

# Schiller Institute honors Heinrich Heine

by Werner Hartmann



Heinrich Heine

The Schiller Institute in Germany is celebrating, with a series of events, the great poet Heinrich Heine, who was born 200 years ago, on Dec. 13, 1797, in the German city of Düsseldorf. To this day, Heine remains one of the most popular poets internationally, with his works having been translated into most

languages, and his fame reaching as far away as China. Some of Heine's works, like "Loreley" and "Belshazzar," must certainly be counted among the most beautiful and popular poems anywhere. Also, his poems, with a unique quality of metaphor and musicality, have been set to music by countless composers, and inspired Classical masters like Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann to some of their greatest Lieder compositions.

Heine, a Jew who later converted to Christianity, used his poetry and theoretical writings on philosophy and culture, to fight for human dignity and reason, against both reactionary feudalism and early Marxist cultural barbarism. He attacked, with humor and biting irony, the backwardness, hypocrisy, and mediocrity of society in post-Vienna Congress Europe. His works were severely censored, and often, banned outright. Heine was forced into exile to Paris, where he died in 1856, after being confined to bed by illness for eight years.

## Bringing Classical poetry alive

The Schiller Institute's amateur poetry working-group *Dichterpflänzchen* ("Budding Poets"), which was formed several years ago to bring alive the treasures of Classical poetry, has put together a program of poems, prose, and songs, to present different facets of Heine's personality and work. So far, the program has been featured in Düsseldorf,

at the house where Heine was born, which today serves as a literary cafe, and in the cities of Mainz and Wiesbaden; several more events are planned.

The program, titled "Kisses of the German Muse," after a line of Heine's, includes some of the most beautiful Lieder composed on Heine's poems, from Franz Schubert's "Swan Song" and Robert Schumann's "Poet's Love," in interpretations by tenor Stefan Marienfeld and pianist Michael Gründler.

Members of the Wiesbaden poetry group illustrated Heine's worldview and personal tragedy, in his own words. In the preface to "Germany, a Winter's Tale," Heine talks of his ideal of "universal humanity" and patriotic "love of all peoples"; in the "Book of Songs," he invokes an unreachable "land of delight" and unfulfilled love to a beautiful virgin, as a metaphor for human reason; "The Slave Ship" is a passionate attack on the African slave trade; "Belshazzar" celebrates the triumph of the power of reason over oligarchical tyranny. Heine saw ideas as the real driving force behind the events of history; but his lack of political success drove him into despair. In the late poem "Enfant perdu," he calls himself a "watchpost in the fight for freedom, for 30 years," who shot literary "bullets" into his enemies' bellies, but who carried also many wounds as they "shot back": "My weapons are not broken—but my heart, it broke."

The program of the Schiller Institute's "Budding Poets"—which stands in stark contrast to many modernizing and distorting presentations, prepared for occasion of Heine's anniversary—was greeted with joy and gratitude. Some guests had come after learning of the events at downtown booktables, which members of the Schiller Institute had set up in Düsseldorf and Wiesbaden, at which poems were recited and the Heine celebrations advertised.

In Wiesbaden, the Sept. 28 program was announced with a favorable article in the local paper *Tagblatt*, based on an interview with the Institute's Rosa Tennenbaum and Lutz Schauerhammer, which detailed the work of the group on bringing great Classical poetry back into everyday life. The room—which was organized despite massive resistance by city officials, because of the group's affiliation with Helga Zepp LaRouche and the Schiller Institute—was filled to overcapacity, with close to 100 people. On Oct. 1, the *Wiesbadener Tagblatt* commented positively on the Heine soirée, in an article titled "Heine with Variations." The article concluded: "The *Dichterpflänzchen* offered a lot to their audience, but also demanded a lot of attention. This, the listeners gave to them, and, in addition, lots of applause."

With their Heine presentations, the "Budding Poets" are now definitely part of the German cultural scene, and constitute a challenge to professionals, to follow more truthfully the ideas and works of the Classics. Meanwhile, the Schiller Institute is looking forward to its worldwide celebrations of Friedrich Schiller's birthday, on Nov. 10.