

# Toward a new Renaissance through Classical education

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

*Mrs. LaRouche, the chairman of the Schiller Institute's international advisory board, gave this speech on Feb. 7 at the symposium on "Creating Excellence in Education Through Music" in Washington, D.C.*

I want to give you a couple of concrete examples about musical education in Germany. But, please be patient, because before I do that, I would like to situate the question of education in a larger context, because it is very clear to anybody who concerns himself or herself with the question of educating pupils and students, that the directionality of that education determines, in the medium term, what kind of a society we have. Do we have a human society, in which the idea of a civilized humanity and state citizens is the outcome, or do we have a brutal society, a criminal society, a society in which violence, and the whims of the powerful and oligarchical forces, dominate?

As I want to approach this problem from two or three different standpoints, I want you to be patient, because I think it's sometimes useful to look at such a problem from the standpoint of different cultures. So I want to talk to you a little bit about cultural warfare in the area of education; I want to talk to you a little bit about the old Chinese tradition in culture, and then I want to return to the question of musical education as such.

I want you to take an elevated view, and look at our century as people may be looking at us 50 years from now. Take the same view, as if you are looking back at the eighteenth century, or the nineteenth century. What would you regard as being important in these centuries?

Well, if you have such an elevated view toward our century, one must say that it was not precisely a very happy one, because there were two world wars. And, unfortunately, this brinkmanship on the Middle East/Gulf situation is going ahead. You may have heard that President Yeltsin of Russia warned that that may lead to a third world war. So, it's not exactly a peaceful century.

You had other such phenomena, like the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now, that meant, when it occurred, that 70 years of a failed ideology led to the destruction of what was supposed to last forever: namely, the Soviet Union. And, I want to put forward the hypothesis that one of the major

reasons why the Soviet Union collapsed, was the collectivist-materialist idea of man, associated with the Soviet system. So, that collapsed.

And now, triggered, but not caused, but triggered by the Asia financial crisis, which you may have heard about in the newspapers as well, that the Asian markets have been collapsing, the currencies have been collapsing, which, for sure, will spread, we are looking, in the next months, in the next period, at something about which I talked with leading European people, which is generally regarded as potentially becoming a civilizational crisis of the West. In other words, the financial crisis coming from Asia will have shock waves in the United States, in Europe, and will not only remain a financial crisis, but will take on a civilizational form. And it threatens to have even more far-reaching consequences than the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## The image of man

I want to suggest that the reason for the crisis we have, the moral crisis, is the question of the image of man. And, if you look at the famous, dominating, leading politicians today, the so-called Baby Boomer generation, Generation X, what you see, is that they have an image of man which is predominantly associated with hedonism, with "me," with selfishness, with self-realization, with things which are centered on "feeling good," on "taking care of your own needs," and lack of concern for society at large.

If you look at the image of man as it is transmitted in our TV culture, which is so predominant, not only in the United States, but also in Europe and elsewhere, you see, again, an image of man which is horrible. It is based on the complete denial of the cognitive process. It is based on ideas which come, really, from people like Hobbes, Darwin, and Nietzsche: the image of man as a selfish egoist; that man is essentially an animal, that he is only gradually different from the beast; that every man essentially is a wolf in respect to every other man, and that therefore one has to have a social contract, and that power is delegated to the state, as Hobbes wrote in his famous work, *Leviathan*.

If such a notion dominates, then you have atrocities like the murder of this woman in Texas [Karla Faye Tucker], who committed, admittedly, a horrible crime, but she did it under



*Helga Zepp-LaRouche at the music symposium on Feb. 7. On the left is David Merrell, a student who reported on his research into the effects of rock music and Classical music on the behavior of mice. On the right is Alfredo Mendoza, chairman of the Department of Singing at the National University of Mexico.*

drug addiction, after 10 years of drugs. Nobody can tell me that there is any redeeming effect in killing a woman who had undergone a Christian conversion, and who was not a threat to anybody, who had committed a crime for which she had been sitting in jail for 15 years. According to any civilized nation in the world, it would not even have been regarded as murder, because it was done in a crazy state of mind, under the influence of drugs. But, in the state of Texas, the governor, George Bush — again, the state — took revenge. It had nothing to do with justice.

