

A CONCERT NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN

Can Beauty Silence the Drums of War?

by John Sigerson

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Sept. 15—Among a number of public events marking the 17th anniversary of the al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, one stood out as not merely a memorialization of past horrors, but as a herald of a future in which true justice shall be served, not only for those who died on that day and who continue to die of its after-effects, but also for a humiliated nation and an aching world.

It was a concert of Classical music and poetry, held

at St. Anthony of Padua Church, in lower Manhattan, a church which served as a sanctuary on that day of infamy 17 years ago. Organized and sponsored by the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus, with the support of the Schiller Institute founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, it was the necessary counterpoint to the Schiller Institute's conference held two days later, as reported on elsewhere in this issue.

No less a personage than Gen. Douglas MacArthur knew well that such expressions of Man's most sublime cultural achievements are the surest way to avert the destruction of the human species through war, by changing not *what* men think, but *how* they think, how they judge. As MacArthur stated at the conclusion of World War II:



Schiller Institute

The Schiller Institute NYC Chorus, singing at the 9/11 memorial concert at St. Anthony of Padua Church, in lower Manhattan, September 11, 2018.

The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advances in science, art, literature and all material and cultural developments of the past two thousand years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh.

Upon entering the beautiful church, the audience heard a single solo violin, played masterfully by Gabrielle Fink, sounding two movements of Johann Sebastian Bach's Solo Sonata No. 1 in G minor, a work replete with the same kind of ironical juxtapositions with which any thinking person is confronted in grappling with today's very real question of whether the United States might once again be manipulated into violating the principles on which the republic was founded.

Schiller Institute spokesman Dennis Speed made this explicit in his opening remarks from the pulpit:

We are gathered here not to commemorate tragedy, but to avert it. Even as we gather here tonight, as was true 17 years ago, the drums of war are being beaten by a group of people in the world spanning various nations and agencies, who seek to induce the United States into an attack on Syria—a Syria which, together with Russia, and also with the assistance of the United States, has significantly reduced and cornered those forces, sometimes called al-Nusra, sometimes called al-Qaeda, but always appropriately called evil, which were part of the carrying out of the attacks here 17 years ago—attacks for which this church, and several other venues in this neighborhood, served as sanctuary—as makeshift hospitals, and, in some cases, as the place where last rites were given.

And that is our situation tonight. It's important to *say* that, because we are led to believe, in our world, that tragedy is a necessity. It is not.

Referencing Virginia State Senator Richard Black's interview following his recent fact-finding trip to Syria, Speed praised Senator Black's courageous commitment to preventing the United States from carrying out, once again, a blind, wrong intervention. "And in this

case, the irony would be that such an intervention would constitute the United States acting as the air force for the very al Nusra and al-Qaeda forces that participated in the 9/11 attack."

Speed pointed to the real solution to such blindness:

When we bring people together, and we use *music* to go beyond the mundane, the banal, the literal, the didactic, the ideological, then the better angels of our nature become poised and armed to overthrow even our own desire for ignorance and blindness.

As one man once said, there are no real mysteries, there's only blindness. And blindness can always be overcome by Truth. But to fortify people of goodwill who perhaps have lost their way, sometimes that Truth must be sung, not said. And we hope that tonight, as we stand here in honor of those dead at the bottom of the World Trade Center, and those who have died since because of diseases and because of their valiant work that day, we hope that what we do here tonight to renew our commitment, and the commitment of the United States itself, to the ideal of Freedom, may proceed through Beauty, not war.

The Music

There followed a well-crafted succession of musical works, performed by four vocal soloists—soprano Indira Mahajan, alto Linda Childs, tenor Everett Suttle, and bass Paul An—accompanied by Robert Wilson on piano, along with the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus directed by John Sigerson and Diane Sare and accompanied by Yuting Zhou on piano.

Since a [video](#) of the concert is available on the Schiller Institute's website, I will focus here on just a few highlights.

Early in the program was a performance of a very special, brief unaccompanied choral work by Johannes Brahms, with lyrics taken from the funeral scene of Friedrich Schiller's allegorical poem "The Song of the Bell," juxtaposing the farmer's sowing of seed, to the coffins bearing the deceased: "far more precious seed," which, we hope, "shall blossom to a more beautiful destiny."

Brahms composed the piece as a funeral tribute to his mentor and dear friend, the composer Robert

Schumann; but it is also a tribute to Brahms's hero Ludwig van Beethoven, in that the opening four notes, sung in unison, are identical to the opening four notes played by the soloist in Beethoven's Opus 69 Sonata for Piano and Violoncello.

To set the tone for Brahms's all-too-brief setting, Schiller Institute President William F. Wertz, Jr. recited a devastating section of Schiller's poem leading up to Brahms's lyrics, in a translation by his late wife Marianna Wertz.

Each vocal soloist paired a Negro Spiritual arranged by such composers as Harry Burleigh and Roland Hayes, with a German *Lied* composed by Franz Schubert, all accompanied by Robert Wilson. A listing of each masterly rendition cannot possibly convey the depth and profundity of their performances. Therefore, I point out only two.

The first was Wilson's own arrangement of the Spiritual, "Deep River," sung by alto Linda Childs, a setting which includes new motivic elements not present in other arrangements of this piece. As Wilson explained afterwards, he encountered this new material in an unpublished setting by John Rosamond Johnson, who is perhaps most famous for composing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to a poem by his brother James Weldon Johnson. This juxtaposition of additional material, seemingly unrelated but in fact united in a higher dimension, is the hallmark of great Classical composition.

No less moving was Wilson's accompaniment to Linda Childs' singing of Schubert's "Litanei," a poem in the form of a prayer for All Souls' Day, with each stanza ending with, "May all souls rest in Peace!" Instead of just "playing the notes" in Schubert's score, Wilson reached "behind the notes" (to use a concept emphasized by Wilhelm Furtwängler), subtly enhancing the accompaniment. As Wilson commented following the concert, "When I play that piece, I hear instruments," and indeed under his hands, the postlude of each stanza grew into what one could easily mistake as

a full orchestra, but as if Schubert himself had been at the keyboard.

Interspersed were performances of Spirituals by the 85-strong Schiller Institute NYC Chorus, directed by Diane Sare. As a testament to the growing reputation of this unique institution, NBC-TV featured the chorus in advance of the performance, reporting that the Chorus had "been given the honor" of memorializing 9/11 in downtown Manhattan—which is inaccurate, since in fact the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus *seized* that honor, because so few other institutions had planned concert events around the city! Both NBC and ABC filmed parts of the concert itself and included it in their day's coverage—quite uncharacteristically, and in violation of the general "orders" handed down to the mainstream media, never to so much as mention Lyndon LaRouche or LaRouche-inspired efforts.

Concluding the concert was the "Lamb of God" section of Beethoven's sublime *Mass in C Major*, Opus 86, directed by John Sigerson. As Beethoven makes even more evident in his later grand *Missa Solemnis*, the image of the Lamb of God, in danger of being slaughtered in senseless warfare, is clearly contrasted with the concluding, gently but firmly victorious "Dona nobis pacem" (Grant us peace), celebrating humanity's recovery from the infantile social disease of "geopolitics," and its embracing of a new paradigm of relations among men and nations.

The Schiller Institute NYC Chorus will perform the entire work, along with Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia* Opus 80, this coming Nov. 18 at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York.

Mere applause at the end of such a concert, with such an intent, would have been misplaced: Instead, the audience was invited to join with the chorus in singing the three-part traditional canon "Dona nobis pacem." And sing they did, followed by an almost eerie silence, in expectation of some future goodness, unspoken, yet strongly felt.