

Beethoven's Work Is the Art of True Political Freedom

by Matthew Ogden

This is the edited transcript of remarks delivered to a Symposium, "The Florestan Principle: Why LaRouche Wrote, and Practiced 'Politics as Art,'" sponsored by the Schiller Institute on December 26, 2020. Subheads and embedded links have been added. A video of the symposium is available [here](#).

The idea of this international "Think Like Beethoven" symposium is an excellent one for the new year, and should absolutely be continued and expanded and developed.

I want to turn to the opening statement of Lyndon LaRouche's [article](#), "Politics as Art." This is what LaRouche wrote in the very beginning:

Some winced or giggled, when the amiable and gifted Senator Eugene McCarthy conducted political campaigning as poetry-reading sessions. I laugh happily at what he did. Senator McCarthy's critics did not remember, as I do, that President Lincoln had won a terrible, justified, and absolutely necessary war on behalf of all humanity, by aid of lessons adduced from Shakespeare, which he had taught, as directives, to the members of his Cabinet. No one, friend or foe, laughed at the awesome result of that instruction.

Real politics, as Plato ... rightly understood, is properly practiced as a form of Classical art....

LaRouche cites the late Senator Eugene McCarthy conducting poetry reading sessions with his youth movement volunteers during the 1968 campaign for President. Later, Eugene McCarthy came to be a friend and a very vocal proponent of Lyndon LaRouche's exoneration, after LaRouche's unjust imprisonment. I was honored to have had the occasion, several times, to meet Senator McCarthy, who remained politically in touch with Mr. LaRouche and maintained contact with my mother, Nina Ogden, until his death.

I recall that, during meetings with him, he was just



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

Sen. Eugene McCarthy became a friend of Lyndon LaRouche and, after his unjust imprisonment, a very vocal proponent of his exoneration. Here he is speaking at the Ad Hoc Democratic Party Platform Hearings organized by LaRouche's Committee for a New Bretton Woods, on June 22, 2000.

as passionate about discussing and debating Homer's compositional methods and techniques in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as he was about discussing and strategizing how to stop President George W. Bush's and Vice President Dick Cheney's fraudulent and criminal war in Iraq. In fact, he regularly published allegorical and hilariously ironic animal stories about Bush and Cheney and the rest of what he scathingly called the "Bestiary," in publications of the LaRouche movement.

When he was asked to sign an open letter calling for LaRouche's exoneration after his unjust imprisonment, Eugene McCarthy said, "How could I not add my name in defense of a man who has brought Plato and Schiller back into politics, and was sent to jail for it?"

Real Politics Is a Form of Classical Art

As LaRouche says in "Politics as Art," which he wrote on the eve of the 2000 contested Presidential election campaign, he said that real politics as Schiller understood it, is properly practiced as a form of Classical art. This recalls a statement by Friedrich Schiller



Herman Matzen

Friedrich Schiller: the greatest work of art is the creation of political freedom. Shown is a statue of Friedrich Schiller on Belle Isle in Detroit.

that the greatest work of art is the creation of political freedom and also Schiller's directive in his essay, "Theatre Considered as a Moral Institution," that the true goal of great art, specifically great drama, is to cause men and women to become better, and to uplift society as a whole. This is what he had to say; this is Friedrich Schiller:

Here, on the classical stage, in this lofty sphere, the great mind, the fiery patriot first discovers how he can fully wield its powers. Such a person lets all previous generations pass in review, weighing nation against nation, century against century, and finds how slavishly the great majority of the people are ever languishing in the chains of prejudice and opinion, which eternally foil their strivings for happiness ... [H]e finds that the pure radiance of truth illumines only a few isolated minds, who probably had to purchase that small gain at the cost of a lifetime's labors. By what means, then, can the wise legislator induce the entire nation to share in its benefits? The theater is the common channel through which the light of wisdom streams down from the thoughtful, better part of society, spreading thence in mild beams throughout the entire state....

And then at last, in all districts and regions and classes, with all his chains of fad and fashion cast away, and every bond of destiny rent

asunder—when man becomes his brother's brother with a single all-embracing sympathy, resolved once again into a single species, forgetting himself and the world, and re-approaching his own heavenly origin.

Each takes joy in others' delights, which then magnified in beauty and strength, are reflected back to him from a hundred eyes, and now his bosom has room for a single sentiment, and this is to be truly human.

A Song to Joy

So, for those of you who are familiar with the text of Friedrich Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, which was set by Beethoven in his *Ninth Symphony*, those concluding words of Schiller's essay, "Theatre as a Moral Institution," will

clearly resonate with you. What did Schiller say in the *Ninth Symphony*?

*Deine Zauber binden wieder
Was die Mode streng geteilt;
Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.*

Your magic brings together
What custom sternly parts;
All men shall be brothers,
Where your gentle wings abide.

