

# Greetings and messages from the entire world of music

To the Schiller Institute conference on "Classical Aesthetics and Music" in Milan, April 9, 1988:

**Montserrat Caballé,**  
soprano; Barcelona (Spain):

Cordial greetings to the participants of this conference, which is treating a matter, which, as a singer, is very close to my heart, since in the more than 30 years of my active career as a singer, I have come to the conviction that high tuning does a great deal of damage.



The human voice has a normal height which one cannot alter. By way of a lot of training one can do that, but in so doing one loses a lot: The beauty and the color of one's own voice, its vibrato, and its volume—because one has to place the voice very high, to accommodate it to the tuning of the orchestra; but in this case the tone is not produced in a natural way. The notes are mastered, but the greatness, the volume of the voice is lost.

I am sure that high tuning is destroying voices. This can be simply demonstrated by the fact, that the careers of today's singers are so short. Another good example is the following: Verdi wrote the *Traviata* for a lyric-dramatic soprano; today, however, this role is being sung only by a coloratura-soprano. Today one cannot hear the real *Traviata* of Verdi, as, for example, Renata Tebaldi sang this role in her time. Using the high tuning of A = 444 or 445, it simply cannot be done.

There is something else: Instruments raise their pitch during a performance; if the orchestras begin high, then at the end of the performance, they are even higher. I recall a performance of *Norma* in 1976 at the Scala here in Milan: We began at 444 and in the last act we ended up with 446. When I mentioned this after the performance, nobody wanted to believe it. But I was able to check it immediately with the help of the tuning-fork and they had to admit I was right.

In this case the tuning was half a tone (!) higher than prescribed by the composer. The voices of many young sing-

ers, who lack experience or technical education and preparation, are destroyed after 5 or 8 years, if they have to sing so high all the time; one hears nothing from them anymore. But these were not bad voices, these were in fact very good voices and also good musicians.

I am quite sure that if we were to return to the lower tuning, in which the composers actually have written, then today we would have many Kirsten Flagstads, many Ramon Vinays, many Mario del Monacos and many Renata Tebaldi, just to name a few of the very great singers. It is not true that great natural voices belong only to the past; they are always there, even today.

I hope that this discussion to lower tuning, a discussion which you are starting anew with this conference, turns out to be a great success.

Cordial greetings,  
Montserrat Caballé

**Anneliese Rothenberger,**  
soprano; Salingen (Switzerland):

I deeply regret that I can't come. It would have been very interesting for me, since this problem of the high musical tuning of the orchestra has been with me my whole life as a singer. Especially in Vienna and Salzburg, the tuning of the orchestra is extremely high, and there, while singing "Pamina," I always felt sorry for my colleagues who had to sing the "Queen of the Night" and, therefore, instead of the already greatly feared high F, had even to reach an F-sharp.

I admire Miss Tebaldi not only as a great singer (we sang *La Bohème* together at the Met) but also because of her fighting spirit. I can only hope, that her efforts and those of all of us one day will lead to success.

In this sense I wish you the best for the 9th of April.

Many greetings,  
Anneliese Rothenberger



**Alfredo Kraus,**  
tenor; Madrid (Spain):

I wish to extend my greetings to this conference, which is discussing a very important matter for all singers and musicians.

I agree that tuning today is too high. This is a fact which I have always tried to fight against. Speaking as an opera singer, I think there are several reasons for high tuning, since in the modern era of opera different kinds of phenomena occur: Great importance is given to the orchestra, the conductor and the director. I always thought that *singing* was in the center of an opera, not the conductor, the orchestra and or director who have to be at the service of the singing on stage.

But now the tendency is to create "the great conductor," even the star conductor. So naturally, if you want to be a big star, if you want to be the protagonist of an opera show while conducting, you have to sacrifice the rest. I don't think that this is the way to do service to singing. The most important thing is the human voice, the melody and the singing. The conductor has to accompany them. He can never be the protagonist.

Another reason for such very high tuning is that the instruments are tuned higher in order to make the orchestra sound more "brilliant" and to dominate. So the orchestra becomes more evident, but what happens to the voices? Human voices are limited and if you increase the pitch it becomes very difficult for the singers. In some of today's operas it becomes almost impossible to sing, simply because the tuning is too high.

The only 'solution' is to transpose, but this is not beautiful: In order to respect the will of the composers, the musician has to uphold the tradition. If the composer wanted a high C, it has to be a high C. But sometimes the high C is almost half a tone higher; this results from the fact that after a while the instruments are even higher than at the beginning, because they warm up during the performance. I remember that, many years ago at the opera in Florence, where the tuning is one of the highest in the world, I sang *I Puritani* by Bellini which is very high for a tenor. At the end of the opera, something very astonishing, almost crazy, happened. The highest note for the tenor in this opera is a high D, but in this case it was almost a high E!

Now we are at a point, where the conductors don't want to turn back, they want to continue to be protagonists at all costs. This is very bad for the cause of singing. Probably all singers think as I do about this issue. I am fortunate enough to have a very high voice, which allows me to sing the high repertoire, but I know that many of my colleagues have



problems.

