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## III. Creativity *Per Se*

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### INTERVIEW

# Italian Evangelists of Classical Music in Manhattan

Jan. 7—Two remarkable opera singers who bring Classical music to the younger generation in Italy, Alessio Magnaguagno (bass) and Fausta Ciceroni (soprano), participated in the LaRouches' Manhattan Project in New York in November and December. They discuss that experience and their work in Italy in this interview with Liliana Gorini, chairwoman of [Movisol](#), LaRouche's movement in Italy.

**Gorini:** On Nov. 7th you sang Verdi arias during a Manhattan Project *Musikabend* to celebrate Friedrich Schiller's 257th birthday in New York. How did you come to be in touch with the Schiller Institute?

**The Singers:** The opportunity came completely by chance. We were in touch with an Italian association in New York, which was invited to the *Musikabend*, and it gave us the invitation. Since we are both opera singers, we volunteered to sing Verdi arias at the event. Our offer was accepted. We and other artists sang, accompanied on the piano by the wonderful maestro Robert Wilson. It was an emotional experience for us twice over, first of all because of the prestigious audience and excellent pianist, but also because it was the first time we experienced singing at A = 432 hz. It was incredible to feel how natural this tuning is. If we were supporters of the Verdi tuning before, now we are all the more so.

**Gorini:** You also attended [both Manhattan Project performances of Handel's \*Messiah\*](#) in New York. What is your judgment of the

[Manhattan Project](#), and what are your thoughts about the "community chorus" which sang in those concerts? How did the audience respond?

**The Singers:** We had the opportunity to hear both performances of the *Messiah*, in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The concerts were great; particularly the chorus was sensational. The audience filled the churches and was attentive and respectful, and at the end, applauded warmly. Even if the social and logistical contexts were different for the two concerts, what united both performances was the total concentration of the audience on the music program, and we as part of the audience enjoyed the Verdi tuning. It was very good to see whole families participate in the concert, demonstrating that music can be a bridge between generations, and an occasion to join in sharing the emotions of great art. Many were young people who participated in the event on



Sabrina Ciferri

*Bass Alessio Magnaguagno and soprano Fausta Ciceroni in duet.*

their own. At the beginning they felt a little awkward, as if they should justify that they were investing two hours of their time in Classical culture. But their applause at the end and the expressions on their faces proved that great works of art have no temporal, generational, or geographic bounds.

**Gorini:** You seem to have your own Manhattan Project in Rome, thanks to which you have managed, without any help from the Italian government, to stage 35 operas in schools, and you are involving pupils in the performance, after teaching them singing from scratch. Yours is a praiseworthy project, which should be replicated elsewhere, since it brings our opera patrimony to the youngest. How did you get the idea?

**The Singers:** That is a delicate and interesting question. We come from very different families and backgrounds, but both of our families always believed in the value of learning and knowledge as the only source of true freedom and independence. That is why we had the idea of involving anyone in our passion for opera who was willing to share the same passion, and had the will to improve and learn. We also taught singing to people who had never had the opportunity, and now could be on an opera stage for the first time. Our work in schools was mainly to teach students to listen, because a concert is not only performed by those who are on stage, but also by the audience. One cannot be without the other. And that is what we tried to realize with our project called “Boys and Girls Go to the Opera.” Opera goes to the schools and schools go to the opera!

We arrange for the main characters of the planned opera to go to the participating schools to meet the students in their own environment. We explain to them what they will see and hear, and the intent of the composer and librettist. We play some of the composer’s compositions, not the opera—something else—so that the students could recognize the compositional method, but without spoiling the surprise of the performance. These “concert lessons” provided an incredible opportunity to explain to them the idea of the opera, enable them to understand the dimension of listening, answer their questions, and bring them to a higher level of par-



*Fausta Ciceroni in different roles.*

Sabrina Ciferri

ticipation. To have 500 young students in a theatre, listening to an opera for three hours and applauding thunderously at the end, is a great reward.

**Gorini:** Can you give us some example of the operas you have staged in Rome?

**The Singers:** We went step by step, starting with single act operas such as Pergolesi’s *La Serva Padrona* (*The Servant Turned Mistress*), Mozart’s *Bastian and Bastienne*, Donizetti’s *Rita, or The Beaten Husband*, and his *Bethy, or The Swiss Chalet*. The success of these operas induced us to move to a more important repertoire, from Mozart’s *Così Fan Tutte* (*Women Are Like That*), to Verdi, Rossini, Donizetti, Bizet, and Puccini. A pleasant memory for sure is Bizet’s *Carmen*. The score calls for a chorus of street urchins with white voices [no vibrato, no brilliance—ed.], and we decided to teach it to students at one of the schools. For three months we were at the school twice a week to teach the boys,—first, how to behave in an opera theatre, and then the basics of solfège and singing, until the performance was perfect in intonation and rhythm. And then there was the enthusiasm of these little men who, well aware of their role and their responsibilities, were able to come on stage and perform entirely on their own!

*The performances of Magnaguagno and Ciceroni at the Nov. 7 Musikabend in New York may be seen [here](#).*