We are living in such a world! I want to look at one of the influences, to show that these things are not self-evident sociological phenomena. I want to just look at one aspect, which bears upon the question of music and education. But, to explain it, let me take a couple of steps back, namely, to one of the leading influences which has penetrated all faculties in the universities, with very few exceptions, and which is the leading ideology of the '68 generation. I'm talking about the influence of the infamous Frankfurt School, and their attack on the notion that the ideal in society should be a moral personality.

### **The evil philosophy of the Frankfurt School**

The Frankfurt School, during the '68 revolution, influenced universities around the world, and greatly influenced the thinking of the Baby Boomer generation, of whom Herbert Marcuse was one of the idols. The Frankfurt School was originally an invention by the Soviet Union, by people like Georg Lukacs and others, who said that the only way that socialism could take over in countries other than the Soviet Union, would be to destroy the Christian matrix, as a precondition;

that it was necessary to destroy the idea of natural law, of a higher law, as the basis for authority of acting on the basis of reason.

And therefore, what the founders of this Frankfurt School determined, is, first, that ideas and values, like the idea of the Good, the idea of the dignity of man, of truth and justice, should be rejected as so-called "affirmative values," because these "affirmative values," as they called them, supposedly have made totalitarianism possible. In his writings on the character of affirmative culture, Marcuse wrote that it was important to eliminate any such values. They invented the so-called critical theory as a method of cognition, which was supposed to be a conscious destruction of ideas, and the famous musicologist, Adorno, wrote that "negative dialectics is consciousness of non-identity, lived out to its fullest extent."

Max Horkheimer, another representative of this school, in *The Critique of Instrumental Reason*, made the proposition that "justice and freedom as such, the idea that they are better than injustice and repression, is not scientifically verifiable, and is therefore useless. Therefore, it would be as nonsensical as to say that red is more beautiful than blue, or that an egg is better than milk."

Horkheimer was a complete cultural pessimist, and he especially liked Schopenhauer's *World As Will and Imagination*. He defined as the elementary drive in life, the permanent satisfaction of pleasure.

They also completely rejected scientific and technological progress. Horkheimer and Adorno even went so far as to say that progress means regression: a further distancing from animism.

As I said, the Frankfurt School was originally meant as a

psychological warfare campaign by the Soviet Union against the West, to undermine the values of the West. It was founded in 1924, and at that time, it had the name Institute for Social Research. And, among the founders were Herbert Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and Otto Kirchheimer. During the Second World War, they moved to the United States, and with the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation, they carried out psychological studies for the creation of mass culture. They did studies of the effect of Hollywood on the brain, the effect of soap operas, the effect of the cult of opinion polls. And you can see today how politicians are fixated and dependent on polls, rather than on truth.

They carried out psychological studies of the “authoritarian personality,” and they said that the person who has a typical disposition for a fascistic way of thinking, is an individual who is oriented toward family, profession, and traditional values.

Now, I just gave you the background of this Frankfurt School, to now focus on the specific emphasis they placed on music. And there are many writings by Adorno, a music sociologist, who, in his famous Radio Research Project, together with Paul Lazarsfeld in 1937, studied the effect of banal music on the individual. In a treatise called “Popular Music,” he came to the conclusion that if you have a specific musical hit, something which goes easy in the ear and you remember well, the listener eventually becomes dependent—addicted—and that in music, through standardization, repetition, so-called pseudo-individualization, and specific musical effects—or today, you would add the visual effects of Techno—you create a dependent type. And by exposing people to such music, you develop rhythmically a submissive type, an emotional type. And he says that both of these types are influenced through music to experience, on the one side, a complete disillusionment, and, on the other side, a complete frustration.

Most musical hits, Adorno concluded, are based on infantile schemas, baby talk: “Cry, baby, cry,” “goody-goody,” and repetition of “musical” motifs used by babbling infants. Now, you all may remember that there was a famous hit: “Don’t worry, be happy, don’t worry, be happy. . . .” which was an earworm, as we say in German, and which went around the world. It was aimed at stupefying people! You should not overlook the fact that the whole paradigm shift made in the ’60s had that effect, that aim: to make people more stupid.