As we celebrate Beethoven's 250th anniversary this year, this celebration comes actually in the form of a challenge. The challenge is to think like Beethoven; but that challenge, that directive, does not merely apply to the domain of musical composition and musical performance, *per se*. It applies to the challenge of using Classical art to achieve the greatest work of Classical art, which is true political freedom.

Beethoven himself was witness to the horrors of the Napoleonic wars and lived through a time really not unlike our own in certain regards, when civilization found itself simultaneously staring into the abyss, but also within reach of potentially fulfilling the promise of the American Revolution, and ushering in the Age of Reason.

The challenge to "think like Beethoven" is not just an abstract notion. In order to perform Beethoven's

music, it's not enough to just sing the notes, such as the *Missa Solemnis*, for example, which is the grand project right now of the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus. One instead is forced to think like him; one must enter into Beethoven's mind, or probably more truthfully, allow him to enter into your mind and to allow his ideas and the development of those ideas to be your motive force—what's moving you—almost as if it were a physical force or a physical principle.

Guided by a Force Within Us

You can actually see this when you watch some of the greatest performers. It's almost like they are being guided by something, or being moved by something external to themselves, like the planets around the Sun, as if they're under the influence of a physical force—gravitation. In music, it is the idea of the composer, which is simultaneously radiating from within the performer, while also external to the performer. It's being projected across time from the mind of the composer, even if that composer be long deceased.

However, if those ideas are to have the ability to resonate in this way with us, the performers, there must be something internal to the performer which he or she has developed which allows that resonance process to occur. That's why no performance of a piece of music can ever be the same; this is a living, breathing experience. The performance therefore, with this resonance, takes on the form almost as a dialogue. It's a dialogue between the mind of the performer and the mind of the composer, with the subject of that dialogue being the development of that musical idea.

This living process of musical performance is the challenge we seek to achieve every time we get on that stage. It's not just about reciting, or executing a dead series of notes and making it sound perfect. Or just putting this on display as if you were a recording. It's rather a living dialogue process between two or more living human souls who are undertaking a shared process of



Engraving by Bram Stoker

Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present."

discovery with each other. And they're experiencing together a shared experience of the beautiful emotion which arises from that process of shared discovery. This is, perhaps, the best definition of what we mean by the Classical principle in music. This is not an era; this is not a genre. Classical, instead, is in this sense of the word, Socratic or Platonic, like Plato's dialogues from Classical Greece.

So, this process of resonance—this dialogue between the mind of the composer and the mind of the performer, involving the minds of the audience—this resonance process is, I think, beautifully captured by the poet Percy Shelley in his

In Defence of Poetry. I'm not going to summarize that in full, but he describes the poet as a lyre, one of those ancient Greek musical instruments, which is moved by an unseen wind. In the end of that essay, he says, "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present..."

Of course, this dialogue, this process of shared discovery between our minds and the mind of the musical composer, I would assert, is the same as the dialogue process between our minds and the mind of our Creator.

Art and Science Are Without Distinction

What is called art or poetry on the one hand, is what we call science or philosophy on the other, is exactly the same process; there is no distinction between art and science. These are one and the same. The story of Albert Einstein and his violin, in which he said that when he would be really wrestling with a scientific problem, with a paradox which he couldn't get his head around, that he'd retreat from the problem at hand to his violin. And he'd immerse himself in Mozart.

That story from Einstein is not some gimmick. Great music is the recreational activity of the creative mind. Great art is where the creative mind goes to replenish itself. Einstein's dialogue with Mozart was literally the exact same process as his dialogue with God, the Cre-



Copy of Padre Martini
Albert Einstein's dialogue with Mozart (right) involved the same process as his dialogue with God.

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ator. I think Einstein himself was very conscious of this. He described, in an article published in 1930 in the *New York Times Magazine*, this process that he called “the cosmic religious feeling” which motivates the great scientists. This is what Einstein had to say:

The individual feels ... the sublimity and the marvelous order which reveal themselves both in nature, and in the world of thought. Individual existence impresses him as a sort of prison, and he wants to experience the universe as a single, significant whole. How can this cosmic religious feeling be communicated from one person to another?... In my view, this is the most important function of art and science, to awaken this feeling and to keep it alive in those who are receptive to it.

Later, elsewhere, he said that his motive was to know the mind of God. Einstein said:

I want to know how God created this world. I'm not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thoughts; the rest are details.

Engage Your Mind with Beethoven's

We have to do the same with music. To seek to know the mind of the composer, of Beethoven. I don't say this

flippantly; it's clearly a monumental challenge.

Luckily, just as God the Creator wishes for us to know his mind, Beethoven himself also wishes for us to know his mind; that's what his music is all about—to invite us in and to engage us in a great Socratic dialogue over space and over time. But if such a dialogue is to function, we have to be willing to engage, and through this dialogue, it's a process of unfolding. A process of becoming, a living experience.

