

‘Music Is the Kingdom of Heaven, Education Is the Kingdom of Heaven’

This is an excerpt from an interview with Dr. William Warfield by Dennis and Lynne Speed, done in November 1994, and published in Fall 1995 issue of the Schiller Institute’s Fidelio magazine.

Fidelio: When you did your first concert at Town Hall in New York City, I understand that one of the things you did that was groundbreaking at the time, was to include a Spiritual at the top of the program, rather than putting them at the end.

I believe that you did a comparison between the spiritual “A City Called Heaven” and, I believe, a Twelfth-century—

William Warfield: Yes, Thirteenth Century, a *Conductus*, it is called.

Someone asked me about that last night, because they said, “Well, you know, Mr. Warfield, I was of the impression that Paul Robeson had done that with his program, and started off with Spirituals,” which was before me, and I said, “Yes.”

The difference was this. The Classical format is to start out with the Baroque period, in which you have Handel and Bach, and pre-Handel, and all of that. And then you have a group of *lieder*, in which you do the Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and all of that. And then, in the middle of the program, there’s usually an opera aria, which is usually in Italian. Then you come back and you do America, and you end up with Spirituals—if you were Black, you ended with Spirituals; not necessarily everybody did that. But it was usually something that was native or belonged to the United States, or something like that.

Now, what I did was this. I decided that I wanted to make the first group a religious group, and I called it, “Songs of the Believer.” And in that group, I put Schütz’s “Eile mich Gott zu erretten,” which was German, pre-Bach; I went back and got a little *Conduc-*

tus of Perotin, who was the organist at Notre Dame back in the Thirteenth Century. I got a *Kol Nidre*, a Jewish arrangement of the *Kol Nidre*,—I don't remember who did it. I did a setting of the 150th Psalm by Monteverdi. And *in that group*, I put a traditional American Negro Spiritual. *That* was what was different, the fact that I programmed that in the first group, with all of these other things.

And the reason I did that, was this. We were speaking of the internationality of music, and back in the Thirteenth Century, in Latin, Pérotin said [sings]: “Homo vidi que pro te passior si es dolor sicut, sicut cor passior”

And then you have [sings Spiritual]: “I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow, I've roamed through this wide world alone. . . .” That's the same thing, yet they're centuries apart. And that was what Sylvia was mentioning last night, she still talks about it. It was the first time anybody included a Spiritual, and it *matched* something that was written back in the Thirteenth Century.

Fidelio: We should just indicate that you're speaking of Sylvia Olden Lee, who is one of the great masters of the playing and arrangement of Spirituals.

I want to ask another question, while we're on the topic. You mentioned the spontaneous response you would get from people, and you've just shown us an example of the identity of the content of the music, despite the fact that the forms, or the languages, at least, may be somewhat different—the “clothing” may be a little bit different.

But could you say something also about what you think the work is that goes into this? For example, how one accurately delivers, declaims, a Spiritual, or another song? I know you've done a lot of work on different components of language, and how they directly contribute to doing a song well.

William Warfield: Let me say something about that, and then I would like to tell you about an experience I had once with Dr. Robert Nathaniel Dett, when I was a youngster. As you know, he got one of his degrees at the Eastman School of Music, and during that time, he formed a choir, and I was a teenager in Dr. Dett's choir. For instance, I learned “Listen to the Lambs”



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

William Warfield and Lyndon LaRouche, at the podium for a panel discussion at the Howard University event in May 1994, entitled “For a Marian Anderson National Conservatory of Music Movement.”

from him. I've done that so many times, and performed it with groups, I know exactly what he expected of it. And, the many times that I've conducted that with groups, I still do it just as Dr. Dett taught me.

But, basically, let me first say this. Number one, there is a *great deal* of learning and development one has to do with the voice as a technique, to know *how* to use the voice. Then, there's a great deal of *learning* one has to do with languages, so that if you're going to do *lieder* and opera and things like that, you know what you're doing. These are mechanical things that have to precede your being able to even utter a sound, if you're going to be in Classical music.

Now, once that is accomplished, and you know languages, and you know how to use your voice and it's strictly under your control, when it gets back to the projecting or the making of music, there's no difference in doing a Spiritual or a German *lied*. You learn all of the technique of *doing* languages and using your voice, but when it comes down to the so-called nitty-gritty in performing, the performance approach is the same.

