

INTERVIEW *Maestro Gürer Aykal*

Music Is the Language of Peace— Meet Maestro Gürer Aykal

Diane Sare, the LaRouche Independent for U.S. Senate from New York in 2024 and a musician and a leader of the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus, hosted the world renowned conductor Maestro Gürer Aykal on her weekly Friday night New York Symposium on Aug. 4, two days before the Aug. 6 Humanity for Peace rally near the UN in New York City, with sister demonstrations around the world, on the 78th anniversary of the atomic bombing by the United States of Hiroshima, Japan. The rally was followed that evening by a concert featuring Mozart's Requiem, conducted by Maestro Aykal, and a selection of classical arias and Negro Spirituals. Joining Diane and Maestro Aykal on the program was Jen Pearl, also one of the leaders of the Schiller Institute chorus.

What follows is an edited portion of their discussion. Subheads have been added. A video of the entire interview is available [here](#).

Diane Sare: Today, the nuclear weapons that have been developed are orders of magnitude more powerful than what was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Every war game that has been played, every computer model, ends up with the inevitable result that once you start a nuclear war, everything goes. Both sides end up launching whatever they can, and basically the planet is pretty well finished in 40–90 minutes. If you don't die in the original blast, you can starve to death in a nuclear winter, because there is so much ash and smoke that it will block out the Sun for years. That is what we are potentially facing because of the arrogance and insanity of certain leading political figures in the United States, the UK, NATO, and I



Maestro Gürer Aykal

Sare for Senate

would say emphatically, financial interests. These are not just elected officials; there are people behind the scenes making policy....

There will be a rally on Sunday from 1–4 pm at Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza in New York, the location of many UN missions. This will be followed by a concert at 6 pm, which will feature African-American spirituals and the Mozart *Requiem*.

The Importance of Classical Music

This evening I want to discuss the importance of Classical music, which is not separate from building a peace movement. Because for mankind to advance to the next level where war becomes a thing of the past, we have to educate our emotions in the way that Friedrich Schiller described. Schiller said that the person who is sublime, the person who is the golden soul, is the person for whom doing what is right is not out of duty, but out of love. That you love to do what is required, even if it requires a certain self-sacrifice or personal physical hardship. That you have developed yourself enough to take delight in doing things for the good of mankind. It is a struggle for all of us to get to that point, and maybe there is someone out there who is completely consistent and does good things all of the time, but most of us, I think, have various ups and downs; it's a continuous battle. The question of Classical music, something that is beautiful, can inspire and help us to access these emotions; to educate our emotions to be able to act in the way that mankind needs so desperately....

I'm joined by Maestro Gürer Aykal, who is an orchestral conductor, and I understand, also an accomplished violinist; and Jen Pearl, who is the founder of

the Schiller Institute chorus in Boston, and who is the chairwoman of the board of the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus. Maestro Aykal is going to be directing the performance of the Mozart *Requiem* following the peace rally on Sunday. I would like to turn it over to you, Maestro, to tell us about why this is important to you; why you are doing this; and how you came to be a musician.

Introducing Maestro Güler Aykal

Maestro Güler Aykal: Thank you very much, Mrs. Sare. I am doing this Mozart because of you; everybody has to know that. Because I met you, and I followed your ideas. Then I learned that you have also a major in music, so I said, “This is the lady.” I am doing it for you.

I was born in Türkiye; I am Turkish-American. My father was a musician, and I studied in the [Ankara] State Conservatory. I studied first violin. You know, when you’re 11, you enter the State Conservatory, not like in America. After elementary school, if you are good in music, you can enter this conservatory. I studied violin and piano. When I was studying violin and piano, I started to write little compositions. Then I found all my friends started to play these compositions. Then I start to conduct. Then, I understood that the violin class and piano class were not enough for me, so I studied composition; it took another eight years, actually. A long period, but I did study good music there. Then, I went to London. I finished the Royal Academy conducting class; I also finished the Guildhall School of Music advanced conducting class. Then, I went to Rome and I finished at Santa Cecilia Academy.

