

‘STRENGTH TO LOVE’

# A Special Tribute to Dr. King

by Dennis Speed

Justice, truthfulness, and those creative powers by means of which we may discover valid, revolutionary principles of our universe, form a seamless whole, in which Classical culture, morality, and physical science are united by a common passion for universal justice and truth. *Where are the men and women fit to lead us in the pathway toward safety, the pathway toward rule by the principles of truth and justice, not ‘popular opinion’?*

—Lyndon LaRouche  
“The Substance of Morality,” 1998

Jan. 24—“Strength To Love”: A Unity Concert—A special tribute in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s vision of the future, was the name of the flagship

event which culminated a two-day “congress” held by the Schiller Institute, in collaboration with The Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture.

A combination of Italian operatic arias by composer Giuseppe Verdi, German songs by Franz Schubert and J.S. Bach, and African-American Spirituals, set both for chorus and for single voice, made up the concert repertoire.

The 350 concert participants were also presented with the cantata for voice and piano, *The Life of Christ*, composed in 1948 by the renowned tenor, Roland Hayes. It consists of ten core selections, with other additional songs capable of being added, according to the performer’s wishes.

For this particular occasion, there was an ensemble of three voices—soloist tenors Everett Suttle and Regi-



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*The Schiller Institute NY Community Chorus and guest soloists at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Unity Concert, Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph, Brooklyn, Jan. 15.*

nald Bouknight, and baritone Frank Mathis—who chose to add four songs to the core of ten. A fourth voice, that of Roland Hayes as narrator, was supplied by mezzo Elvira Green. The quartet was accompanied at the piano by Gregory Hopkins, singer, organist, conductor, and Artistic Director for the Harlem Opera Theater.

Both Green and Hopkins worked for decades with renowned vocal coach Sylvia Olden Lee, the first African-American ever hired by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Lee was a member of the Schiller Institute Advisory Board for nearly ten years, until her passing in 2004.

Such a performance of *The Life of Christ* has rarely occurred, if ever at all. This presentation of the piece was intended to emphasize the dramatic content of Hayes' narrative of the Christ story, as well as the reverent simplicity of his settings. Hayes consciously wished to invoke the mood, and approximate the form, of Bach's weekly cantata offerings that he wrote as new compositions for his church at Leipzig. The effect of the multiply-connected voicing of the performing quintet was to focus the audience on the arc of the piece, rather than the particular song being performed.

Monsignor Kieran Harrington—the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph at which he serves televised the entire concert live—had introduced the entirety with an invocation, prior to which he gave brief remarks of welcome. He stressed the role that such events, dedicated to the theme of unity, could have in internationalizing the vision of the United States, to take into consideration conditions of war and crisis worldwide. He named the nations of Syria, Nigeria, and Venezuela, where war, terrorism and economic catastrophe are a fact of daily life.

By “unity” is meant not the infantile “why can’t we all just get along?” but the unity of the American republic,



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*Roland Hayes' cantata, The Life of Christ, was performed by three voices supported by piano and narrator. From left, Gregory Hopkins (piano), Everett Suttle (tenor), Reginald Bouknight (tenor), Frank Mathis (baritone), and Elvira Green (narrator).*

lic, as Alexander Hamilton and Gouverneur Morris, Hamilton's closest friend, had stated that principle of unity in the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States, which Morris drafted.

Monsignor Harrington then introduced the New York Police Department Ceremonial Unit, including William Bove, bass-baritone, to sing “God Bless America.”

Later, Schiller Institute spokesman Dennis Speed revealed to the audience that “God Bless America” was being performed in honor of the Alexandrov Ensemble, 64 of whose members were killed on Christmas Day 2016 in a plane crash. The Alexandrov Ensemble had performed “God Bless America” to honor the United States and the New York City Police Department on the tenth anniversary of September 11. The NYPD Ceremonial Unit, led by Lt. Tony Giorgio, had just joined the Schiller Institute in conducting an outdoor commemorative ceremony at the Teardrop Memorial in Bayonne, New Jersey, on Orthodox Christmas Day, Saturday, Jan. 7, 2017.

