

EIRFeature

Let us found a National Music Conservatory

by Marianna Wertz

The international movement to restore the principles and practice of Classical musical composition and performance took a great step forward over the Memorial Day weekend, when over 500 musicians, community activists, and students gathered for an all-day conference on May 28 at Howard University in Washington, D.C. to plan out the long-overdue establishment of a National Conservatory of Music in the nation's capital.

The conference, along with a gala concert held the previous evening, was sponsored by the Schiller Institute, and was dedicated to the late Marian Anderson, the "voice of the century" and later American cultural envoy who personified the right of all Americans to the best fruits of universal Classical culture. It was entirely fitting that the conference was held at Howard University, which was founded in 1867 during the pre-"Jim Crow" Reconstruction period, and was intended by its founders to be a hub of Classical learning, along with Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, which had been founded one year earlier.

The conference also represented a milestone for the movement launched in 1988 by Lyndon LaRouche, to bring the standard tuning pitch back down to the natural value of C=256 Hz, as was demanded by the Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi, and as was considered the norm for all the great composers of Classical polyphony. It was in fact a dialogue on the science of music between former Metropolitan Opera tenor George Shirley and other top American musicians, Schiller Institute co-founder Lyndon LaRouche and his associates, and the audience, which actively participated.

LaRouche keynoted the conference with his speech "Why the World Needs a National Conservatory of Music Movement in America" (see p. 19). Professor Shirley, the first black tenor at the Metropolitan Opera and professor of voice at the University of Michigan; Dr. William Warfield, leading concert artist and past president of the National Association of Negro Musicians; and Sylvia Olden Lee, renowned vocal coach and pianist, all spoke extensively.



Dennis Speed of the Schiller Institute discusses the way that the "multicultural zoo" created by the British Lord Palmerston spawned the "race scientists" who put the African pygmy Ota Benga on display at the Bronx Zoo at the beginning of this century.

Robert McFerrin, who in 1955 was the first black male artist to perform at the Metropolitan Opera, gave welcome participation in coaching the students, as did pianist Raymond Jackson, performance director of the Howard University Music Department.

Two grand pianos were on stage to assist in the many demonstrations and examples presented throughout the day. One was tuned to the modern high pitch of $A=440$ Hz, while the other was at the natural "Verdi" pitch of $A=430.5$ Hz, which corresponds to a C at 256 Hz. This arrangement was the same as that used in April 1993 by the famed Italian Carlo Bergonzi, when he came to New York City to demonstrate the superiority of the natural tuning at a demonstration concert sponsored by the Schiller Institute at the Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall. As the Schiller Institute's Kathy Wolfe, co-author of LaRouche's textbook, *A Manual on the Rudiments of Tuning and Registration, Book I*, explained in her presentation at the conference, it is only at the "Verdi pitch" that Classical compositions become intelligible. This, she explained, is because all music is based on how the well-trained *bel canto* singer uses his natural registration in order to enunciate poetry. At the higher pitch, that poetry is destroyed.

The first National Conservatory of Music, the inspiration for this movement, was initiated 100 years ago by New York teacher Jeanette Thurber, who brought the Czech composer Antonin Dvořák to New York to head the school. Dvořák sought to create in the United States a school of Classical music using the *bel canto* singing of native American themes, as the basis of a scientific school of counterpoint, in the style of

Beethoven and Brahms, and used African-American spirituals as a major source of Classical material.

Over the past year, the Schiller Institute sponsored a series of concerts in the Washington area, aimed not only at founding a National Conservatory, but also more broadly at remoralizing residents of the District of Columbia, so that they might muster the courage to force the removal of the statue of Confederate general and Ku Klux Klan founder Albert Pike, which still blemishes downtown Judiciary Square. The two issues are closely related: Already last year, it had become evident to the organizers of the anti-Pike statue campaign, that just as during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, it will be the singing and playing of music in the Classical tradition which may well be the margin between defeat and victory.

The Schiller Institute's Dennis Speed emphasized that this National Conservatory of Music is proposed not as a building, but an idea, whose purpose is to "rid the arts of the rule of the cultural (and countercultural) Philistines" through a movement composed of mass choruses, educated through seminars, concerts, and symposia, "intended in these troubled times to bring back into focus the need to reestablish the arts as the center of our lives." In his opening presentation, Dennis Speed discussed the reason why the first effort to found a National Conservatory failed. He showed how the kind of culture represented by Frederick Douglass—whose grandson became a concert violinist—was anathema to the British and British-allied "race scientists" who, following their bitter defeat at Abraham Lincoln's hands, were desperate to ruin the

post-Civil War reconstruction effort. Speed contrasted the integrated post-Civil War state legislature of South Carolina, which was the first to institute free public education, to the revolting story of Ota Benga, the African pygmy who was kept at the Bronx Zoo at the behest of the gaggle of British-backed race-scientists based at the American Museum of Natural History.

