

‘If You are Human, You Should Sing!’

by Susan Bowen

Dec. 26—Under the baton of Maestro John Sigerson, the Schiller Institute New York City Chorus and Orchestra last week demonstrated the quality of creativity necessary to reverse the crisis of civilization facing our nation and the world.

At the beautiful Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary/St. Stephens Roman Catholic Church in Brooklyn, New York on Saturday evening, Dec. 19, 2015, the first of two unique presentations of the often-performed *Messiah*, by George Frederic Handel (1684-1759) was sung in the Italian bel canto style, at the Verdi tuning (middle C at 256 Hertz, A at 432). The [Brooklyn concert](#) was dedicated to the Principle of the Sanctity of Human Life, and was opened with a welcome and prayer by the Rev. Msgr. Guy Massie.

The soloists in both concerts were Rosa D’Imperio, soprano; Mary Phillips, mezzo-soprano; Everett Suttle, tenor; and Jay Baylon, bass-baritone. Maestro Sigerson was particularly attentive to Handel’s intention, his words, his voicing, and his message, thus gripping the audience with a much richer and more profound *Messiah* than they had heard before.

On Sunday, Dec. 20, young students, teachers, music lovers, church members, neighbors, musicians, people who got a flyer on the street, civic and political activists, and curious individuals who had never heard a classical concert, filled Manhattan’s All Souls Unitarian Church to capacity to hear [the performance](#). Lynn Yen, Executive Director of the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture, which co-sponsored the event, welcomed the standing-room-only audience, who came to hear Handel’s *Messiah* speak to them of Peace on Earth and Good Will toward Mankind.



Schiller Institute

John Sigerson conducting the Schiller Institute chorus in the Mozart Requiem in Boston, Jan. 19, 2014.

Conceived as an intervention against the violence, the wars, and the lack of Classical education that permeate our depressed economy today, these beautiful concerts of the “Manhattan project” succeeded beyond expectation. Many who came signed up to join the choir, the Foundation, and the Schiller Institute movement, and the New York City landscape has been transformed as a result of the performances at these two historic churches.

Read the programs and learn more.

- [Program for Messiah Performance on December 19 in Brooklyn.](#)
- [Program for Messiah Performance on December 20 in Manhattan.](#)

Interview with John Sigerson

I interviewed John Sigerson, Music Director of the Schiller Institute, on Dec 26, a few days after he conducted the extraordinary performances of Handel's Messiah in Brooklyn and Manhattan. I was fortunate to participate in the chorus in these historic events, and I can report that throughout the rehearsals and right up through the performance, John's constant refrain to his choir, and also to the orchestra, was that we were never to just "sing the notes"! He insisted that we sing the music, the ideas, and communicate what Handel had intended in his Messiah. From all accounts by those who heard the live concerts, this sublime mission was accomplished. We discuss that in the interview below.

Bowen: You conducted Handel's *Messiah* in New York. This is one of the most often-performed works in the United States, and yet these two performances were unique. To start out, can you talk about why the Schiller Institute Chorus and orchestra perform at the "Verdi" tuning (where Middle C is at or near 256 Hz, and the "A" is no higher than 432 Hz)?

John Sigerson: All the great Classical composers, from the time of Brunelleschi and Guillaume Dufay in the Italian Golden Renaissance up through Johannes Brahms, understood that music, both vocal and instrumental, must never stray from the primacy of the beautiful, well-placed human singing voice. During the mid-1980s, in the course of wide-ranging discussions about the scientific discoveries of Nicholas of Cusa and Johannes Kepler, combined with discussions about Classical poetry and German *Lieder*, Lyndon LaRouche decided that the time was over-ripe to return to a tuning which is in harmony with the underlying principles of the human singing voice, and specifically with the way the human voice is organized into registers.

These registers are, in fact, of the same nature as the orbits of the planets in our Solar System as investigated by Kepler. And just as those orbits aren't accidental, neither are the vocal registers! And the tuning that works best with these registers, happens to locate Middle C at, or around, 256 cycles per second.

We quickly discovered that indeed, this was the tuning demanded by Verdi, in opposition to those who sought to raise the pitch to arbitrarily higher values, supposedly in order to make instruments sound more

brilliant. It was also the tuning preferred by Mozart, Beethoven, and many others.

So we started a campaign to return to the natural tuning, and enlisted the enthusiastic support of a number of the world's greatest singers of the time, including the baritone Piero Cappuccilli, who, in a video you can see [on the Internet](#), conclusively demonstrated the superiority of the Verdi tuning. And then Norbert Brainin, the first violinist of the famous Amadeus Quartet and already a longtime friend of Lyndon LaRouche, demonstrated that his Omobono Stradivarius also works best at C=256 Hz.

