

III. Culture and History

Let's Walk Together Towards a Golden Renaissance

by Sophie Tanapura

Mrs. Tanapura is a Classical soprano and the founder of the Metropolitan Opera of Bangkok in Thailand. She and her husband lived in Europe and the U.S. for several years, collaborating with the La-Rouche movement and the Schiller Institute, before returning to Thailand in 1985. The following is an edited transcript of the June 16 address by Mrs. Tanapura, to the June 15-16 online conference of the Schiller Institute, "The World on the Brink: For a New Peace of Westphalia!" She spoke on Panel 2, "The Richness of the Cultures of Humanity and the Coming Golden Renaissance." The videos from that conference are available [here](#).



Sophie Tanapura Facebook page

Founder of the Metropolitan Opera of Bangkok, soprano Sophie Tanapura has spent decades bringing Classical music to her native Thailand.

Many of us who worked closely together years ago, haven't seen each other for about 20 years, so I'm very happy Mike [Billington] contacted me and asked me to speak. It's really an honor and a pleasure to be touching base with old friends again, and meeting new friends.

I will talk about what I've been doing with music

since I left Europe. I'm still doing it. Let me go on and say that I am very passionate about Classical music, to the point of becoming a trained soprano. That has made all the difference in my life. I have a lot to thank the Schiller Institute for, having introduced me to not only voice teachers such as Mexican bass José Briano and German alto Gertrude Pitzinger, but especially to Schiller's writings that will get us through difficult times today, such as *Solon and Lycurgus*, which is definitely on the agenda; *Don Carlos*; and *On the Aesthetical Education of Man*. These are like Biblical writings that my husband and I refer to all the time.



Sophie Tanapura Facebook page

Bringing Classical music to the population everywhere: Here Tanapura performs at her restaurant, Vinifera, "an oasis of humanism in Bangkok."

These works inspired me to share my modest knowledge and insight into the humanist outlook with others here in Thailand and neighboring countries. How do I do that? From my return home to Thailand in 1985—yes, it's been that long—I founded the Ibycus Chamber

Ensemble with music teachers and serious amateurs, named Ibycus after Schiller's poem "The Cranes of Ibykus." The ensemble grew into the Ibycus Chamber Orchestra, and I was able to manage it for eight years (I'm giving you all this history, because at least that way you know what I have done, am doing, and will continue to do), working with European conductors and soloists such as Hans Günter Mommer, Christoph Poppen, Lukas David, and Hans Stadlmair. We have been performing monthly concerts over these decades in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Phuket. Occasionally, I sang in smaller chamber formations, and we went on concert tours to Singapore, Cambodia, and Vietnam. In Vietnam, it was at the Opera House in Hanoi, where I sang Mozart's "Exultate Jubilate," under the baton of the Japanese conductor Maestro Yoshikazu Fukumura. That was in 1999.

On another occasion, as the guest of the Indian Consul for Cultural Relations, I was given the opportunity to visit chamber orchestras, dance groups, as well as choruses in New Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai. On that trip, I was able to help the tenor section of a chorus move more easily and beautifully into the head tone. It was a joy for everyone.

For another short period of five years, at the turn of the millennium, the city of Bangkok provided a sizable budget for the Ibycus group to teach Classical instruments and voice. At the end of that period, I had a group of young soloists, and with that group we went onto the next step, which was to create the Metropolitan Opera of Bangkok. We did that and performed abridged versions of Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, Mozart's *La Nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro), and Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Doing these things in Bangkok, even though over the years things have developed more, but having done these little gems of operas, it has brought a lot of thought



Sophie Tanapura Facebook page

"Who would feel so threatened by this cultural work of mine?" Shown here, Mrs. Tanapura performing an opera aria.

to the society; a different point of view from what we're used to.

But doing this cultural development work is not all roses. Let me share with you a story of what we ran into. There was a period when the Japan Foundation director supported our Ibycus Chamber Orchestra. One day, he asked me, what he could do to help before he would have to leave his post in Thailand. I said, "Well, you could provide orchestra instruments for the dramatic arts faculty of Thammasat University in Bangkok. The faculty wanted to create a music program that would eventually produce musicals one day. A shipment of these instruments arrived a few months later for the establishment of an orchestra. However, a prominent member of the Privy Council asserted

himself and told the dramatic arts faculty that he would now take over the orchestra project. Yes, the orchestra project was literally hijacked. Who would think that someone would feel so threatened by this cultural work of mine?

There are many stories like this along the years I've been back here.

Seven years ago, I opened a French-Italian restaurant by the name of Vinifera. At this restaurant in Bangkok you will be able to hear German lieder, French melodies, Italian canzonetta, as well as opera arias. I've made it into an oasis of humanism in the middle of Bangkok. Even in these difficult times, we continue to provide Classical music live at the restaurant.

Today, at the age of 74, I still sing in concerts. My health is still very good, so I continue to do my art. My standing Japanese pianist is amazed that I continue to make progress in my art, so I hope all of you will have the same health, energy, and joy to do whatever you love to do.

I also continue to teach voice. My recent student is a promising young (20-year-old) Thai-Ukrainian tenor. Yes, you heard it right; I'm teaching a 20-year-old Thai-Ukrainian tenor.

On this note, I'd like to ask you to join me to firmly take humanity by the hand, and let's walk together towards a golden renaissance with Franz Schubert's "Frühlingsglaube," the "Faith in Spring." After a very harsh winter which we are going through right now,

Frühlingsglaube

by Johann Ludwig Uhland

Die linden Lüfte sind erwacht,
Sie säuseln und weben Tag und Nacht,
Sie schaffen an allen Enden.
O frischer Duft, o neuer Klang!
Nun, armes Herze, sei nicht bang!
Nun muss sich Alles, Alles wenden.

Die Welt wird schöner mit jedem Tag,
Man weiss nicht, was noch werden mag,
Das Blühen will nicht enden.
Es blüht das fernste, tiefste Tal:
Nun, armes Herz, vergiss der Qual!
Nun muss sich Alles, Alles wenden.

there will always be Spring. This is a song that I love to sing all the time; even though it's in German and hardly anybody understands German here in Bangkok, but I will always comment on it and try to inspire people that there will be Spring.

Faith in Spring

The soothing breezes have awakened,
They rustle and weave day and night,
Everywhere they are creating.
Oh fresh fragrance, oh new sound!
Now, poor heart, be not afraid!
Now everything must change.

The world grows more beautiful with each day,
Nobody knows what might yet happen,
The blossoming knows no end.
The deepest, most distant valley blossoms.
Now poor heart, forget your pain!
Now all must change.