
II. Music and the Manhattan Project

LYNN YEN

The Mission of the Foundation for The Revival of Classical Culture

May 2—Dennis Speed of the LaRouche Manhattan Project interviewed Lynn J. Yen, Director of the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture, on April 29.

Dennis Speed: Let's talk about what the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture has been doing for the last year in New York City. There has been a lot of work at schools and with young people. Can you describe it?

Lynn Yen: Yes. This year we started an outreach program of bringing concert artists into the public schools, of bringing classical music to a lot more young people. What we have done thus far is to invite a number of concert artists, pianists, cellists, violinists, vocalists, and classical musicians of all kinds to come and visit these schools, where we organize for whole classrooms and, actually, for the whole school to be assembled, where the musicians present musical performances, and talk to these young people about what is music, what is classical music, what is classical culture, and what is this music that they have just played for them, followed by questions and answers. We have so far visited, or been involved in, about 43 public schools.

We have had some extraordinary feedback from



Lynn Yen addressing a Schiller Institute Conference in New York, January 2013.

kids and teachers, but very especially teachers. For example, there was a teacher in a school in Queens who, after one of our sopranos sang at the school, sent us a wonderful email, saying how appreciative she was that we included her school in the program, and how appreciative they were to have the kids so benefitted from the wonderful presentation—and it wasn't just a performance, but an actual presentation.

We had one baritone, for example, who went to a public school, a middle school, and when we went into the school the parent coordinator said, "You're the classical music people! I'm so excited! But I have to tell you, these kids only like hip-hop, and you might have difficulties." But when the baritone started singing from Handel's *Messiah*, I believe it was the second solo, about the coming of the Prophet, there was such a look of concentration on all of the faces of these fourth and fifth graders; they were completely captivated by the music, and they were captivated for the whole presentation—the whole piece, definitely, but the whole presentation—because he introduced other music to them. They asked lots of questions. At the end, one of the kids said, "Can you just please sing some more?"

We have had teachers who have written to us, as

one from a middle school, where the teacher said, after we did the visit, that one student in particular, who has been hard to engage in the past, told her that he really enjoyed it, and asked when the musician would come back again. And she said, “For me, watching the students, who at first are taken aback by an operatic voice—they giggle a little in the beginning, then quickly become interested and excited—was particularly gratifying. I think having opportunities to encounter something like this, to engage with and enjoy it is so incredibly important and powerful for our kids. “

I think we need to continue to do this, and to give this to a lot more young people in a lot of schools. Because just with these 43 schools we have been in throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, we have been in front of over 17,000 young people, and we want to translate that now into something more substantial.

Speed: What you just said, that you have been in front of 17,000 young people in 43 schools, how many people does that mean are in these different sessions? It sounds like they must be pretty large.

Yen: Yes. Usually a school will be between 300 and 800 people. We would break the sessions down to half the school, usually the upper and lower grades. In some rare instances we have had the whole school together. But we always make sure it is of a size that will allow the kids to really be part of the program, and not just part of some very large, large performance.

Speed: How are these programs composed?

Yen: It is usually about 45 minutes to an hour, essentially one school period. The teachers will coordinate so that certain grades of certain schools will come into the auditorium, or in one case, where we had a Ukrainian pianist and cellist, it was in the basement, so the kids all sat around the pianist and cellist. The musicians prepare two or three or four pieces; in the case of that basement, it was two pieces, one by Beethoven, one by Franck.

Typically, with the instrumental pieces, which are



On Easter Sunday, March 27, 2016, the LaRouche Manhattan Project and the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture collaborated in the performance of parts II and III of Handel’s Messiah at the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Brooklyn.

longer, the musicians will perform one or two movements from it. They would say something about the music first, invite questions first, and then answer questions later. In the case of some of the singers, because they are singing in a language other than English—German, Italian, and French—they explain the piece beforehand, sometimes asking the students to pronounce a certain word in that language and ask them to listen for it, and then afterwards answer questions. It is a very interactive type of program.

Handel’s Messiah

Speed: From the inception of the foundation you have been talking about performing the Handel *Messiah*. There have been several performances of the *Messiah*. Why did you emphasize this from the beginning of the foundation, and what has happened with the use of the *Messiah* over the years?

Yen: First of all, we emphasized the performance of Handel’s *Messiah* because it is written in English. It is in many ways one of the most accessible pieces of classical music for English speakers today. It has many aspects that make it wonderful. Handel wrote it in 24 days, and he wrote it with an intention to help others. He wrote it originally [for a benefit performance] to get people out of debtors’ prison, and for the poor and the sick.

Messiah gives the listeners hope, gives them the promise of a better and brighter future. More importantly, you have to look at what the United States and what our culture today is doing and not doing. There is so much violence in America. There is so much violence, for example, in the schools, in the youth population. There is so much darkness. What is so important about Handel's *Messiah*? To put it in context, as Martin Luther King once said, "As great as are the stars in Heaven, as great as the music of Handel's *Messiah*, how much greater is the mind of man that contemplates these things?"