I'll tell you why I discovered this, how I became aware of this. I was a youngster, I was about eighteen years old, and I did a radio show, and Dr. Dett listened to it, and I came to his studio the next day, and I said, “Dr. Dett, how was it?” and he said, “Young man, it was very fine, very fine. But what did *you* think about it? How did you think you did?” I had done a German

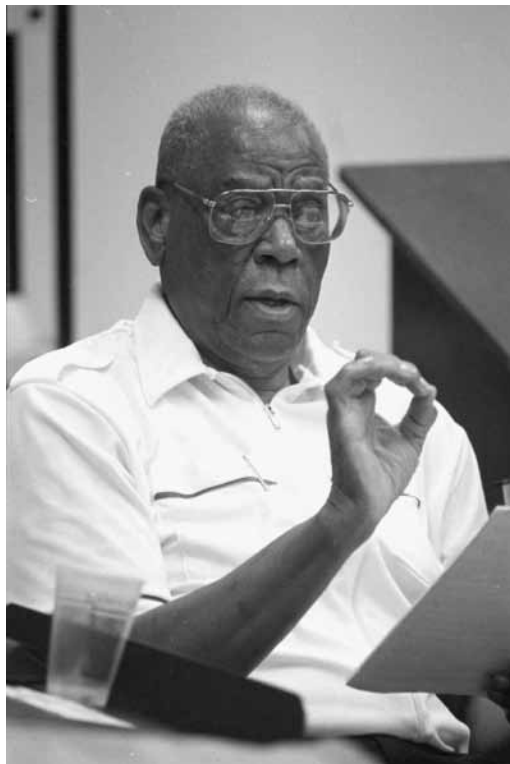
piece, a French piece; I ended up with a Spiritual, and I started with Handel. And I said, “Well, of course, the Handel and things, I think that went very well. Of course there’s nothing new to me with that, because we sing ‘The Messiah’ and all of that in church all the time. It was quite natural.” And then I said, “People told me that my German was excellent, that my pronunciation was fine and that they liked this, they liked that, and the French song, my French teacher told me that the pronunciation was beautiful and I did everything right.” And so on and so forth.

And he said, “What did you think about singing the Spirituals?” I said, “Oh, when I got to the Spirituals, I was at home.” And he said, “Hhhmm. Young man, when you feel the same way about your German and your French, as you feel about that Spiritual, you’ll be an artist.”

I looked at him, and *boing!*, something went off in my head. And to this day, I can sing Schubert’s “Wohin?,” and tell all about the brook in German, and turn right around and sing a Spiritual, and there’s basically *no* difference in making music, whether I do it in the Spiritual, or in the German *lied*.

And *that* is all a part of this thing I called the universality of music. That is when your spirit comes out, and your spirit shines. All right, I can sing in German, I can sing Italian. I can do this. But when it comes right down to it, if I am singing an aria, and want to sing “Heavenly Aida”—[sings] “Celeste Aida . . .,”—as the tenors do in *Aida*, it’s the same thing as singing, “Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel?” *It’s the same basic emotion*. You’re expressing your emotion through music. And when you discover that, music is on such a plane that you can sit by yourself sometimes, and make yourself weak just singing—because it’s coming out of you, it’s part of you.

Fidelio: I’ve had the pleasure of seeing a few of your master classes with the youngsters who are learn-



William Warfield at a rehearsal by the Leesburg Schiller Institute chorus in May 1995.

ing to sing, and I know that you have emphasized to them a great deal, *what* they’re saying, *what* they’re communicating, getting across a point, and that they must utilize the prosody which is embedded in the language, be it English, or German, or French, to bring out the meaning, and make an artistic presentation. Perhaps you could give us an example of that. I know one wonderful thing you have done, is in some of the Spirituals that have a repeated phrase, where you need to really bring this out in certain ways.

William Warfield: Yes. This is also true with *anything*. In German, for instance, where you have phrase after phrase after phrase repeated, and verse after verse, as in Schubert sometimes—you know, in “Unge-*du*ld,” and things like

that, the idea is to see that when you do something each time, it has a different emphasis, or a different accent, or expanding the thought. For instance, I have a lot of fun doing Margaret Bond’s Spiritual, “Didn’t It Rain?”:

Children, didn’t it rain?
Oh my Lord, didn’t it, didn’t it, didn’t it?
Oh my Lord, didn’t it rain?