Beauty as science

"Music is a serious business, a scientific business, not recreation," Lyndon LaRouche began. He said that his interest in music had been a by-product of a scientific venture, his work beginning in 1947 to refute Norbert Wiener and information theory. Wiener wanted to reduce the content of ideas to statistical procedure, to dehumanize people. Mr. LaRouche was sufficiently angered to begin a project to refute this idea, as well as that of John Von Neumann, the father of the computer and of game theory (although, joked LaRouche, "I don't know exactly how the act of conception was performed").

Refuting Wiener, Mr. LaRouche continued, required proving that he was wrong in a field other than economic science. So, said LaRouche, I chose music. He began a broad-based study of composers, beginning in the 1780s through Brahms. From the study of poetry, he showed that the same principle of discovery in poetry is also the essence of music, and of all great art.

The *bel canto* method of singing is the most efficient way to sing, Mr. LaRouche continued. It is the natural way. And as one looks into singing more deeply, one discovers voice registers and six species of singing voice, which then lead to the natural scale based on the human voice, the well-tempered scale. One then discovers, said Mr. LaRouche, that Plato and Kepler understood that this principle is related to the laws of the universe.

To restore these creative powers today, Mr. LaRouche said, we must engage in this "beloved music," which "ennobles the soul." For his own creative activity, Mr. LaRouche said, he always turns to the Classical music tradition as a "wellspring of spiritual nourishment."

'Physiologically more sound'

Professor George Shirley opened the afternoon with a speech on the universal nature of African-American spirituals, and of lieder. "There's no reason to sing, unless you say something," he said, comparing the dignity of the spirituals, which helped black Americans overcome slavery, to the power of the lied to help Europeans rebuild shattered societies after the war. The purpose of music is "to awaken, and affirm within us, the dignity which is our divine birthright," he noted. "Both the spiritual and the lied speak to the heart with rhythmic power, clarity, nuance, and honesty. They are both Classical. They are both spiritual."

Professor Shirley, Dr. Warfield, and colleagues through-

out enjoyed experimenting with the two pianos and the results of the lower Verdi pitch. For six hours, they coached almost a dozen voice students in opera arias, spirituals, and lieder, comparing the modern A=440 and the Verdi tuning.

The poetic pedagogical powers of these fine teachers was a pleasure to observe. Dr. Warfield made revelations by just speaking the texts of songs. While describing how to sing Roland Hayes's "Crucifixion," he brought such differentiation to the many repetitions of the refrain "not a word, not a word," that there was stunned silence. In most cases, the singers' performances markedly improved, as Dr. Warfield, Professor Shirley, Mrs. Olden Lee and Mr. McFerrin urged them to express the poetry fully.

"The Verdi pitch certainly makes possible the handling of the F-naturals in a way physiologically more sound," Professor Shirley told the morning panel, after tenor John Sigeron demonstrated Verdi's "Celeste Aïda." "The higher tuning often makes one attempt to do something at a place in the vocal range for artistic purposes which is not really healthy for the instrument. In 'Celeste Aïda' the Fs can be sung unshifted at the higher pitch, but it sounds blatant. Yet, the problem is that, if you try to shift the register there, you can choke the voice, because it's too soon for that.

"At the lower pitch, the Verdi pitch, there is no need to shift the register at the Fs, so it's easy to keep it open, because that's the way the larynx wants to function. And then, you get a marvelous change, when you go to the higher notes above the F."

There was also much solid advice given about the singer's duty to master the language in which he or she is singing. The need to do so was underlined by the fact that some of the singers stumbled when asked to do a spoken recitation of the poetry they were singing. Tenor and music teacher Gregory Hopkins (who also sang Beethoven's "Adelaide" following Professor Shirley's remarks) pointed out how in many cases, the singer must know the language even better than native speakers.

'Save singers' throats'

In closing the conference, Professor Shirley summed up the feelings of many when he appealed to the audience: "Become advocates! Save singers' throats! For me, it has been a revelation, to hear the difference in the singing and in the sound of the singer's voice when singing at the Verdi pitch. There's so much gained in terms of color, texture, and ease, expressiveness at the Verdi pitch. Throats don't change as rapidly as Steinway can stretch strings. I think we've heard today enough evidence to support the necessity to make sure that there is a return to the pitch level that singers in Verdi's time enjoyed. Why should it be any more difficult for us to sing that wonderful music?"

Videotapes of the entire conference proceedings will be made available by the Schiller Institute. For details, contact the Schiller Institute, P.O. Box 20244, Washington, D.C. 20041-0244.