That is the really important thing, because I think that Handel's *Messiah* celebrates the really important aspect, the divine creativity that lies in every human being; if people can come to realize that, that is essential for their own humanity. What does the *Messiah* talk about? It talks about love, it talks about forgiveness, it talks about peace, unity, all the things we need in America, in the world today—the elevation of all of ourselves to the idea of love. Again, Dr. King said that the principle of nonviolence is the principle of love.

To Bring People Together in Love

We originally started four years ago with the idea of performing Handel's *Messiah*. It has been a long road, and we still have a long way to go. But last December we performed Handel's *Messiah* twice, once in Brooklyn and once in Manhattan, parts one and two. This was in collaboration with the Schiller Institute Community Chorus, which was started December 20, 2014, exactly a year before our concert this past December,



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Even though frenetic hip-hop and crazed rock music have spread globally, including to China, Yen noted that Classical presentations by her Foundation demonstrated an ability of young students to concentrate that was not expected by their teachers. Above, a contemplative young audience in China listening to Classical music.

precisely because on December 20, 2014, two policemen were killed in Brooklyn as we were performing Handel's *Messiah* for the first time, a much smaller concert. At the dinner after that performance in 2014, the conductor and I, and the soloists and a few others said, well, something has to be done to bring people together as a community, to bring people together in love.

It came about a year later. There were two concerts, performed on December 19 and 20, and we had a full house for both concerts. It was overfilled at the Manhattan location. A lot of young people and families came to those concerts, and I think people want to be part of something that uplifts them, that shows them that there is a different path, a more beautiful path to life.

On Easter this year, March 27, we presented parts two and three of the *Messiah*. We performed at the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, because when storm Sandy hit New York especially

hard [in October 2012], that was where much of the concentration of the effort to help the city took place. We wanted to do something for the community again to bring people together around something that is a higher idea, and of course, there is a beautiful idea of resurrection in Easter.

The Importance of Proper Tuning

The three concerts in 2015-2016 were all, very importantly, performed at the proper or Verdi tuning of C=256 herz (cycles per second), or you could call it A=432. It is a very important point, because vocally, musically, when you have a great classical composition performed at the proper tuning, it not only allows the real power and majesty and beauty of the music to come to the fore, it allows the audience to much more easily hear the real idea of the music and to understand what it is really saying. We are hoping to do more of this.

Speed: You did a series of concerts at Carnegie Hall, and you have done these concerts at the proper tuning. Can you say something about that, and also about the concert of 2015 which was dedicated against violence?

Yen: Starting in 2013, when I realized the importance of the proper tuning in musical and artistic performance of, especially, classical compositions, we had our first Carnegie Hall concert, on May 28, 2013, at Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. We titled it *Properly Tuned Masterpieces* and pianist Tian Jiang performed. It was very interesting, because Leszek,¹ the Grammy Award winning sound engineer at Carnegie Hall, said to me that what he heard of Tian's performance of the Chopin *Nocturnes* was so bel canto, so vocal, so "singing" in its music, that he's never heard anything like it before. He said, "I'm Polish, and Chopin's favorite composer is Bellini, so Chopin is always composing his music with the idea of vocalization of his instrumental, his piano pieces, and to hear it like this was really wonderful."

So I came to realize the importance of the proper tuning, or what everybody knows as the "Verdi tuning."

1. Leszek M. Wojcik, Recording Studio Manager of Carnegie Hall, has been at Carnegie for over 30 years. He has recorded most of the world's great pianists—Brendel, Horowitz, and Schiff, among others. He knows more about recording in Carnegie Hall than almost anyone else alive.
—Dennis Speed

We then did subsequent concerts, including the very important one on June 21, 2015, Fathers' Day, and it was titled "Music Against Violence, and Music of the Future," because, again, it is really important for us to remind people, for us to do something that is not simply some concert, but something that has real meaning. What is the purpose of music? What is the purpose of culture? The purpose is to make people better people. If you can't do that, you are not doing the right thing. You are not doing things that are really, truly, meaningful.

Love Against Hate

This concert was our attempt to again bring young people together, and in this case we had in the audience over 1,700 young people and their parents and teachers, and this was from more than 80 schools, who came to this concert on Fathers' Day—especially on Fathers' Day, because so many of our young men and fathers have been killed meaninglessly. Since 9/11 there have not been many people killed by terrorism, but there have been 500 or more killed by violence in New York City. What should one do about that?

Representatives of the New York Police Department participated in this concert, and we had among the speakers during the intermission, Terry Strada, who is the Chairwoman of the 9/11 Families United for Justice Against Terrorism, and Dr. Bernard Lafayette, who is the successor to Dr. King as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He is the chairman of the board. He is also the head of the National Center for Creative Nonviolence.

Dr. Lafayette and Mrs. Strada both talked about the importance of love against hate, of how important music is. Dr. Lafayette said, for example, that it was crucial for the Civil Rights Movement. In his brief remarks he made a really clear point about the role of music and that it enabled the Civil Rights Movement to function and be successful. He emphasized how much today billions of people around the world need this music of freedom, which can never be sung by violence.

Mrs. Strada said it is necessary that we see beyond the hatred and practice a more beautiful culture. This is something that is vital today; it is especially vital that we continue to work toward that spirit of man, and to work to inspire that spirit of man in ourselves and among all people, but especially among young people.