

## Verdi 'A' resounds in Parma, political fight begins now

by Leonardo Servadio

The international Schiller Institute conference on the Verdi tuning fork which took place on Friday, Feb. 10 in Parma, Italy was simultaneously a celebration of beauty and a battle-cry. In times such as these, when our culture and our civilization are so suffocated, it could not be otherwise. The title of the conference was "In Defense of Western Culture—Giuseppe Verdi and the Scientific Tuning Fork (A = 432 Hz)."

The atmosphere of the meeting was strongly determined by two events: first, the fact that Lyndon LaRouche, who launched the campaign to return to the scientific A around the world, had been for two weeks incarcerated in the United States, convicted of "crimes" similar to those for which Socrates was condemned in the "oh-so democratic" city of Athens; second, the fact that the Public Education and Culture Committee of the Italian Senate had completely turned on its head the proposal which the Schiller Institute had launched one year ago in April to establish by law that the tuning at which classical musical works should be performed, should be the standard pitch of Italy's great composer Giuseppe Verdi, and not the stratospheric pitches which are in fashion today.

In the beautiful auditorium of the Parma Society of Letters and Conversation there were more than 200 persons:



*Renata Tebaldi*

instrumental musicians, teachers, students, mostly professionals of the music world and all unified around their sincere love of Verdi, who was born at Busseto, a village not far from Parma, and who made this north Italian city into a capital of the operatic theater.

Speakers at the conference were the celebrated soprano Renata Tebaldi, who despite not being able to attend personally sent a long recorded message; the founder of the Schiller Institutes, Helga Zepp-LaRouche; the president of the Schiller Institute in Italy, Fiorella Operto; Liliana Celani who chaired the conference; the 'cellist Susan Moses; and Prof. Bruno Barosi, director of the acoustical physical laboratory of the International Violin Building Institute of Cremona.

Other participants included the bass Michele Pertusi and the baritone Michele Purcelli, who sang various excerpts of Verdi operas in the two tunings—the one prevalent today (upwards of A = 440) and the A at 432 Hz, which permitted the audience to appreciate how much more beautiful and natural the voice sounds in the Verdi tuning.

Telegrams of encouragement and greetings were read from Alfredo Kraus, Carlo Bergonzi, and Luciano Pavarotti—three of the world's most famous operatic tenors—and renowned Verdi baritone Piero Cappuccilli, who all spoke in favor of the Verdi A at 432 Hz, as well as baritone Renato Bruson, who came in person to convey his greetings and best wishes.

Of course, one week after the approval in the Italian Senate of a law that sets the standard A at 440 Hz, all of these stances took on the character of a strong criticism toward the workings of the Senate Committee.

In her opening remarks, Liliana Celani announced that already several scores, of the hundreds of singers and musicians around the world who have spoken on behalf of the Verdi A of 432 Hz, have declared themselves completely contrary to the convenient "compromise" arrived at in the Senate, and ready to take up the battle to make the real Verdi A triumph.

The audience listened with rapt attention to the recorded presentation of Renata Tebaldi, the soprano who by the 1950s dominated the Italian 19th-century operatic repertoire at New York's Metropolitan Opera. "It will be necessary to come back often," she said, "to this subject; it seems now that everything has been twisted, we are going back to 440, which is *stupidissimo*, because this tuning fork already existed 40 years ago," but it was only respected for a brief period, and then, since recordings seemed to come out better with higher tunings, it was abandoned and the pitch started to climb. "To take the tuning back to 440 is a joke, and there won't be a single orchestra that will hold to 440. There need to be some drastic decisions to change things," she added.

Renata Tebaldi explained how singing with too high a tuning causes the throat to constrict, cutting back the sound and making it more strident; this ruins the voice and falsifies the composer's intentions.

### **A political battle is cultural**

Helga Zepp-LaRouche explained why the battle for the Verdi tuning is a fundamental one for our civilization and absolutely must be won. The founder of the Schiller Institutes attacked the tendency to make compromises on issues of principle, as occurred in the Italian Senate: "This is a kind of moral bankruptcy. The argument by which the Senate compromise was reached is that although the Schiller Institute had demonstrated the superiority of the Verdi A, its enactment would not be possible, because this would require redesigning all the fixed-tuning instruments, such as the wind instruments, and would imply an expenditure, an investment, and that is not possible because of lack of funds."

The society that does not know how to defend its own culture because of budget-cutting is a society which is moving toward decadence and self-destruction: It is really a question of the same principle by which governments do not invest sufficient funds for the AIDS fight or to give health care to the old. With this kind of policy a nation is put to death, for economic motives.

What has to be defended, instead, Helga Zepp-LaRouche underlined, is the will of the composer, and for this we have to perform the works as they were conceived by those who wrote them; not to act like those directors today who can't produce works of their own or understand those of other people, and so distort them with absurd interpretations.

Mrs. LaRouche spoke of how this rush to raise the tuning pitch not only ruins singers' voices, but makes many works today simply not performable, because the harmonic pas-

sages, the modulations, the musical development by which the composer conveys his creative idea, is aborted by the change in the basic key.

With the great classical pieces, Helga Zepp-LaRouche stated, the composers express not only a specific idea, but they communicate their own process of creative thought, which is the most beautiful and elevated one that exists, insofar as it is a reflection of a higher lawfulness. Thus, great classical art is based on the concept of natural law, understood as the expression of a higher form of harmony, in reflecting upon which the individual finds his own dignity. The function of art is precisely that of celebrating the principle of human development and creativity as a true, unwritten and unwritable, law of human life.

To introduce arbitrary variations in the representation of a great work of art means therefore to deny the very existence of "natural law" thus understood, and to deny the idea of human creativity as a legitimate and rigorous phenomenon.

Mrs. LaRouche recalled that the idea that there is no law or higher principle to which one can refer, is in fact that of Nietzschean philosophy, according to which all is permitted to him who has the force to impose his own will upon others, and how this Nietzschean philosophy is the root of various phenomena of degeneration in our civilization, from drugs right down the chain of irrationalism, to the culture of Satanism which is spreading more than ever today.

For these reasons, the defense of the Verdi A from the arbitrariness of the A = 440 standard pitch, which is a compromise totally without scientific basis and far from what had been the tuning of reference of the great classical composers, has a lot to do with the defense of our civilization against the assault of irrationalism and hedonism to which it is subjected today. "But the Senate decision," she concluded, "shows that politicians do not understand what is at stake in the cultural battle today. The way out, therefore, is that we have to take into our own hands the reins of decision in this matter. The minister in charge of safeguarding cultural property, and surely Italian opera is a great cultural property, must be someone who really understands our culture. Who better than Miss Renata Tebaldi could do this? For this reason, both Renata Tebaldi and Fedora Barbieri, as well as Prof. Bruno Barosi, have decided to become candidates with us, forming an independent list which will be called Patriots of Italy," Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche announced.

Speaking next, Fiorella Operto, president of the Schiller Institute in Italy, maintained that morality, artistic beauty, and scientific rigor are inseparable. Operto cited the well-known part of Verdi's opera *Simon Boccanegra*, when Simon stands up to placate the fratricidal scuffle in the Genoese council, and concludes with the words of the great poet Petrarch, "Io vo gridando pace, io vo gridando amor," ("I go crying peace, I go crying love,") as one of the loftiest examples of love of art and true patriotism, an example that must be followed today as well.