So, things went on from there. We tuned our pianos down, shattering the myth held by many that it would destroy the instrument. I trained our chorus at the lower pitch, and found that it was much easier to train beginners, and that advanced singers felt that they could finally spread their wings vocally, so to speak. I co-authored a book on the principles of registration and tuning, and I also collaborated with the tenor Carlo Bergonzi on a demonstration at Carnegie Hall in New York City, where he warned that unless we returned to the Verdi tuning, the days of great "Verdi voices" would never return.

Bowen: Great opera singers, like those you mention, Cappuccilli and Bergonzi, are *bel canto* singers, as are most professional soloists. But your choral singers also train in "bel canto" singing, the method of especially of Italian opera singers. The Schiller Institute New York City chorus is a Community chorus, open to everyone, so the participants are not professional singers. Can everyone learn to sing in a chorus?

Sigerson: Well, if you're human, and your voice is not seriously damaged in some way, you should sing, and strive to sing Classical music, since it's the best way to educate your emotions along the lines discussed by Friedrich Schiller in his letters on the aesthetic education of man. And what better way to sing than with a chorus of people dedicated not just to singing for self-gratification or entertainment, but to the same moral purpose as Schiller's? That's why I've never been in favor of excluding anyone who wants to join our chorus, even if they may have serious vocal limitations, whether those be of the physiological sort, or of the psychological sort such as so-called "tone-matching."

Of course, we're fortunate enough to have a core of experienced singers who can help the beginners along. We also encourage chorus members to attend smaller



Choristers celebrating the Fall of the Berlin Wall with Beethoven's Choral Symphony on Christmas Day 1989.

sessions with others of the same voice type, so that we can create as much of a conservatory-type spirit as possible, given people's other life responsibilities.

Retuning All the Instruments

Bowen: Handel's *Messiah* is written in English, and quotes from Bible passages, so it should be quite intelligible to an American audience. Following the performances, audience members in these concerts said that not only were these presentations intelligible, but, in fact, seemed to be much more "alive," as if speaking directly to them. Why was that? Is that why the words and the phrasing were so articulated? Can you give an example?

Sigerson: Americans' speaking habits nowadays have degenerated way below what they were, say, 100 years ago or more, and when they sing in their own language today, they tend to bring in their bad habits more than if they were singing in a foreign language such as German, Italian, or Latin. One of those bad habits is speaking in a mechanical way, where each syllable is spat out like machine-gun bullets, in a rapid monotone.

For example: People will say, and sing "For the glory of the Lord" in such a way that they put just as much emphasis on "the" and "of the" as they do on

"glory" and "Lord." So, they may be singing the notes correctly, and even with decent vocal production, but the effect is totally mechanical and unpoetic.

Therefore, in my rehearsals of *Messiah*, I've been insisting on a natural delivery that is in keeping with the natural tuning and placement. To continue my example, not only do you want to de-emphasize "the" and "of the," but you also want to lengthen the "gl-" of "glory" and especially the "L-" of "Lord."

I could go on and on with more examples, but it wouldn't make much sense in print. Just come to one of my rehearsals and you'll understand.

Bowen: Regarding the orchestra. I understand that string players can easily modify the tuning of their instruments by simply adjusting the tension on the strings. Wind and brass players are much more limited in their ability to modify the tuning. How did you approach this question of tuning the instruments to the Verdi pitch?

Sigerson: We're still in the process of getting all the instruments in shape to play at the Verdi tuning. As you said, the tuning of the strings is generally not a problem, though it's sometimes not easy for a string player to quickly make the adjustment.

As for the winds and brass, we demonstrated in Boston in early January 2014, with our performance of [Mozart's Requiem](#) in commemoration of John F. Kennedy's assassination, that some instruments can be made to play at the lower pitch in the hands of a highly-trained professional. The clarinets, for instance. Also, for last weekend's performances, we had Matthew Ogden playing a modern Heckel bassoon with a custom bocal (the mouthpiece where the double reed is mounted) which Heckel kindly manufactured for us. It worked perfectly!

There are certain instruments, though, which just can't be modified like that, but which need a complete re-design. The oboes, for instance: As it stands, we have to rely on replicas of historical oboes such as were played during Mozart and Beethoven's time, but we really need modern oboes specifically designed for the Verdi tuning. Perhaps the Chinese will be able to help us out on that.

Bowen: Lyndon LaRouche, who developed the idea of the "Manhattan project" originally, discussed the success of the process on the Policy Committee Show on Monday.

