

Dateline Mexico by Rosa Sánchez de Cota

Children sing for freedom

More than 4,000 Mexicans attended a series of Schiller Institute concerts promoting the cause of world freedom.

If only we had a children's chorus here like yours!" was the universal comment from listeners in various culturally starved northeast Mexican cities to the finest classical children's chorus in all of Mexico, the Mexico City-based Niños Cantores, from the National Music School of Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM). The choir's concert tour was organized by the Schiller Institute and was made possible through the collaboration of the government and state congress of Sonora, as well as the archdioceses of southern Sonora and Mexicali states.

The tour, under the direction of Maestro Alfredo Mendoza, began on Dec. 19 with a concert in Tijuana, Baja California, and concluded Dec. 23 with presentations in Navajoa and Huatabampo, Sonora. From beginning to end, it brought beauty and joy—plus a special moral purpose—to thousands.

The concert was in two sections: The first consisted of religious pieces all dating from the period of the Spanish Viceroy (1521-1821), where musical culture reached in New Spain reached "European" levels. Many of these songs showed the strong influence of the same Neapolitan School which trained Handel and Mozart, but also showed how musical elements of the indigenous cultures could be integrated so as to ennoble those cultures—as opposed to what "indigenous music" aims at today.

The second part consisted of some of the best Christmas songs from other parts of the world, sung in Latin, German, French, English, and Catalan.

The enormous number of people

who attended the concert series also shows that the majority of the Mexicans loves great music, if given the chance. In Tijuana, before 400 people, and in Mexicali before 1,500, the national president of the Schiller Institute Marivilia Carrasco dedicated the concerts to the struggle for freedom by the peoples of Eastern Europe, and especially to the two Germanys, whose fight for unification is based on a single great culture: the universal legacy of Schiller, Beethoven, and the Humboldts.

On Dec. 20, the day of the U.S. invasion of Panama, Carrasco dedicated the concert to the heroic resistance of the Panamanian people. She explained that the invasion is an aggression against the very heart and soul of Ibero-America, which is united by a single culture, a single religion, language, and history.

On Dec. 21, more than 1,000 people filled the state auditorium in Hermosillo, Sonora, to hear the Niños Cantores. The public broke into emotional applause after hearing the children—ranging from 8 to 13 years of age—singing Christmas carols from different lands. In that concert, a small children's chorus of the Ciudad Obregón Schiller Institute also participated, revealing an advanced vocal technique and demonstrating that the musical potential of children is vast, requiring only adequate education.

About 1,200 Mexicans attended the concert in the cathedral of Ciudad Obregón, and heard an opening appeal from local Schiller Institute director Angélica de Tirado for "this Christmas and this concert to be an opportunity to pray for freedom for

those today suffering the infamy of tyranny." She called on the audience to view the concert as a celebration of Christmas "as Christian tradition would have it. Enjoy the beauty of these choral voices, and may that beauty be the means for ennobling all of our souls, to remind us that the birth of Christ is the birth of our civilization, a civilization based on love and freedom, a civilization which is today brutally threatened by the appropriately named 'structures of sin': the financial and political structures which assume tyrannical and savage forms in both the East and the West.

"May this be the opportunity, especially, to remember the heroic people of Panama, who today are resisting an ignominious invasion by foreign forces seeking to steal their freedom and sovereignty."

Present at the concert was the bishop of Ciudad Obregón, who at the concert's conclusion joined with the other priests and parishioners in singing the hymn "Adeste Fideles" along with the chorus.

The Niños Cantores chorus was founded in 1980, and is made up of 35 children. They are students from the Center of Musical Training of the UNAM, an institution which coordinates with the National Music School. Since its appearances with the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra in 1983, the chorus has maintained a constant presence at operas, symphonic concerts, and choral festivals. In addition, it regularly offers its own programs, made up largely of classical music but also complemented by a repertory of children's and folkloric music. During this latest series of Christmas concerts, the Niños Cantores was joined by the Schola Cantorum chorus, founded in 1988 and made up of 15- to 17-year-olds who were previously members of the Niños Cantores.