### **The Classical tradition: Confucius**

We could discuss this more later, but I want to counterpose this approach, the oligarchical approach of making people stupid through music, to the Classical tradition of great thinkers of the past, who understood very well that great music is what makes people more intelligent.

You know that the most important person in the Chinese tradition is the famous philosopher Confucius, who presently

is experiencing a big revival in China. As a matter of fact, there is a neo-Confucian revival, because the Chinese presently say that China must go back to the 5,000 years of history, and especially the 2,500 years of Confucian philosophy, to find the strength to deal with the problems of the present, and to use these cultural resources to make an important contribution to mankind today.

Now, Confucius wrote a lot about music, and he talked about music a lot in his discussions, where he said that one of the key notions of Confucian philosophy, on the one side, is *ren*, the question of love, but also *li*, which is the idea of man finding his place in the universe, of being in harmony with the universe. So, Confucius says that *li* gives man the right, gives him strength, and music makes him complete.

For Confucius, music had a function for the state. He said: “Music rises from the heart when it is touched by the external world. Therefore, sorrow will give you the sound when the sounds of the music are somber. Satisfaction: The sounds of the music are languorous and slow. Joy: The sounds are glorious. Anger: The sounds are harsh and strong. Piety: The sounds are simple and pure. Love: The sounds are gentle and sweet.

“These moods are produced by impact from the external world. Therefore, the ancient kings were ever careful about things that affect the human heart. They tried to guide the people’s ideas and aspirations by means of *li*, establish harmony in sounds by the means of music. *Li*, music, punishment, and government, have a common goal, which is to bring about the unity in the people’s heart, and carry out the principles of political order.

“Music arises from the human heart. When the emotions are touched, they are expressed in sounds. And when sounds take definite forms, we have music. Therefore, the music of a peaceful and prosperous country, is quiet and joyous, and the government is orderly. The music of a country in turmoil shows dissatisfaction and anger, and the government is chaotic.”

Now, what would you say about the governments of our present day, if you apply that measurement of music? “The music of a destroyed country shows sorrow and remembrance of the past.” Now, if you permit me to say it, that is Country and Western, because that has this sorrow of the past. “And the people are distressed. Thus we see music and government are directly connected with one another.”

In a very beautiful treatise on music, Confucius writes: “When the likes and dislikes are not properly controlled, and our conscious minds are distracted by the material world, we lose our true selves in the principle of reason, and nature is destroyed. When man is constantly exposed to the things of the material world which affects him, and does not control his likes and dislikes, then he becomes overwhelmed by the material reality, and becomes dehumanized, or materialistic. When a man becomes dehumanized or materialistic, then the principle of reason in nature is destroyed, and man is sub-

merged in his own desires. From this arise rebellion, disobedience, cunning, and deceit, and general immorality. We have then a picture of the strong bullying the weak, the majority persecuting the minority, the clever ones deceiving the simple-minded, the physically strong going for violence, the sick and the crippled not being taken care of, and the aged and the young helpless and not cared for. This is the way of chaos.

“So music is connected with the principles of human conduct. Therefore, the animals,” says Confucius, “know sounds, but they do not know tones. He who understands music, comes very near to the understanding of *li*. And, if a man has mastered both *li* and music, we call him virtuous, because virtue is the mastery of fulfillment.”

Confucius says: “Truly great music shares the principle of harmony with the universe. When the soul is poor, things do not grow. When the fishing is not regulated according to the seasons, then fishes and turtles do not mature. When the climate deteriorates, animal and plant life degenerate, and when the world is chaotic, the rituals and the music become licentious. We find, then, a type of music that is rueful without restraint, and joyous without calm.

“Therefore, the superior man tries to create harmony in the human heart by a rediscovery of human nature, and tries to promote music as a means to the perfection of human culture. When such music prevails, and the people’s minds are led toward the right ideas and aspirations, we may see the appearance of a great nation. Character is the backbone of our human nature, and music is the flowering of character.”