In one sense, *each* musical offering in the concert was in the form of a prayer. Many of the audience were aware that this year, 2017, marks the 50th anniversary

of King's famous speech against the Vietnam War, delivered at New York City's Riverside Church on April 4, 1967. King momentarily, back then, almost lost everything because he gave that speech. Newspapers, including the *New York Times*, denounced him. Contributions dried up. His popularity sank to an all-time low.

Already affected by the diminution of his influence among African-American youth as a result of the Black Power slogan and movement of 1967-68, and by internal criticism of his "splitting his attention" between his controversial Vietnam War stand and his defense of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee—when King gave his final speech on April 3, 1968, he was not the popular Nobel Peace Prize-winner of December 1964. "He was despised and rejected" by his former liberal-establishment backers.

The selections, Schubert's *Ave Maria* and Bach's *Bist du bei mir*, respectively performed by sopranos Indira Mahajan and Gudrun Buhler, were not only chosen for their relative familiarity. They are both prayers of persons contemplating death. "Abide with me, and I shall go joyfully to my death and to my peace," says the singer in the Bach work. Indira Mahajan's *Ave Maria* performance of the familiar Catholic prayer, in the Latin rarely heard today in the Catholic Church, was particularly noted and appreciated.

The Verdi operatic selections that followed, taken from his *Don Carlos*, originally written by Germany's greatest playwright Friedrich Schiller, and from Shakespeare's *Othello*, are also prayers. The first is Verdi's *Dio, che nell'alma infondere*, simultaneously a prayer and a freedom song, a duet in which the two singers (Frank Mathis and Everett Suttle) reinforce each other in their mutual commitment to a cause. The second, Desdemona's *Salce! Salce!* (Willow! Willow!) aria, one of the most famous in opera, was so well per-



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*The concert included arias by Verdi, songs by Schubert and Bach, and African-American Spirituals, set both for chorus and for single voice.*

formed by Gudrun Buhler that there was no immediate reaction from the audience—only silence. Desdemona's agony as she awaits her certain execution at the hands of her deeply beloved Othello—a fate she does not deserve and did not cause, but cannot change—does not diminish her love for him.

### Gethsemane in Memphis

As with Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address,—there were two great speeches that defined King's public life in America. His "March on Washington" speech was given in front of over 250,000 people and simultaneously televised. His speech in Memphis, "I've Been to the Mountain-Top," which was essentially extemporized, was given to just over 600 people, in a two-thirds filled church, on a rainy, stormy night, and has been seen or heard, in its entirety, by far fewer people. The conclusion of the speech is well known:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And so, I'm happy to-

night. So I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

It is the beginning of the speech that makes it clear that King has imitated Christ, and has consciously placed himself on the stage of universal history. This is not merely a personally-willed decision, but an ontologically willed decision:

Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world. And you know, if I was standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a kind of general and panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?" I would take my mental flight by Egypt, and I would watch God's children in their magnificent trek from the dark dungeons of Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land. And in spite of its significance, I wouldn't stop there.

I would move on by Greece and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides, and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon. And I would watch them around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would go on, even to the great heyday of the Roman Empire ... But I wouldn't stop there. I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all that the Renaissance did for the cultural and aesthetic life of man. But I wouldn't stop there. ...

Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty and say, "If you will allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy."

Now that's a strange statement to make, ...

King's speech was not, as most believe, a wild preacher's rhetorical ecstasy at its conclusion, but was a 43-minute, conscious and optimistic acceptance of Gethsemane. It is a magnificent act of courage, like that committed by the historical Jeanne D'Arc, which

directly led to the creation of the French nation. King's assassination less than 24 hours later by a multiple-person unit—and not by "lone assassin" James Earl Ray, who later denied being King's executioner and co-wrote a book entitled "Who Killed Martin Luther King?"—was neither unexpected nor sought, but it also was not feared. It was the inner music of his intent to act for the cause of freedom that King relied upon for his power. That power was not singular with King, but was the wellspring of intent that he knew to be contained in the African-American Spiritual. King's ability to invoke this power in his audiences, African-American and otherwise, stemmed from his ability, as Roland Hayes also demonstrated, to hear the divine spark of, not resignation, but optimistic defiance of the slave mentality.

