

The Example of Robert and Clara Schumann

by Harley Schlanger

People who are practical are intrinsically tragic, because they limit themselves to what they think is practical, whereas progress is always based on getting beyond being practical, by making discoveries of principle, or discovering principles which had existed before, but you didn't understand them.

—Lyndon LaRouche,
August 16, 2015

Aug 18—While Lyndon LaRouche was commenting on the cowardice and moral degeneration which characterizes today's political leaders, as well as the general population, his observation applies to the human condition, throughout history. Improvements in the conditions of mankind have always been the result of the creative intervention of small numbers of courageous individuals, who rejected submission to arbitrary power, who defied popular opinion, and who refused to adapt to the fears and smallness of those around them. For such improvements, it has been necessary to wage war, not just against the oligarchical forces which have oppressed the vast majority, but also against the tendency of ordinary citizens to submit and retreat, in the face of what appear to be overwhelming obstacles.

How can small people, used to submission, be



"He who does not attack the bad, defends the good but halfway," wrote Robert Schumann. Here he is depicted in a lithograph by Josef Kriehuber in 1839.

moved to act for a higher purpose?

LaRouche has been emphasizing that people must be mobilized to *think*, rather than merely reacting, out of anger and frustration. The most effective means to accomplish this is through the use of Classical culture as a weapon, in particular Classical music, which, when properly performed, enables members of an audience to get a glimpse into the beautiful mind of a creative artist, and to participate, in a way, in the act of creation. And when one is able to participate more directly, by performing in a chorus, singing great works by the most accomplished composers, in that Classical

method, the effect is further enhanced—the performer becomes directly involved in an act of creation, and is able to experience what it means to be creative.

Such an experience, of direct, personal involvement in the discovery of principles, is the strongest weapon against the induced littleness of those who live, as we do today, in a degenerating culture. Once one has gone through that experience, the willingness and ability to combat degeneracy is greatly increased. That is the weapon being unleashed in the development of a chorus, in New York City, as a central feature of LaRouche's Manhattan Project.

Robert Schumann's War

One individual who understood this creative power, and dedicated his life to its propagation, in spite of great personal difficulties associated with a debilitating illness, as well as opposition from networks run by the oligarchy, was Robert Schumann (1810-1856). Schumann organized around him a small group of musicians and other artists, intent on using their art to attack the destructive, superficial culture of their time, while demonstrating the higher capacity for creative discovery, which alone can open the door to a better future for all mankind. In April 1834, at the age of 24, Schumann launched a publication, "Neue Zeitschrift für Musik" ("New Journal of Music"), to defend and promote the Classical musical tradition of J.S. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, which was under assault by the proponents of "new music," with its emphasis on virtuoso technique and emotional effect.

In its first issue, Schumann declared war on these networks, which he characterized as modern Philistines.

He who does not attack the bad, defends the good but halfway. Our purpose... is to remind our readers emphatically of the distant past and its works. Then, to emphasize the fact that the contemporary artist can secure strength for the creation of new beauty only by drinking from such pure fountains. Then, to attack as inartistic the immediate past, which is concerned merely with encouraging superficial virtuosity. Lastly, to help prepare and hasten the coming of a new poetic era.

His publication served as a rallying point for those who feared that, with the deaths of Beethoven (1827) and Schubert (1828), the Classical tradition would be buried. As Schumann knew well, the great composers of the past had been targeted by bought-and-paid-for critics, who claimed that their music was inaccessible to the common man, and who conspired to prevent the performance of their works.

In collaboration with his wife Clara, and with Felix Mendelssohn, Johannes Brahms, and others, Schumann and his allies not only defended the heritage of Bach against such inane slander, but produced new beautiful works. They organized concerts and choruses, and recruited the best performers, such as the violinist Joseph Joachim, to their circle, to bring these musical ideas to a new generation. They studied the compositional methods of the Bach tradition, such as fugal counterpoint, and applied and developed them. In doing so,



"My entire political creed consists of nothing but the bloodiest hatred for our whole civilization..."
wrote Richard Wagner. This photo was taken by Franz Hanfstaengl in 1870.

they demonstrated that music does not reside in a succession of notes, as a sensuous effect, but is produced in the mind, as a means of accessing the higher mental faculties of what LaRouche calls "creativity per se."

For this small network, this was a moral fight, a war to lift man above mere sensuality—a state in which a population is easy to manipulate and control—to a dialogue with the Deity. Schumann wrote, "For me, music is always the language which permits one to converse with the Beyond." In a direct attack on his contemporaries, Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner, for whom producing an effect in the lower extremities was their specialty, he wrote polemically that the "most important thing is for the musician to purify his inner ear."