Now, the point I want to make, is that there is a direct connection between music and the way society is organized. Please think back: The United States was the first country in history to adopt a representative republican system. And, in the famous U.S. Declaration of Independence, it states that each human being has inalienable rights, which nobody can take away.

Historically, that was very important, and it is still very important, because if the United States doesn’t function on that principle, there is no harmony in the rest of the world. So, citizens of the United States, whether they know it or not, have a much larger responsibility, simply because of that historical role which the United States has played, and must play. And you should remember the famous *Federalist Papers* of Alexander Hamilton, in which he asked, in the commentary, the gigantic question: Can men organize society in such a way that justice and freedom rule, or are we condemned forever, that arbitrary power of the strong and misery of the poor should prevail?

I’m saying that everything has to do with the kind of educational system, and the kinds of values which permeate a society, which will answer this question posed by Alexander Hamilton.

Let me say why we wanted the Thomanerchor not only to come to Washington, and sing beautifully, which you all can hear in the afternoon, but why we wanted to let you participate

in the rehearsal of this choir, which, unfortunately, we now will not be able to see. But I attended a rehearsal several years ago, and I can only tell you: It gives an absolutely incredible insight into how people, children from a young age, 6, 7, 8 to 18, can acquire excellence. And, I wanted to integrate the question of musical excellence — because it is just one, but by no means the only area, in which excellence can be reached in education.

## The Humboldt educational model

You may have heard of a person called Wilhelm von Humboldt. Wilhelm von Humboldt was one of the great, towering giants of the German Classical period, of the so-called Weimar Classics. He was one of the great Prussian reformers, the creator of the best educational system, which, to my knowledge, has ever existed anywhere in the world. And, I want to describe to you a little bit about how this education system was defined.

Wilhelm von Humboldt was influenced very much by Friedrich Schiller, who defined, as the goal of education, beauty of character. He was fighting very much against the prevailing idea of the schools of his time, that people learn only to have a job, to learn concrete skills, so that you can do your job tomorrow in the best way. And he said this is not important, because when you first develop the beauty of the character, the beauty of the soul, and you make a person a state citizen, who takes care of the common good of the state, who has as his highest idea to be a beautiful person, then such a person can pick up any skill afterwards, as it is required. Because once the character is fully developed, these practical skills are very easy.

So, he said that in order to have such an education goal, to have beautiful souls, certain subjects of knowledge are more effective for having such an impact, than others. And, among the subjects which he regarded as absolutely necessary, was, first of all, universal history, that each pupil has to learn in essential ways the entirety of human history up to the present point; because, he said, only a person who knows, over generations and generations, what struggles it took to accomplish our present society, and how many lives were given, how much blood was sacrificed, to arrive at the degrees of beauty and progress we have today, only such a person will value that, and out of that, take the strength to add his own, to give these things inherited by him, more richly and more broadly, to the next generations. And, only such a person has the moral foundation to be a good state citizen.

Another aspect, Wilhelm von Humboldt said, which every pupil has to learn, is the qualitative advances in natural science, and in Classical great art. Because only if the pupil has at least a foundation in all the major scientific progress made, not multiple-choice learning, but rediscovering the creative act of the natural scientist in physics, in chemistry, in biology; only then does he have access to that faculty in the mind, which the great scientist, at the point of his discovery,

and at the point of his creation, actualized, so that the pupil has a training of these greater faculties, himself. And, when you do that over several years of education, you can create genius, because there is no reason why every pupil can't become a great mind, in any field.

For Wilhelm von Humboldt, music was one of the equally important subjects, for the reasons I already elaborated: that music goes to the innermost depths of the heart, in the most direct way. He added also that people should know at least one ancient Classical language, because Sanskrit, Greek, these languages simply have a richer grammar and are more developed than our modern languages. And only if you have the self-reflection of looking at your own language, from the standpoint of a more advanced language, do you become conscious of your own language. Naturally, you have to study your own language in the best way, and that means with the examples of great poets, literature. In the case of English, this for sure would mean Shakespeare, Shelley, and such people, because only what the mind is able to communicate in terms of metaphor, in terms of that which is not in the prose, in terms of that which is not in the facts; but, again, to address that higher faculty, which is where creative mentation, creative cognition occurs. Only in that way can you broaden your instruments of thinking.