He emphasized the importance of the placing the voice properly:

...It's now been demonstrated by these two events on Saturday and Sunday, and therefore, this is the weapon in which to build what we must do for mankind as a whole. Because it's in tune; you've got Russian factors; China is developing, emerging, so forth; all these kinds of things. And therefore, when you take these principles of the human mind, not the words, not the language, not the accounting or whatever. But that's what is here. That's what's crucial, and that's our weapon. Our weapon in Manhattan, in two days, with the preparation that led into that. . . .



Stuart Lewis

Norbert Brainin in a rehearsal for his Dec. 2, 1988 concert in Washington, D.C., in honor of Lyndon LaRouche. He is accompanied at the piano by Gunter Ludwig.

In that same discussion, he said:

These differences in languages in terms of the Classical languages so-called, all depend upon the adaptation to a quality of representation of the human mind. And every kind of speech has to be checked for that kind of thing. Not just song, but voice itself. And the quality of the mind, the quality of the opinion of mind, and Bertrand Russell understood that perfectly.

How does this apply to what you worked on in the *Messiah*, and with the music work generally? Why would Bertrand Russell be so upset with how these concerts communicated Handel's idea? What is meant by voice placement, if it's not just making the sound, and how does music resonate in the mind?

Closer to the Creator

Sigerson: Well, no man, and no chorus, is an island! It's important to understand that our Manhattan Chorus is part of our overall "Manhattan project" which intends to pull not only New York City, but the entire nation and the world from an otherwise unimaginable abyss. The rehearsals with the chorus are informed by that intention in ways that are more unspoken than

spoken, especially since rehearsal time is short, and I have to concentrate on mastering the music, and not on lectures. The placement of which Lyndon speaks, flows precisely from this.

One aspect of this which is terribly important, though, is the tempo. Unlike time-beaters such as Arturo Toscanini, I agree with Wilhelm Furtwängler that the tempo must never be totally fixed, and that it must organically move with the flow of ideas. This generally means broader tempos than those which Bertrand Russell would probably have preferred, such as the quick tempos introduced by Russell’s contemporary Sir Robert Beecham in his 1927 recording of the *Messiah* which I heard the other day.

Bowen: Diane Sare, the founder and director of the Schiller Institute New York City Community Chorus, reported tremendous interest in the Schiller Institute Chorus, with many wishing to join, others wanting to collaborate, and many wanting to learn about the tuning. And as a result of these performances and the ongoing musical interventions, there also are numerous invitations for the Schiller Institute chorus to perform at the

Verdi tuning at various venues. So as this choral movement grows throughout New York City, do you have other thoughts you would like to share with our national and international readers?

Sigerson: Working with the Manhattan Chorus challenges me and all the singers alike to rise to the level of the poet of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s mind, for whom music, poetry, science, economics, and political leadership are governed by the same principle of the ever-increasing perfection of mankind. This brings us ever closer to the Creative Principle itself, or the Creator, if you will.

As I pointed out to some of my associates the other day, our intention is therefore not to put on “professional” performances, but rather to go way beyond that, in the same way that Furtwängler did with his performances of Schubert’s Ninth Symphony, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and Brahms’s Fourth Symphony, among others. Study Furtwängler, and you’ll begin to grasp what I’m talking about.

Bowen: Thank you, John.

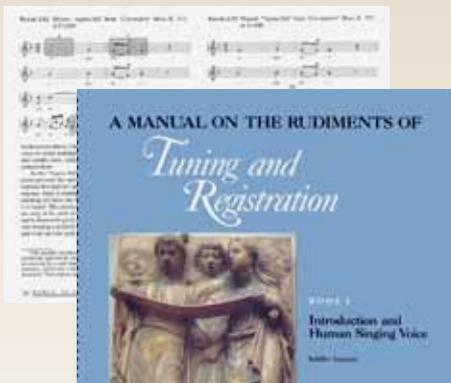
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The book that will unleash a musical revolution—

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“This Manual is an indispensable contribution to the true history of music and a guide to the interpretation of music, particularly regarding the tone production of singers and string players alike. . . . I fully endorse this book and congratulate Lyndon LaRouche on his initiative.”

—Norbert Brainin, founder and first violinist, Amadeus Quartet

“Without any doubt an excellent initiative. It is particularly important to raise the question of tuning in connection with bel canto technique, since today’s high tuning misplaces all register shifts, and makes it very difficult for a singer to have the sound float above the breath. . . . What is true for the voice, is also true for instruments.”

—Carlo Bergonzi

\$50

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