

Schiller Institute concert honors anniversary of March on Washington

More than 3,000 people filled Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 27 for "A Musical Celebration of the Struggle to Secure the Inalienable Rights of Man," a Classical concert sponsored by the Schiller Institute to celebrate the cultural foundations of the civil rights movement and the 30th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington that featured Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

The unofficial kickoff of a weekend of events in the nation's capital commemorating the 1963 march, the concert also celebrated the artistry of the great African-American singer Marian Anderson, who in 1939 was denied the right to sing in Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution because of race. Denied the hall, Miss Anderson appeared at an outdoor concert at the Lincoln Memorial before some 75,000 people. Miss Anderson passed away this year on April 8.

Now, 54 years later, black and white, young and old, people came from all over the city and region, and from out of town, filling the cavernous hall to honor the memory of that great artist and others who have since walked in her footsteps, and to hear what observers called the largest Classical concert of its kind in several decades.

The house was filled not because of expensive advertising, but through determined community organizing by the Schiller Institute, whose founder, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, is the wife of U.S. political prisoner Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. Schiller Institute Vice Chairman Amelia Boynton Robinson, recipient of the Martin Luther King medal and a board member of the King Center in Atlanta, conceived the idea for the concert to coincide with the anniversary of the 1963 march.

Dozens of Schiller Institute volunteers visited churches and other community sites across Washington distributing concert fliers and ticket vouchers. Other people were invited by letter and phone call, and word of mouth spread the word even further. The free tickets were gone by 2:30 p.m., and when several hundred people had to be turned away, an amplifier was brought in to broadcast the concert into the park across the street.

The concert marked the second sell-out Classical event sponsored by the Schiller Institute in Washington, and orga-

nizers stated that it proved that there is a vast audience for Classical culture there and in other urban areas across the nation. The events are part of the institute's campaign for a cultural Renaissance in the United States.

Inspirational role models

The "Musical Celebration" featured performances of the highest caliber by baritone Robert McFerrin, the first African-American man to sing at the Metropolitan Opera, who debuted in 1955, months after Marian Anderson, as well as by Washington favorite soprano Regina McConnell, Metropolitan Opera mezzosoprano Hilda Harris, and the up-and-coming young singers Elizabeth Lyra Ross, Detra Battle, Melinda Young, Gregory Hopkins, and Reginald Pindell.

They were accompanied by the gifted pianists Sylvia Olden Lee and Dr. Raymond Jackson, who brought a tremendous quality of poetic expression to every selection.

The artists performed the traditional repertoire sung by Miss Anderson and her mentor, tenor Roland Hayes: *bel canto* Italian opera, American spirituals, and German *Lieder*.

The program featured works of Franz Schubert, Giuseppe Verdi, Johannes Brahms, Brahms's protégé Antonin Dvorak, and the American spiritual composer Hall Johnson, who had arranged some of his spirituals especially for Mr. McFerrin. Dvorak, who taught in the United States from 1892 to 1895, was sent here by Brahms to bring the European contrapuntal method, and found his most ready students among black Americans, such as Harry Burleigh and his successor Hall Johnson, who applied to Negro spirituals the method which Brahms used to transform German folk themes into high art songs.

In addition, a movement of a Brahms sonata for violin and sonata was performed by the duo of Seth Taylor on violin and Monica Ripamonti on piano, who came from Europe to perform. The sonata was shown to be the basis for two Brahms songs, which were also performed.

The entire concert was performed at the "Verdi pitch" of C=256 Hz, the original "natural" Classical pitch based on the human singing voice at which all the greatest 17th-19th century composers wrote their music, and at which America's best singers such as Roland Hayes and Marian Anderson

continued to sing until after World War II. The Schiller Institute has been fighting since 1988 to reestablish C=256 (A=430 Hz) as the standard pitch, a fight joined by thousands of leading musicians worldwide. The resonance and richness of sound resulting from singing at the lower pitch were evident to all.

Dick Gregory leads off

The event was opened by comedian and civil rights veteran Dick Gregory, with a 15-minute satirical blast at our times, which had the audience laughing at the banality of "gay rights" and at the grotesque state of race relations in America today. Speaking of the 1991 Rodney King beating and subsequent riot last year in Los Angeles, Gregory commented, "If you see me out there getting whooped, don't stand there taking a video picture; come help me!"

Following Mr. Gregory, Rev. James Bevel greeted the audience. According to notes in the commemorative program, Bevel was the initiator of the 1963 March on Washington, as Direct Action Coordinator for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Introducing Amelia Boynton Robinson, Reverend Bevel pointed to the continuing injustice in America, naming the death penalty and political persecution in particular.

Amelia Boynton Robinson, who just celebrated her 82nd birthday and has spent at least 50 years in the civil rights struggle, spoke to much applause about the necessity to continue that struggle: "The battle is still engaged," she said.

Washington Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly's formal proclamation to the concert, presented to Rev. James Bevel and the Schiller Institute by D.C. Commissioner of the Arts Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, identified the unique importance of the event: "In these times of crisis, this showcase of leading artists performing the traditional repertoire of Ms. Anderson, as well as Roland Hayes and others, will provide inspirational role models for us all and especially our young people."

The concert program also included greetings from Wyatt Tee Walker, former chief of staff to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; from Rev. Hosea Williams, former Field General of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and from D.C. Senator Florence Pendleton. In addition, greetings were sent from such legendary musicians as sopranos Leontyne Price and Shirley Verrett, baritones Sherrill Milnes and William Warfield, and Dr. Willis C. Patterson, President of the National Association of Negro Musicians.

The concert also featured a major facet of the Schiller Institute's drive to bring Classical musical literacy to all Americans: a 100-voice "concert choir" including numerous children from the D.C. area. It included the Nevilla Ottley Singers from Tacoma Park, Maryland, Schiller Institute choir regulars, and volunteer singers from neighborhoods and churches all over the District, many of whom are trained weekly by conductor John Sigerson of the Schiller Institute in the Classical Italian Renaissance *bel canto* singing method.

The choir began with the "Star-Spangled Banner," ac-



Baritone Robert McFerrin performs at the Schiller Institute's concert at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 27.

companied by the children of the Reed Elementary School Band, followed by "Lift Every Voice and Sing," known as the Negro National Anthem, and an arrangement by Sigerson of Beethoven's setting of Friedrich Schiller's "Ode to Joy." After intermission, the choir again appeared to sing the chorus of Hebrew slaves, "Va Pensiero," from Verdi's opera *Nabucco*, and Mozart's "Ave Verum."

New level of harmony

Despite, or maybe because of, the historic character of the event and the unique quality of the performance and the audience, not a word of the concert has been mentioned in the so-called establishment media.

As Schiller Institute chairman Helga Zepp-LaRouche stated in her greetings to the event: "How sorely we need Marian Anderson's great example today, along with the greatest possible number of artists to tread in her footsteps! Indeed, many former associates of Dr. King, who lived through those days, assure us that the state of civil rights today is much worse than it was in the 1960s." This concert and the Schiller Institute's movement for a new Renaissance of classical culture is indeed bringing a higher level of harmony to the American people.