Battling the Satanic

Schumann's death in 1856 left to his wife and Brahms, primarily, the responsibility to take on the evil represented by Liszt and Wagner. These latter two were promoted by the degenerate oligarchs of Europe, who created a virtual cult around them, in order to wipe out the Classical tradition.

In his anti-Semitic screed attacking Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, "Judaism in Music," published in September 1850, Wagner explicitly identified his target as the Classical compositional method, championed by Schumann:

Do what you will: look away from Beethoven, fumble after Mozart, gird yourself round with Johann Sebastian Bach: write symphonies with or without choruses, write masses, oratorios—sexless opera-embryos!—make songs without words, operas without texts!... We look without fear toward that great annihilating blow of destiny which will make an end of this whole unwieldy

monstrosity of music, clearing space for the Artwork of the Future.

Wagner's nihilistic view was not limited to the great Classical composers, but to all mankind, as he admitted in a letter written in 1851:

My entire political creed consists of nothing but the bloodiest hatred for our whole civilization, contempt for all things deriving from it, and a longing for nature.... In Europe, I prefer dogs to these dog-like men.... Only the most horrific and destructive revolution could make our civilized beasts 'human' again.

It is not coincidental that Wagner was revered by Hitler and leading Nazis, nor that he expresses the same contempt for mankind that one finds in the likes of the pro-genocidal Prince Philip, of the Nazi-loving British Royal Family!

Clara Schumann and Brahms engaged in direct combat with Liszt and Wagner, openly identifying them as a destructive force. Of Liszt, Clara wrote in her diary:

He played, as always, with a truly demonic bravura and possessed the piano really like a devil (I cannot express it any other way)... but oh, his compositions, that was really too horrible.

Of Wagner, she wrote of his "Rheingold," "I felt as if I were wading in a swamp the whole evening.... The boredom one must endure, however, is dreadful." She described attending a performance of "Tristan und Isolde," with its love/death theme, as "the saddest thing I have experienced in my entire artistic life."

New Musical Principles

This battle against the Satanic efforts of Liszt and Wagner, and their sponsors, was by no means limited to criticizing their works, but meant the discovery of new musical principles in the tradition of Bach. One profound example of this is Brahms' "*Ein Deutsches Requiem*" ("A German Requiem"), which premiered in Leipzig in February 1869, as Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's unification of Germany was moving toward its successful



"Study Bach. There you will find everything," wrote Schumann collaborator Johannes Brahms. This photo was taken in 1853.

conclusion. Using a text from the Lutheran Bible in German, rather than a Latin text, and incorporating Bachian counterpoint throughout, Brahms' work was quite popular, as it inspired a pride in Germans, as well as a humility, in challenging the living to act to continue the mission of those who have departed.

This elevating and actually human treatment of immortality pointed listeners to the future, something which was intolerable for Wagner, whose "dramas" were designed to glorify a non-existent past, in a world in which destruction was the highest good. Wagner said derisively about Brahms' Requiem, "We will want no German Requiem to be played to our ashes."

While it may appear that the sponsors of Liszt and Wagner succeeded, as Brahms was the last composer in this tradition, and the musical culture of the Twentieth Century has been one of accelerating degeneration, theirs is a pyrrhic victory. The battle to enhance the creative power of man, through defending and promoting Classical culture, which was the focal point of existence for the Schumann circle, was kept alive, through the efforts of the towering figure of Classical music in the 20th Century, Wilhelm Furtwängler, and his allies.

Today, through the work of Lyndon LaRouche, and his organizing of the Manhattan Project, we can draw inspiration from the insistence of the Schumann circle on fighting on, against the destructive evil represented by Liszt and Wagner. The choral principle, which is at the heart of LaRouche's Manhattan Project, is a revival of the heroic work of that small circle of geniuses which emerged around Robert Schumann. The future of humanity depends on the ability of such small circles today to organize, with the commitment to the ennoblement of mankind, which was the mission embraced by Robert and Clara Schumann.

For Further Reading:

["Robert and Clara Schumann, and Their Teacher, J.S. Bach,"](#) by Michelle Rasmussen, *EIR*, June 18, 2010.

["The Musical Soul of Scientific Creativity: Rebecca Dirichlet's Development of the Complex Domain,"](#) by David Shavin, *EIR*, June 10, 2010.