Though this dialogue with Beethoven might take

the form of musical performance and musical composition, the subject by no means is music *per se*. The subject, as Einstein said—and let me paraphrase—is that ultimately, we are not necessarily interested in this or that phenomenon, in the theory or the notes or the sounds *per se*. We want to know his thoughts, Beethoven's thoughts. And the rest are details.

Beethoven himself said it is overcoming the experience of mere sound, of tone. That is how he introduced Schiller's poetic text in the final movement of his *Ninth Symphony*, with the words of the baritone soloist, which thunders out above the orchestra: “Oh, my friends, not these sounds” (“*nicht diese töne*”). Then, he implores, “But rather, let us sing of that which is even more pleasing and even more full of joy,” from which follows an exultant and triumphant hymn to joy, to love, to human brotherhood, and to the Creator himself.

In the conclusion of what is universally recognized as one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, what does Beethoven do? He doesn't say this is the piece of music, and now it comes to an end. He ultimately points our attention away from the music itself. He points our attention towards the heavens and the stars and the planets in their orbits. He says, “*Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen / Durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan*” (Gladly, as His suns fly / Through the heavens' grand plan), and finally he directs our attention to the Composer himself with a capital C, the Creator who composed the entire

universe, and who resides, as Schiller says, “above the stars themselves”: “*Brüder, über ’m Sternenzelt / Muß ein lieber Vater wohnen.... / Such’ ihn über ’m Sternenzelt! / Über Sternen muß er wohnen.*” Over, above, beyond the stars, beyond the things is where the Creator lives.

Conductor William Furtwängler

I think the best place to start this endeavor of seeking to think like Beethoven is to follow in the footsteps of one who is undeniably one of the greatest performers of Beethoven of all time, the great conductor, Wilhelm Furtwängler.

There’s a lot to say about Furtwängler, both historically and artistically, including current research into his actual association with and active role in the anti-fascist resistance movement against the Nazis, as opposed to the defamation which Furtwängler is usually subjected to.

But let me go directly to the point that I’d like to make about Furtwängler’s way of thinking. That’s what made him capable of resonating with the ideas of Beethoven in a way which I think many have tried to imitate, to mimic, but none so far have been able to fully match.

I believe his insights will also serve as an indictment of sorts to the tendencies in music that he saw emerging around the turn of the century, away from the ideal that Beethoven represented. It’s also a road map of sorts for us to recapture the method of Beethoven and to use in this extended Beethoven year as an opportunity not to just heap empty praise on Beethoven’s genius, as if it’s an unattainable goal sitting on the top of some mountain peak somewhere. But actually to recreate his genius within ourselves, and to relive that genius. And to create a true renaissance in its truest sense; a revival and a rediscovery of the method of Beethoven’s mind.

I gave a more elaborated [class](#) on “The Genius of Wilhelm Furtwängler” this past summer, as part of the Schiller Institute NYC Chorus summer class series. The whole series was excellent. But in the interest of keeping this presentation now abbreviated, I’d refer

you to that discussion, in which I laid out a detailed presentation of what I asserted was Furtwängler’s epistemological understanding of the science of music and the science of the human mind, which is really the subject of music.

But right now, I’d just like to close by letting Furtwängler do some speaking for himself. I’d like to share Furtwängler’s own words in an essay he wrote on Beethoven. You will notice immediately how much of what Furtwängler says here resonates directly with what Lyndon LaRouche always insisted: that music resides between the notes, beyond the sensual effects, and that the ironies that are inherent in great musical com-



Société Wilhelm Furtwängler

Wilhelm Furtwängler: “Never has an artist, driven by an irresistible creative force, felt so intensely the ‘law’ that underlies artistic creation, and submitted to it with such humility [as Beethoven].” Shown is Furtwängler conducting in St Cecilia’s Hall in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1948.

position must cause us to understand the notes as such as mere vehicles for ideas, which point away from themselves and towards the ideas which dwell far beyond the realm of mere sense perception.

Furtwängler On Beethoven

I do not intend to speak today about the famous composer we all believe we know, the composer who has an unshakeable place in our culture, but about another composer, widely misinterpreted, largely misunderstood, and much abused: The illustrious Beethoven,

the man we all claim we have in our possession. Beethoven, the great Classic—has he any relevance for the youth of today as they gaze into the future?

To be sure, his works are frequently enough performed and his appeal to the masses appears undiminished. Not so, however, to those more closely involved. For not only are the professional musicians bored with what has become all too familiar, but it almost seems as though the more modern, the more intense, the more sophisticated a person's emotions are today, the more indifferent he feels towards Beethoven's music. What is the source of this paradox? One major difficulty with Beethoven—alongside Bach the most complete, the most perfect composer the world has seen—is that, contrary to first appearances, there are no “external” means of access to his music.