Then I turned back to my country—Türkiye. I started to conduct there; I’m still conducting there, actually. My wife was sick, and the doctors told us to come to the United States, so we were in the United States, first at Rochester, New York. I conducted the Philharmonic Orchestra, and I also conducted the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra at that time. Then, I was invited to Bloomington, Indiana—I still get emotional about this Bloomington, Indiana school. It’s an unbelievable school. I taught conducting there, and also con-



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Conductor Aykal shares a moment with Megan Dobrodt, President of the Schiller Institute USA, and board member at large of the Schiller Institute’s NYC Chorus. Humanity for Peace concert. Unitarian Church of All Souls, New York City, Aug. 6, 2023.

ducted several concerts.

Then we had to move, because of [my wife’s] medication, to Texas. When we moved to Texas, I lost my wife. My three sons and I stayed in Texas. I conducted the Lubbock Symphony Orchestra first; then the El Paso Symphony Orchestra. I love them, I still have contact with them; they are very good orchestras. In the world, I’ve conducted big orchestras in London, in the Soviet Union—and still now Russia, and Germany, England. You name it, I’ve done it; I’m a conductor, my job is to conduct.

But now, I am so happy to meet this [Schiller Institute] chorus. Because throughout my life we always have professional choirs. The first time I saw this [Schiller chorus], I saw in their eyes; they want to do something. I thank you very much, Mrs. Sare, because of you I am going to earn those people’s hearts, I know, because Mozart is going to do that.

You know, you were speaking about war. Once I saw Mr. Putin playing piano, I saw him. I don’t know President Zelensky, but if he plays a violin, if Mr. Putin and Mr. Zelensky came together and played one Mozart sonata together, believe me, the next day this war would be over.

‘Mozart Is My Prophet’

For me, Mozart is everything, actually. Now, some people are practicing Mozart. Tomorrow, someone is going to enjoy Mozart. Next year, maybe millions of



EIRNS/Sylvia Spaniolo

Maestro Aykal conducting the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus and orchestra in a performance of Mozart's Requiem. Humanity for Peace concert, Unitarian Church of All Souls, New York City, Aug. 6, 2023.

people are going to study Mozart and try to play Mozart and listen to Mozart and get happy and healthy. Music, especially Mozart. If you listen carefully, you will be a good person, you know? You won't do any war, you won't do nuclear wars. We have to do a lot of music. We must have concerts on every corner. We have to make our music public, we have to make our nations understand how important music is in our lives.

Mozart is my prophet.

Sare: Tell us why.

Maestro Aykal: He is my prophet because when I study Mozart, and in this choir when I study Mozart, I get rich, I get happy, I get healthy. This is my prophet; he gives all beautiful things to me, and I am also trying to give those things to other people. Not only to myself. This is Mozart.

Mozart Requiem Performances

Jen Pearl: That was really well put, Maestro. I agree. I think we could solve a lot of things if people played more duets together. I wanted to talk a little bit

about our concert process, beginning in 2013–14, which really set the tone for the choral movement the Schiller Institute unleashed, and now you're seeing this wonderful concert coming together.

The Schiller Institute Chorus performed Mozart's *Requiem* in 2013 in Vienna, Virginia. Then, we replicated that concert on a much bigger scale at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston on January 19, 2014. This was on the 50th anniversary of the memorial concert that Jacqueline Kennedy had organized as part of the funeral mass for the assassinated President John Kennedy. At that concert in 1964, there were 1,800 people gathered in [the sanctuary of] that cathedral, and 3,000 more outside. I'm sure there were millions more watching on TV at that time in 1964.

We had the idea of commemorating that event 50 years later. We approached the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, and one of the biggest challenges was how to fill the place? It's huge! It was quite an overwhelming thing, but as we began to bring this idea of Mozart's *Requiem* and John F. Kennedy together as one idea, it really resonated throughout the city. There are many stories about that, but what we managed to create was

an incredible breakthrough event which featured a chorus of more than a 100 and an orchestra, made up of a lot of young people from the local conservatories, conducted by our conductor John Sigerson. It was addressed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche. Messages were read from Michael Higgins, President of Ireland, and former Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn. At the middle point of the *Requiem*, we stopped the music, and we played over the cathedral loudspeakers clips of John F. Kennedy's speeches. This was very moving, and many people told us afterwards that it felt like he was there with us, and there was an incredible resonance with the people there.

The video of this tribute concert is available [here](#) on the Schiller Institute website.

The Powerful Beauty of Classical Music

That concert was quite incredible, and I think it really set the tone for a kind of process that we've had over the last decade with our chorus in New York, with other choruses around the world. This became a real political intervention, as opposed to just entertainment or something like that. We can move people to change, if not permanently—which I think you can—but at least temporarily, in the moment. Then, if you are consistently bringing them into such beauty, you can change them permanently.

