

LYM Brings Beauty to Baltimore 'Death Zone'

by Ted Smith

I am the director of a community center in one of the “death zones” of Baltimore.* I was interviewed by *EIR* as part of the Baltimore Project. In a question and answer after one of Lyndon LaRouche’s webcasts, I asked him for marching orders so that I can best affect this community. Lyn advised me to involve the community in singing, which will inspire them.

I contacted members of the Washington office of the LaRouche Youth Movement, and they began singing classes on Mondays. We had two classes of about 4-5 middle-school-aged students. It was a very different experience for the students. On the one hand, it intrigued them; but their attention was probably garnered for about 15 minutes. After a couple of classes, I began to have discussions with members of the LYM to figure out how to strategically inspire this community. We agreed that the best way would be to have a full-fledged ensemble sing for the community. The kids and the community at large need to see the finished product.

A couple of times a month, we have a community meal where parents, community members, and students are invited. At our latest gathering, the LYM sang three selections. Two of them were in foreign languages, and one was in English. There were approximately 40 people present. To be honest, I was fearful at the response to an all-white, opera-sounding ensemble singing in the “heart of the ’hood.” I believe in the beauty of Classical music, but this was truly an experience where the “rubber met the road.”

I was counting on my youngsters (5th and 6th graders) to be engaged, while I prayed for my older youth (12-15) to just be orderly. Ironically, the opposite occurred. The older youth, who are struggling in school (and are seriously at-risk for criminal activity) were the most engaged. When Jennifer Getachew (the director of the chorus) asked the crowd questions at the end of each selection, they provided very thoughtful answers. Those youth were the most spellbound by a beautiful performance. I could not help but think that those most entrenched in ugliness are primed to appreciate beauty (especially when they may have never seen it before).

*The deindustrialization of Baltimore has turned what was once a center of innovation and industry into a decayed shell, where impoverished neighborhoods have become petri dishes for disease, drugs, and crime. See *EIR*, Jan. 6, 2006.

A Challenge

The older youth were answering questions about musical selections that were in foreign languages. I was thinking to myself, "What is happening here?" I have never witnessed anything quite like this in my life. After all three selections were presented, Jennifer asked the crowd who wanted to become part of a chorus. About three hands went up. Then, the same group that was the most spellbound began to jokingly volunteer some of their peers to become part of the chorus. While they may have appreciated the beauty of the performance, it is simply not popular to sing Classical music.

Everyone sat down to eat, and enjoyed their meals. There was a buzz in the air, but it was still very serene. This was simply a different experience, and the kids were more orderly, because of it.

However, the LYM would not give up in their determination to get some of the kids to defy popular opinion and join the chorus. Then, the shocker of the evening came: The LYM challenged members of our basketball team to a game. If the LYM won, then the kids would have to sing. My jaw dropped. It was one thing to engage some of these kids in singing, but I seriously thought that the LYM are out of their minds. This is not Capitol Hill; this is a basketball game played in the 'hood!

The whole place was electric. The kids were definitely not going to back down from a challenge. They were laughing, and arguing amongst themselves who would be the four-some to slaughter the LYM. After the kids shot for a chance to make the team, the game was played. It was a game to 11. The LYM surged to an early lead, which stunned the crowd and the players. No one left, while this game was being played. There was a drama in the making. The kids battled back to even the score at 10-10. Now, the winner would have to win by two. Both sides were tired, but the LYM looked a little more worn. However, they were not to be denied, as they won a very hard-fought game. The kids were stunned, but the LYM earned their respect. There was no arguing during this game or dirty fouling (events that I witness often amongst the kids).

After the LYM left, I talked with three of the kids. They said that they were okay with singing: Fair is fair. They asked me for my opinion of the game. "Why did we lose, Mr. Smith?" I told them that the LYM played completely as a team, and there is a principle driving them that cannot be measured. For some reason unbeknownst to me, God has

blessed them to become acquainted with this principle as well.

I have a sneaking suspicion that there may be a revolution brewing in East Baltimore. There is a light that is glowing in the midst of a lot of darkness. The LYM is sparking a chorus, defying all popularly conceived rules in the process. I thank God that the LYM believe that the kids of Collington Square deserve a chance to experience beauty.



Courtesy of Ted Smith

Author Ted Smith (back left) with some of the young participants in choral work with the LaRouche Youth Movement, at a community center in the Collington Square neighborhood of Baltimore.



EIRNS/Brian McAndrews

The LYM chorus singing at a Washington, D.C. event last year.