What is to be done? Although it is very difficult to change things now, I do think we should do something about the situation. I wish this conference, which wants to start the process to lower tuning, every success.

Cordial greetings,  
Alfredo Kraus

**Wolfgang Schneiderhan,** violinist; Vienna (Austria):

Cordial greetings to this conference, which is dealing with an issue of great importance for music.

It may seem to be unusual at first glance for a violinist to be interested in the height of tuning, but for me there are two reasons for returning to the lower tuning of the classical composers.

The first reason is my absolute pitch, which makes it impossible for me to hear and sense A as different from corresponding to about 430 hz. Already as a child I had to suffer sometimes outright pain during my lessons with Professor Sevcek, since his piano was tuned much too high for my ear. His reasoning for the high tuning: The tone would sound much more "brilliant."

Secondly, it became clear to me during my artistic career, especially through the close collaboration with my wife, the singer Irmgard Seefried, what a great significance the lower tuning has for the development and the maintenance of the singing voice.



Irmgard Seefried

Unfortunately, the search for more "brilliance" of tone has led to a situation, where the great classical pieces are often performed almost half a tone higher than prescribed by the composer, as I have to acknowledge time and again with great astonishment, when I check the height of the tuning of today's radio broadcasts with my piano.

Therefore, I am pleased that you are bringing the important question of tuning into the musical debate in this form and I wish all success to your conference.

Cordial greetings,  
Your Wolfgang Schneiderhan

**Kurt Moll,** bass; Bremen, West Germany:

The idea of returning to the lower tuning A = 432 is highly relevant today and has to be realized if we want to safeguard our singing voices. I wish you success in the conference in Milan and express my moral support for this.

Kurt Moll

**Placido Domingo**, tenor,  
Mexico City (Mexico):

I regret that I am not able to be at the Milan conference, for reasons related to work, but I hope to be able to do so on another occasion. I hope that the conference will be a great success, since its result will be very important indeed to protect the singers of our generation.



Affectionate greetings,  
Placido Domingo

**Edda Moser**, soprano; Bonn (West Germany):

May this conference give a meaningful message to the music world.

Edda Moser

**Elisabeth Furtwängler**, Clarens (Switzerland):

I regret that I can not be at your conference in Milan, for which I wish you all the success possible.

Cordial greetings,  
Elisabeth Furtwängler

**Karl-Adolf Zenker**, Vice Admiral (ret.), Bonn (West Germany):

As a member of the Schiller Institute, I send my cordial greetings to the participants of the conference in Milan and hope your meeting will be successful and inspiring.

Although my profession as a naval officer prevented me from being engaged as a musician intensively, I always was interested in classical music very much. Starting at the age of 11, I took 'cello lessons for some time. I never succeeded in playing this wonderful instrument with mastery; only after World War II did I take 'cello lessons again, which allowed me to at least reach the intermediate level.

Since that time I have had a lot of joy with my very beautiful 'cello, built by Giovanni Battista Ruggieri, a pupil of Niccolò Amati, in the year 1705. This instrument I inherited from my grandfather who, by the way, also was a navy officer and who was a much better 'cellist than I. I myself had to stop being musically active in the meantime because of a medical problem with the tendons in my hand.

I deem it a positive development that the number of young people actively playing various traditional instruments is increasing. They do not want to become professionals so much, but rather to seriously study the music as amateurs, since the present mechanical or electronic consumption of music does not satisfy their desire to understand art.

I am glad that the Schiller Institute is dealing intensively with the questions of the cultural value of classical music and its practical performance and I wish your efforts in this respect full success.

Karl-Adolf Zenker, Vice Admiral (ret.)

## Text of petition to lower standard pitch

*This petition was circulated at the Schiller Institute's Milan conference on April 9, 1988. More than 70 persons have signed it, including opera singers Luciano Pavarotti, Giuseppe Di Stefano, and Carlo Bergonzi.*

### Whereas

the continual raising of pitch for orchestras provokes serious damage to singers, who are forced to adapt to different tunings from one concert hall or opera to the next, thus altering the original texture and even key of the works they perform;

### Whereas

the high standard pitch is one of the main reasons for the crisis in singing, that has given rise to "hybrid" voices unable to perform the repertoire assigned to them;

### Whereas

in 1884, Giuseppe Verdi had the Italian government issue a decree establishing  $A = 432$  cycles (corresponding to middle  $C = 256$ ) as the "scientific standard pitch," correctly stating in a letter to the government Music Commission that it was absurd that "the note called A in Paris or Milan should become a B-flat in Rome";

### Whereas

even for many instruments, among them the Cremona violins, ancient organs, and even the piano, modern high tuning is deleterious, in that it does not take physical laws into account;

### The undersigned demand that

the Ministries of Education, Arts and Culture, and Entertainment accept and adopt the normal standard pitch of  $A = 432$  for all music institutions and opera houses, such that it become the official Italian standard pitch, and, very soon, the official standard pitch universally.