And she does that all the way through. And I get a big kick out of seeing how many times I can say “Didn’t it?” differently than the time before. There are so many possible ways you can say “didn’t it, didn’t it, didn’t it”; and if every time you say “didn’t it, didn’t it, didn’t it” in a monotonous way—well, I mean, get off that box! Do something with it! Get involved with “didn’t it.” See how many different ways you can say “didn’t it?” It’s that kind of thing.

And this is true with a little thing like, for instance, the “Wohin?” of Schubert, where he says,

Wohl aus dem Felsenquell . . .
Ich hört’ ein Bächlein rauschen,
Wohl aus dem Felsenquell.

And then sometimes it's

Hinunter und immer weiter,
Und immer dem Bache nach,
Und immer frischer rauschte,
[sings *forte*:]
Und immer frischer rauschte,
Und immer heller der Bach.

It's the same thing. He's repeating "und immer . . ." and always it's fresh, and you hear the brook speaking louder, then you repeat that, and you say it differently. And this is to me the essence of your projecting and your making something of music. It's just not reading off something.

Yesterday, we had a wonderful session having to do with the Spiritual, and Sylvia came out after the students had done it, and then we got them to loosen up. And we said, "Let it all hang out." All right. This was "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." [sings, *piano*:] "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, comin' for to carry me home, Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home." Now the next time, [changes

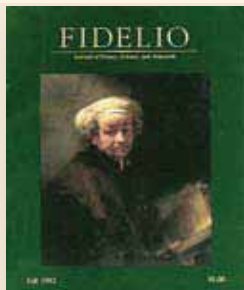
accent on words] "Oh, Swing low, sweet chariot [*forte*:] comin' for to carry me home, Oh, swing low, sweet chariot—."

All of that is possible, when you let yourself go, just let it come out as your expression of what you're saying, and not simply what's on the paper. "Now I'm going to do what *I* feel like I want to express in singing this." [sings] "I looked over Jordan and what did I see? [*piano*:] Comin' for to carry me home. Ohhhh, a band of angels comin' after me, [*forte*:] comin' for to carry me home." All of that, is my expression of what I feel about what I'm singing, and you're not going to find it on the paper.

This is what we were doing yesterday, and the audience just responded like crazy, because they recognized what was happening. Music was *expressing* itself, not just being sung.

Fidelio: I wanted to say about that experience yesterday, that what you hit on in your description, is what I'd call the essence of real education.

William Warfield: That's right. That's the whole thing.



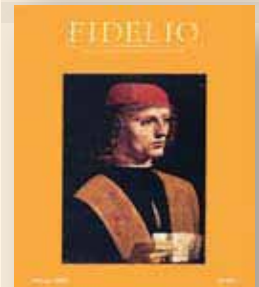
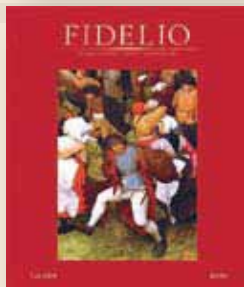
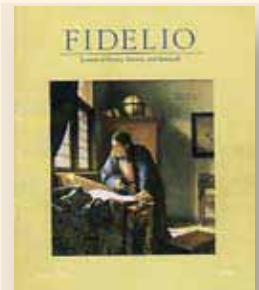
FIDELIO

Journal of Poetry, Science, and Statecraft

From the first issue, dated Winter 1992, featuring Lyndon LaRouche on "The Science of Music: The Solution to Plato's Paradox of 'The One and the Many,'" to the final issue of Spring/Summer 2006, a "Symposium on Edgar Allan Poe and the Spirit of the American Revolution," *Fidelio* magazine gave voice to the Schiller Institute's intention to create a new Golden Renaissance.

The title of the magazine, is taken from Beethoven's great opera, which celebrates the struggle for political freedom over tyranny. *Fidelio* was founded at the time that LaRouche and several of his close associates were unjustly imprisoned, as was the opera's Florestan, whose character was based on the American Revolutionary hero, the French General, Marquis de Lafayette.

Each issue of *Fidelio*, throughout its 14-year lifespan, remained faithful to its initial commitment, and offered original writings by LaRouche and his associates, on matters of, what the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley identified as, "profound and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature."



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