Naturally, also, geography: You have to have an overview of the world, because how can you have knowledge about the universe and the world as a whole, if you do not know where the different African cities are, where the different Russian cities are, where the different Chinese regions are? So, geography is very important, and not only your little region where you come from in your country, but you have to study world geography.

You know, the reason why the Thomanerchor was for me the best way to demonstrate this conception of education, is because the Thomanerchor is 800 years old. It has an unbroken tradition of 800 years! And, in the time of the Thirty Years' War, only three children were left in the chorus, because you had the Black Death, and war, and so forth. But, nevertheless, three boys maintained the chorus. And, because this was a horrible period, they had adopted a slogan: "Here I stand and sing." I thought this was very beautiful, because it shows that great culture can give you a tremendous moral strength to go through all kinds of horrible experiences.

In any case, as you know, then Bach became the cantor of the Thomaner, and every week he composed one major piece, and the boys' chorus performed, and learned one major piece, new in the repertoire, every week. And, by just doing that, they developed this incredible excellence, so that they can pick up notes correctly in a rehearsal, where we mortal people, we rehearse it, and we make the wrong notes for years and years, and it's very difficult to correct it. These boys, because they have been trained from a very early age on, they just hear it once: "Okay, this was a mistake. Now I correct it," and it's in their mind.

And, when I saw this, I came to the conclusion that, quite contrary to present ideas of OBE, outcome-based education, or the ideas of "attitude problems," and solving those with Ritalin, and making creative children dumb and stupid, that there is a completely different way that one can solve these problems. In other words, if you apply the very method of excellence, as the Thomanerchor has done it in music, you can do that in every other field. You can do it in poetry, you can do it in literature, you can do it in history, you can do it in natural science, and, in a certain sense, if you take that approach to education, all your problems disappear.

### **Berlin study shows superiority of Classical music**

I'm very happy that just now, in time for this symposium, the interim report about a study made in Berlin was released. I want to present to you at least the most important findings, which proves the point I was just making.

Presently, in Berlin, there is a long-term study going on about the effects of Classical music education on the mind and on the character of pupils. This study has been proceeding for four years already, and it will continue with the same group for two more years, with pupils who learn either beautiful singing, *bel canto* singing, or a Classical instrument. The professor who conducts the study says that, comparing one test group of pupils who had this musical training, with another one who did not have any musical training: The first group is more joyful, more intelligent, and more creative!

Fortunately, the Berlin Senate, that is, the government of Berlin, financed this project, which is conducted at 12 schools. Most important, these schools are in socially disadvantaged districts, or poor districts, namely, for those of you who have travelled in Berlin: Kreuzberg, Redding, and Tiergarten, where you have a lot of guest workers, foreigners, Turkish people, other people of low income, unemployed, and so forth. And the Senate financed the studying of a Classical instrument of their choice, for each of these pupils.

Now, the slogan which this professor wrote at the beginning of the study, is a quote by Socrates, who said, "Education through music is therefore the best, because rhythm and harmony penetrate into the innermost depths of the soul, and give it grace and decency."

What this study found, is that it is not only musical skills which are attained in this way, but that it has all kinds of side effects, namely, that the pupils who are in this program have an extremely positive self-conception: They have extremely high self-esteem, they have extraordinarily developed cognitive powers, they are much more eloquent and intelligent in discussions than pupils of the other group. They have an outstanding creativity and originality in thinking; they have a great capacity for memory, not only in music, but in all other fields. They have energy, will power, steadiness, and an extremely high flexibility concerning themselves and the world.

In a group of 60 in one school, 10 out of the 60 pupils made

earned baccalaureate, that is, the degree which is somewhere between high school and college. You're about 18 when you make this degree in Germany. Ten of these 60 ended up with 1.0. That's the best possible grade, because it means they got the best grade in all areas of their education.