With its origins in itself, self-contained and self-sufficient, his music is ultimately impervious to any attempt to understand it from without ... Instead of looking for Beethoven in his works, i.e., from his music, people have been trying to “explain” his music in terms of personal characteristics and thus make it more “intelligible.”... But how different are his works!

Never has an artist, driven by an irresistible creative force, felt so intensely the “law” that underlies artistic creation, and submitted to it with such humility.

To what extent the modern age comprehends this situation is a moot question. The only law the present passive and unproductive age seems to acknowledge is the law of effect, effect achieved by any means....

A merely “correct,” i.e., mediocre performance, is a bad performance; the more so in the case of Beethoven than of any other composer, because it ig-



Ludwig van Beethoven, by Joseph Willibrord Mähler

nore what lies between the notes—and it is precisely there that the essence of the music resides.

This music owes far less than that of other composers to specific sensory qualities—that is to say, when working out his ideas, Beethoven does not proceed primarily from the nature of the instruments or the voices through which he conveys these ideas....

He adapts himself to the instruments he uses, but never surrenders to their power. They are vehicles for ideas that go far beyond the realm of sense perception. There are fortissimos which, though scored for ridiculously few instruments, have an inner drive and power which completely overshadows the explosive outbursts of a modern symphony orchestra. This reveals itself in performance.

Confronted with the inner stresses and tensions of this music, all our genteel, refined striving after artistry and euphony proves useless. Beethoven lies beyond the limits of what people call “prettiness.” The smoldering within his works consumes all who perform it, singers and instrumentalists alike. To change the metaphor—every work has to be wrenched from the very consciousness of whoever performs it.

A Living Organism

Only one thing will help the performer—the most important thing of all—namely, for him to feel his way into the structure of the work as an entity, as a living organism. With Beethoven, the structure [architecture] of the work is identical with the spiritual message....

Foremost is the use of rubato, that almost imperceptible yet constant variation of tempo which turns a piece of music played rigidly according to the notes on the printed page into what it really is—an experience



Wilhelm Furtwängler: "More than any other composer, [Beethoven] seeks to uncover the laws of nature, the eternal truths—hence the extraordinary clarity of his music." Here Furtwängler rehearses Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in February 1948.

of conception and development, of a living organic process.

This naturally demands from the performer a relentless pursuit of clarity and an unyielding self-discipline, combined with emotional intensity and infinite devotion. Today's fashionable cult of personal flair and intensity fails utterly in the face of these demands, for it has no means of access to the organic, self-contained and self-sufficient work of art. However accomplished a performer of this kind may be, he can only, when confronted by Beethoven, either behave like a headstrong "rubato" interpreter, or be led by his sense of style—as people call it—to divest himself entirely of his natural instincts and modern feelings and turn himself into a so-called "Classical" musician.

The latter tendency is, of the two, the more dangerous and fraught with disaster, for the following reason: The powerful tensions in Beethoven's music make it necessary to observe a clarity and strictness of formal development, since otherwise the music would be consumed in its own flames.

If the performer does not re-experience and re-live the music each time anew, these formal elements will thrust themselves into the foreground ... giving an im-

pression of regulation and prescription, of hackneyed repetition, while draining the work of its energy, the vitality of its spiritual freedom, and giving the impression that it is the "form" that matters most. In a word, Beethoven is turned into a "Classical" composer. And it is this much-lauded "Classical" Beethoven who prevails in the minds of most musicians, rules in our conservatories, and dominates the performances one hears, obstructing our view of the real Beethoven, destroying him day after day...

Yet, it never ceases to surprise me how obstinately loyal audiences remain to him. Can it be that the living heart of his music pierces even the densest of clouds around it?

What strikes one above all about Beethoven, and manifests itself to a greater extent in his music than in that of others, is what I would call the "inner law." More than any other com-

poser, he seeks to uncover the laws of nature, the eternal truths—hence the extraordinary clarity of his music. The simplicity that dominates his work is not that of a naïve or a primitive artist, nor does it aim at achieving an immediate sensory effect, like modern popular music. Yet, no music makes its approach to the listener so directly, so openly—so nakedly, one might dare to say...

Beethoven encompasses the whole of human nature in all its complexity. He is the universal genius.... Beethoven has a modern relevance like that of no other composer.

What nobility of emotion wells up in his most intimate of personal utterances! The most beautiful moments in his music speak of an innocence, a childlike purity, which, in spite of all their human qualities, have an otherworldly aura about them. No composer has ever understood more about the harmony of the spheres, or the inner peace of the Godhead. And it was from him that the words for Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, "Brothers, a loving Father must live above the starry firmament!" received their true, living meaning, a meaning that lies far beyond the reach of words.

These words of Wilhelm Furtwängler can guide us in learning to think like Beethoven, but the task is ours.