Sare: I was thinking about the incredible tension of the moment that we're in. It's clear that a large part of the world's population is striving for new relations, where they respect each other, where they're acting to eradicate poverty, where they respect the sovereign rights of other countries. And then you have this left-over rotten, shriveled-up old relic of the colonial system, like some ancient curmudgeon with a stick, saying, "Ah, you have to do it this way!" Unfortunately, the old curmudgeon with the stick has the power to annihilate all of us with a nuclear war.

But you have this tension, which I think is very tough on people. I think it takes an emotional toll. It's like sitting in a double Lydian, if you want to put it that way, or a diminished seventh for an extended period of time. You want to know how it's going to resolve; you want to know the answer, you want to know how it gets there. And, if you think about what you develop in a performance, and also, in a sense, when you're in these moments of tension, you also are realizing there is great potential there.

I really do feel like your soul becomes educated by partaking in Classical music performance. I think one of the great crimes in the United States is that people don't learn this in school. They don't sing as children; they don't have music classes; they don't have ensembles. They have no outlet for emotions that they can't figure out how to deal with or control. There's no way of expressing these things.

I also think this music is extremely important for the rally, because I have to say that since February of last year, I wake up every morning unhappy. Not that I'm unhappy; I'm a happy person, but I wake up every morning with this horrible sense of tension. Then, you're spending the day organizing yourself out of it. I think that getting ourselves into the minds of the great composers is so urgent, because it may allow us to find a solution. Beethoven did say that "If people understood my music, there would be no more war."

Maestro Aykal: You are right. In 1791, it was November, and he started to write this music, and he was sick actually. I'm sure you know better than I, that for the "Lacrymosa" [a movement in the *Requiem*] he wrote only eight bars; after that, he died. The ninth bar [was written by Franz Xaver] Süssmayr, who added that [and completed other sections of the *Requiem*]. Süssmayr did a very good job; he took everything that Mozart had written before. He developed all those things; our thanks to him.

Also, it's not always sad, this *Requiem*. Sometimes you have to make a real *forte*, because it's enough, you have to say, "enough"; then "amen." First you have to say "enough."

Sare: Even just in the opening of the "Kyrie" section when you get to the part, "Et lux perpetua" (And perpetual light), it's so beautiful, and in a major key, and light, compared to the difficult part.

Maestro Aykal: Yes, technically it's a very difficult part for the choir. Really technically very difficult; they have to have good education for this, I know. But this chorus is doing wonderfully. I like them, I like them very much. So, I'm going to give them all the strength, and we are going to do something. And people will get the idea.

Pearl: This idea of Classical composition, and the *Requiem*: I was thinking about it, looking through the



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“For me, Mozart is everything. He is my prophet. He gives all beautiful things to me, and I am trying to give those things to others.” —Güler Aykal

text earlier, how you are taken through this journey or process, as you said, where you’re given a way to deal with these complex emotions. But, it’s even more than that—human beings go through these crises. How do you deal with, as you said, this tension of nuclear war?

‘First, Music’ in the Schools

I’ve been thinking about this too because I work a lot with children, and I don’t want to divert the subject, but it’s a similar thing. I’m very insistent with children, that they have to work on Classical music. There’s a lot of pressure to work on popular music; a lot of pressure. I try to make the point that it’s not just the technical aspect of the singing. That’s one aspect, but it’s also the subject matter. What are you actually getting these children to work through? How do you develop their emotions? How do you make them better people? How do you give them a sense of joy, of optimism? These beautiful Classical songs, these art songs, poetry; these are things that, because they’re beautiful, they give people a sense that it’s beautiful to be human. As opposed to all this other stuff that people are bombarded with, which tells you it’s terrible to be human; that it’s better to be an animal.

In working through a certain life-changing experience, either as an audience listening to the *Requiem*, or

singing it, you are given the opportunity to work through things which otherwise you wouldn’t know how.

Maestro Aykal: Very important: music education. In many countries, there is not very good education for music. Everybody thinks mathematics; I know mathematics is very important, but if you give the young generation a good musical education, the mathematics would get better too. You can use music for everything. Music and nuclear war; you can’t. If they understand a bit—*do, re, mi, fa, so, la, si*—they will not go after nuclear attacks.

