done at the tuning demanded by Verdi himself. At the second concert, Norbert Brainin and pianist Günter Ludwig performed sonatas by Beethoven and Johannes Brahms.

Verdi in Houston

The tuning revolution arrived in Houston on Oct. 7 when classical singers representing a cross-section of the Houston musical scene performed arias and ensembles from Mozart to Verdi. Lyric baritone Douglas Yates opened the concert program by singing the aria "Ah! Per sempre io to perdei" from Vincenzo Bellini's *I Puritani*, first at the high tuning of A=440, and then at A=432. Yates, a member of the National Opera Company, explained how the words are more clear at the lower tuning, the vowels "more open," and the sound more round and beautiful. The singer is also able to voice the E-flat in the middle register, as intended by the composer, instead of displacing the sound by "passing" the note into the higher register.

Also appearing on the program were sopranos Lois Alba, Shana Hogan, and Louise Mendius; mezzo-sopranos Paula Blackman and Jane Riley; tenors Carlton Hines and John Jennings; and baritone Rodney Stenborg, who performs with the Houston Grand Opera.

Of pitch and transposition

Opera in Crisis: Tradition, Present, Future

by Henry Pleasants

Thames and Hudson, New York, 1989

128 pages, index, \$19.95

The following article, kindly made available to us by the author, is an expanded version of one written for About the House, the magazine for the Friends of Covent Garden, in July 1981, for inclusion in the book Opera in Crisis. Dr. Pleasants, now resides in London, was music critic for the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin and the New York Times, and then, from 1967 onward, the London music critic of the International Herald Tribune. He has written, translated, and edited numerous books in the field.

In 1988, Henry Pleasants endorsed the campaign of the Schiller Institute to back a law then pending before the Italian Parliament, to reinstate Giuseppe Verdi's pitch of A=432 Hertz—as opposed to the modern A=440 and even higher concert pitches—as the standard tuning pitch for state-subsidized schools, orchestras, and public concerts. A=432 defines the upper limit of a tuning based on the scientific middle C of 256 Hertz.

The book consists of a series of lively essays, of which the following sample is typical. Although we differ in our estimate of the authority of Ellis (see article, above), we could not agree more on the thrust of his defense of singers from modern pitch extremes, and we find the book delightful and informative—a good holiday gift idea for your music loving friends.—Nora Hamerman

What is *authentic*? What is *original*? And what of the singer? Well, *authentic* and *original* are adjectives much used nowadays by those commendably bent on bringing us operas of the standard repertoire as conceived and written by their authors—at least as far as the music is concerned!—cleansed of the cuts, transpositions, embellishments, cadenzas, interpolations, instrumental touching up, etc., that have come down to us in performance over the years, and are now generally accepted as "traditional," often having found their way into printed vocal and orchestral scores.

Recent examples of this quest of authenticity have been