

Placido Domingo supports Verdi tuning

Leading world tenor Placido Domingo told a press conference at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 12, that *A Manual on the Rudiments of Tuning and Registration*, commissioned by statesman Lyndon H. LaRouche and published by the Schiller Institute, is “an extremely important initiative for the future of opera.” Domingo, who is also an important conductor, enthusiastically supported the “Verdi tuning” of A=432 Herz (C=256) as “most desirable.”

Maestro Domingo was presented with the Schiller Institute book at the conclusion of his press conference, his first in Washington, called to announce his plans for the 1996-97 season of the Washington Opera, of which he has just become the new Artistic Director. Domingo stressed that he is beginning a “new era” in his career, to “bring to the capital of this great nation . . . the understanding of a singer, and what beautiful singing can contribute to American culture.”

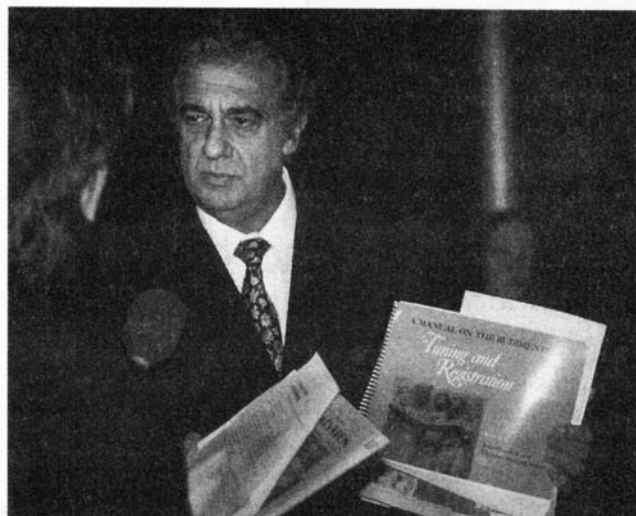
He also stressed the need to educate a new generation of young opera singers. He announced a 1996-97 Washington Opera season with many new singers “barely 30 [years old], or just over 30,” in which some 60 artists will be making their debuts. He described the “Placido Domingo World Opera Competition” he has been holding around the world, and his efforts to follow up all finalists, create productions for them at various opera houses, and educate them in singing, long after the contest.

Domingo announced that his 1996 opening night production will be the Washington premier of *Il Guarany*, the 1870 opera by Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Gomes, a collaborator of Giuseppe Verdi. Carlos Gomes, the centennial of whose death is 1996, wrote in Italian, he said, “in the *bel canto* style of Verdi. . . . I want the Latin American people to hear, that they have produced such a great composer, who wrote based on an Italian singing line, but also with strong South American characteristics.”

Saving young voices

Maestro Domingo’s comments were sought by the Schiller Institute, for the upcoming publication of Book I of the *Manual* in both Italian and German, in Europe this spring. Domingo held the *Manual* up before the U.S. and European TV cameras, and stated enthusiastically, “This is an extremely important initiative for the future of opera; it must be continued without fail. . . . The modern rise in the singing pitch is most destructive to the *bel canto* voice, especially to young singers. . . .

“Did you know,” he asked reporters, many of whom were



Placido Domingo said at a press conference at the Kennedy Center that the Schiller Institute’s manual on tuning is “an extremely important initiative for the future of opera.”

from Ibero-America and Spain, “that the tuning here may be at A=440, but in Vienna it is as high as A=448? This makes singing almost impossible; it chokes us off,” he said, with a choking motion of his hand to his throat. “And Verdi himself wanted legislation to hold it down to A=437.” When a Schiller Institute representative mentioned that Verdi had desired the tuning be as low as A=432, he replied, “A=432? Even better! This is most desirable.”

Domingo also noted that he still endorses the comments he made at the time of the Institute’s 1988 Milan conference on the Verdi tuning:

“It is very important that we singers start doing something, because the conductors are tuning the orchestras way too high today . . . and that means that a singer does not last long. So far, we have been obedient and sung without complaints, but throughout my career, the pitch has just gone up and up.

“Even the 440 cycles for A, which is the standard today, is much higher than, for instance, at the time of Verdi. And now there are even some conductors that tune at 445-446, because they believe that this gives a beautiful sound and brilliance. . . . This is simply outrageous.

“I remember one time, when we had to sing *La Boheme* with the Boston Symphony, Renata Tebaldi arrived before the performance and gave the oboist an A. . . . He got very offended and said: ‘Madame Tebaldi, what is this supposed to mean?’ ‘That you are too high,’ she answered. ‘That you don’t have to tell me, I know my work,’ he said, and then a lot of trouble and confusion arose. But the end of it was, that the orchestra was tuned in the original way and this was a very good experience.”

Domingo joked that, since he is now running an opera company, he might have to withhold his final 1988 comment, calling for “a singers’ strike” for the Verdi tuning.