Mrs. Sare, this is, I think, your job. We need more good music teachers in our schools, and more. Not only every week two hours or something; but also every day, music classes. First, music lessons, then math, then algebra, whatever you want. But if you say the music is not important, but mathematics is important, you will not reach the mathematics somewhere else. You will be missing a lot of things. I’m also fighting in Türkiye for that, for good music teachers.

First music, then mathematics. If you want good mathematics people, good science people in your country, you have to first give music. First, music. Listen to Mozart, and a student, if he or she listens to Mozart, the homework will be much easier. But now, they listen to different music, which I don’t understand. Some young people are listening to—I don’t understand. Anyway....

Sare: I think our dear departed friend, Lyndon LaRouche, who passed away in 2019, would be very happy to hear what you said. He wrote a great deal about how poetry must supersede mathematics. When he was recruiting a large number of young people, he insisted that they had to start by singing every morning. Every morning began with singing.

Maestro Aykal: Great!

Conveys Profound Ideas

Sare: He talked about the placement of the voice, which is something I’ve begun to have a glimmer of

understanding lately; not as a singer, I'm afraid. I can carry a tune, that's about the extent of my singing. But in speaking, as a political figure, I keep hearing this idea of placement of the voice. It's the placement of an idea, actually. It's working to be a vessel for an idea which is more powerful than you are, and to move yourself out of the way of expressing it. Like Percy Shelley says in his "Defence of Poetry" that in moments of revolution, a trumpet may sound something the trumpet itself doesn't understand, but the tone comes across in a certain way. This is so important; it gives people power, actually. When you have the power to convey an idea which is bigger than your own mortal existence, then you begin to realize how you can defeat something very evil.

One of the biggest challenges of the so-called peace movement, or anti-war movement, is that people feel very small. They say, "We're a protest movement." Well, I'm not a protester. I intend that we are going to change the world. We have to change the world. We are not here to protest. I don't want us all to be dead, and then I can raise my hand and say, "Well, at least I was on the right side." That's not the position to be in.

Working together LaRouche and John Sigerson, our chorus conductor for those earlier performances of Mozart's *Requiem* concluded that the motet by Bach, *Jesu, Meine Freude*, which is very difficult, became the piece that the younger organizers worked on, every morning for 45 minutes to an hour and a half. You had people who had no past musical experience; nothing. Jen was intimately involved in that project. They did something very good.

'Greater than the Sum of the Parts'

The chorus I founded in New York, we have no auditions. We said it's open to anybody, and we hope you will do the work. We have sectionals, we have practice tapes, we have section leaders. LaRouche also had a very interesting idea; he said, "Your chorus should have 5,000 members." [Laughs] That's what I said! What a



EIRNS/Robert Baker

Güler Aykal, happy to dance with Mozart and to solve problems with Beethoven.

crazy idea! We haven't recruited 5,000 exactly, but there is a process where maybe 3,000 people have been in our chorus, and now they're also in the audience. They become a better audience because they were part of the chorus.

But also, what you discover, what I love about the chorus, is that if you hear many of us—myself included—singing by ourselves, you would say, "Well, hmm, I don't know; are we really going to do the Mozart *Requiem*? Are we really going to do the Bach *Jesu, Meine Freude*?" But then when you put these people in a group, certain leadership emerges. You discover you have a couple of really strong singers in a section, and everybody begins to orient to them. And then,

suddenly, what the group is producing is infinitely superior to the sum of its parts.

Again, you have a sense of power, because the individual members of the chorus say "I just participated in something really beautiful, that I didn't imagine I could be part of before." I think that's the dynamic.

Pearl: The way you spoke about Mozart, Maestro, was almost like he was your friend. I appreciate that. Are there other composers that you consider almost friends like that, where you feel that sort of connection?

Maestro Aykal: Mozart; but another man is Beethoven. For example, if I have a problem, if I have to solve a problem, if I have to fight for something, I start to listen to Beethoven. To listen to Beethoven as a conductor, and also with a perfect ear, you can hear the symphonies also. I always listen to Beethoven and study Beethoven, because Beethoven gives me strength. I can be more powerful, I can be more demanding. Mozart, no. As a conductor, when you conduct a symphony next week, you will be dancing with this composer, actually. You are getting in love with it. But I'm keeping them away—Mozart and Beethoven. Beethoven I'm going to repeat again, I can fight with Beethoven easily. I can describe my feelings easily with Beethoven. Just that.