It was in order to bring this re-assessment of King's last hours to life in the minds of the audience that Hayes' *Life of Christ* was selected. Hayes' unique experience of the African-American Spiritual's Classical roots—in the sense in which the Schiller Institute utilizes that term, along with the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture—qualifies his portrait of Christ as the perfect frame for rendering with psychological truth "the imitation of Christ" that was King's final hours.

Despite the fact that all who participated wittingly and with forethought in preserving the institution of slavery, turned themselves and every social institution with which they were associated into animals—except the slaves—the preservation of the humanity of the nation was still made possible through the invention of the African-American Spiritual. The performance by the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus, conducted by Diane Sare, Founder and Co-Director of the group, of three Spirituals at the beginning of the program, managed to capture this idea. In particular the Spiritual, "Soon Ah Will Be Done (With the Troubles of the World)," illustrates this. The chorus, which sang at the beginning of the concert, then took its seats, and shifted its choral role to that of audience.

The Schiller Institute intends to increase its "singer audience" to 1,500 people in the coming months, as a way of providing a cultural paradigm-shift to occur in parallel with the "new economic platform" that must needs be brought about in the current circumstance. The very survival of the United States may depend on re-employing the key components of American Classi-





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*Chorus founder Diane Sare (shown) and music director John Sigerson conducted the chorus.*

cal culture, such as the African-American Spiritual as developed, preserved, and performed by Roland Hayes, Sylvia Lee, Hall Johnson, Harry Burleigh, and Antonin Dvorak, to allow today's citizens "to stand on the rock where Moses"—and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—stood.

## The Mission of Roland Hayes

*Jan. 24—The following are excerpts from Roland Hayes' foreword to his book, My Songs: Aframerican Religious Folk Songs Arranged and Interpreted by Roland Hayes (1948).*

I was born just twenty-four years after the Emancipation Proclamation. The atmosphere of the slave days was still strong at my place of birth and the religious folk songs of my people were being born out of religious experience at white heat. I have seen them being born in our religious services at the community Mount Zion Baptist Church at "Little Row" (now Curryville), Gordon County, Georgia. Here I heard great ritual sermons preached and prayers prayed, and I

sang the Aframerican religious folk songs as a child with my parents and the church folk. Later, I was for four years a music special student at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and I acquired additions to the knowledge I already had of our folk songs from their pioneer collections.

In London and Paris, where I lived for twelve years, I made my home with some highly intelligent native Africans, most from the West Coast of Africa, who were making university studies under government auspices. Discussions of the music of African peoples in Africa and Aframerican folk music were mutually enlightening. Aframerican folk songs, forgotten since childhood,

sprang to my lips, and to my astonishment my native African audience joined in the music while expressing what they felt in their own language idiom. This pointed out to me the African characteristics in Aframerican folk songs, and in the heat of discovery the dross was separated from pure metal, to borrow a figure from the iron foundry in Chattanooga where I worked as a youth.

Eventually, I obtained recordings of African music, and a collection of musical instruments used in them, which I learned to manipulate well enough to understand them. From my African friends in London, and later from African visitors to my home, I learned how instrumental effects are sometimes implied in the vocal characteristics of the older Aframerican folk songs. These and other studies I have drawn upon in some of my accompaniments.

The term "Negro" is a misnomer when taken to mean that in anything but color the slaves within the borders of the various Southern states, or the various plantations—or even anywhere—were of one universal type. But for those Africans who were transplanted to the United States the term "Aframerican" seems fitting.

*In the same work, he began his introduction to his Life of Christ cycle as follows.*

The salvation of man is always the great theme of masterworks in literature and art. Biblical material follows like a red thread in mankind's art works through