The study also shows that these pupils, because of the stimulation of their creative potential, have a normal desire to pursue other areas of creative activity, like painting, writing poetry, composing, doing scientific research, writing short stories, and so forth.

And, the pupils who are involved in this, have absolutely no aggressivity. Their social behavior is vastly improved; they respect each other. If you ask these pupils, "Is there anybody you absolutely can't stand, you hate?" they say, "no," while, in the other group, which hasn't learned a musical instrument, they say, "I can't stand this guy!" There is a big emotional difference.

So, what this professor emphasizes, is the connection of music to the character and the mind, which has been long debated, since the Greek Classics, since the Confucian tradition; but, with this study, for the first time, even the people who want to have hard facts and statistics, should be satisfied. And, it's the first time that a so-called scientific, provable such experiment has been made. And therefore, he recommends that the learning of a Classical instrument should be an essential part of any educational program.

## Creating a new Renaissance

I'm telling you these things, because we have reached a point of no return. In a country like the United States, where, according to what I heard, in some cities, you have curfews for your young people in the evening, because they're regarded as the most dangerous element of society. In my view, if you look in the mirror and you see a society which regards its own youth as the most dangerous element, and therefore, they can't go out in the evening: That is a dying society. A society in which you need a metal detector to enter a high school, is a dying society; a society in which 60% of the adult population, as in the case of Baltimore, is illiterate, functionally illiterate: That is a dying society.

So, I just hope that, on the one side, by reflecting on that, and on the other side, looking at the beautiful example of the Thomanerchor this afternoon, that this symposium will become a point of change, and that a whole movement of people fighting for excellence in education, will be the result of it. And, if it doesn't come from the government—which would be better, if they would do that—but if it doesn't come from the government, it has to come from the initiative of the people, because it is your country, it's your own life, and it is your children and grandchildren who will profit—or suffer—from your action or non-action.

Let me end by reporting to you one activity the Schiller Institute is engaged in, in Germany. Schiller was the most famous and most beloved poet in Germany, and the Schiller

Institute is named after him, because of the ideal of man he represents.

In Germany, we have similar problems to those of the United States, that because of a whole bunch of changes in the education system, many young pupils, many children, do not know poems any more, the Classical poems of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Heine. And therefore, several years ago, the Schiller Institute started to try to recite Classical poetry, which is a dying art. There are not many people who know how to do it any more. And now, you have many groups spreading all over Germany, who have worked on this for two, three, four years, and reached actually quite a degree of excellence.

And, these people, of whom I'm sometimes a part—in the beginning, we went to senior citizens homes, on the one side, because these old people all still remember poems, and many times they would just fall into line beside you, when you would recite poems; on the other side, it's a very rewarding thing, because it helps them to get through the day a little bit better. Then, the poetry group branched out to rehabilitation clinics involving patients, and schools, and, eventually, a whole movement developed, where now you can have such an event, with 50 or 100 people each time.

So, it shows that there is a desire in the people for great culture. And I think that the reception of the Thomanerchor here in the United States, shows that a similar potential exists here. I think the fact that celebrated musicians from all over the United States, and abroad as well, are supporting this effort, gives hope that indeed, at a point where we are looking at the potential collapse of civilization, and a moral crisis, that we can start the process of rebuilding culture. And, what better thing can happen to you, than to look into the faces of happy little children singing, playing instruments, doing something which makes them joyful, even if it occurs in a city which is going to hell?

And I can assure you—and you can think about me when this happens—that in the next weeks and months, the whole world will go through incredible financial, political, and psychological crises, for reasons which are not now the subject of this symposium, but having to do with the financial crisis, having to do with what's happening in the Middle East, and so forth. And, I'm predicting that all the values which have led to the present moral condition of our society, all the values of the Frankfurt School, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, all these values will be called into question. And then will come the time, when people will have to go back to beauty. They will have to go back to the beautiful ideas in Classical culture, in Classical music, in literature. And, I'm convinced that if we do that, then the people here in this room, as well as many co-thinkers around the world, are the ones who will be the seed of a new Renaissance, which is the only way the world will get out of this mess.

But I'm totally convinced that man is made for something better, and therefore, we can create a new Renaissance.