

Christmas Concert on Beethoven's Birthday in Brooklyn

by Diane Sare

Dec. 25—On Saturday, Dec. 16, over 500 people attended a Christmas concert presented by the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture, and featuring a combined chorus of over 100 voices, including the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus, and members of Schiller Institute Choruses from Boston, Leesburg, Va., and Baltimore. The concert included parts of Beethoven's Mass in C, as well as excerpts of Handel's *Messiah*, and other selections. This is the fourth concert that the Schiller choruses have participated in at the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Brooklyn, including a presentation of the Mozart *Requiem* embedded within an actual Requiem Mass, performed on Sunday September 11, 2016, in honor of the firemen of Brooklyn's Ladder Company 105, and all victims of 9/11.

Monsignor Kieran Harrington of the Co-Cathedral began the program with a welcome to all, invoking the

responsibility for the whole human race as well as the promise of a new beginning associated with Christmas. He was followed by remarks from the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture's Executive Director, Lynn Yen, who discussed Beethoven's triumph over adversity, the courage required today to triumph over adversity with beauty. The concert program began with three songs, all directed by Diane Sare: "O, Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (arranged by Sare), "Ain'a that Good News" (Dawson), and "Glory, Glory, Glory To the Newborn King" (Hogan). This was followed by the Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo from Beethoven's Mass in C, and most of the Christmas section of Handel's *Messiah*, directed by John Sigerson.

The chorus was joined by distinguished artists Robert Wilson, on piano, and soloists Indira Mahajan, soprano; Linda Childs, alto; Everett Suttle, tenor; and



Ilko Dimov

Full Schiller Institute Chorus in Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Jay Baylon, bass-baritone.

For two weekends prior to the concert, a small sub-section of the chorus had gone out to sing Christmas Carols in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. What struck the singers was the hunger of the population for beauty. People were particularly responsive to carols like “Silent Night,” “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” and “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming,” and as long as they were sung well, large crowds would gather. A handful of people jumped in to join the singing. Many were seen wiping their eyes in tears of joy. At least one of the people met there attended the concert, and signed up to join the chorus in the new season.

Also indicative of the thirst for beauty, and probably of the dramatic improvement of the chorus over its three years of existence, is that many people brought others. In addition to the spirited effort of our intrepid “Manhattan Project” organizers, who distributed leaflets, attended events, etc., 35 or more chorus members sold tickets to their friends and family. A number of young people were brought by their parents—small children and teenagers as well, who sat in rapt attention listening to the music.

In one case, a small boy, perhaps about three or four years of age, was told by his parents that it was time to go, although the concert was not quite over. As his parents headed to the doors, he ran back to the pew where they had been sitting and held on to the back of it tightly as the chorus began singing. A bystander tapped the boy on the shoulder, and he did not even notice, so intense was his concentration on the music!

A woman met just the week before at an event at the church, and who heads up an organizing committee on behalf of canonization for the priest who built the first orphanage for African-American children in New York (which was then burned down twice by the Ku Klux Klan), organized nine other people to attend the concert!

A Chinese-American member of the chorus succeeded in getting a prominent short announcement into



Diane Sare conducting.

Ilko Dimov



Soloists

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a Chinese-language newspaper, which resulted in several people making the two-hour trek by subway to come from Flushing to Brooklyn.

Another couple from Staten Island who are very active in Italian organizations attended. They had been met at a hearing in Staten Island about the Columbus statue where the wife testified. She

explained that they always attend another service in Manhattan, but decided to come to the concert and were very happy with their decision. Other people, as they were leaving, commented on a similar circumstance of having to choose from multiple events, deciding on our Christmas concert.

Several people, including the video crew, commented on the clarity and transparency of the soloists, as well as the chorus. This was probably a result of the Verdi proper tuning, which a couple of musicians in the audience remarked on.

Twenty-three people signed sheets expressing interest in joining one of the Schiller Institute NYC chorus chapters. The enthusiastic response to this performance, which was not technically perfect at every moment (although quite solid overall), must be attributed to something more than the Verdi tuning, or the bel canto technique stressed by the directors. What came across from beginning to end, including in the remarks of the Monsignor, those of Lynn Yen, and the program notes, as well as the singing, is *intent*, the dedication to what Friedrich Schiller called the aesthetical education of Man. In a world where our minds are assaulted daily by pornography and violence labelled “news,” it is only human to demand something better reflecting the dignity of mankind.

The Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture and the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus are planning to perform the full Beethoven Mass in C, in a concert on April 4, right after Easter and in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the tragedy of his assassination.