
II. LaRouche on Education

The Inner Workings of Alma Deutscher's Musical Genius

by Michelle Rasmussen

I want to write beautiful music—music that makes the world a better place.

—Alma Deutscher

May 19—When I think about 12-year-old Alma Deutscher, the budding English composer, violinist, and pianist, I cannot help but be reminded of Robert Schumann's first public statement about Frédéric Chopin: "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius."¹

Our political movement is dedicated to the proposition that all children can become geniuses, if their creative potential is developed. Alma is proof of that. We are convinced that the most important challenge of humanity is to develop a strategy to unleash the creativity of every man, woman and child, and that a crucial method to achieve this, is by reliving the creative discoveries of the past. Alma is also proof of that. And we are determined to create a new global renaissance, for which new musical compositions, based on the principles of the greatest classical music, will help lead the way. Again, Alma's young musical mind and soul already prove that it is possible.

A Very Young Classical Music Composer

On December 29, 2016, Alma's first full-length opera, *Cinderella*, had its European debut in Vienna, under the baton of Zubin Mehta, who dubbed her "one of the greatest musical talents today."² The reader may see a shorter version, performed in Hebrew with English subtitles, on YouTube.³

1. In *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, a review of Chopin's *Variations on "Là ci darem la mano"* by Mozart.

2. [One aria from the Vienna performance.](#) / Quote from Alma's new website under Reviews: <http://www.almadeutscher.com/>.

3. [First part.](#)
[Second part.](#)



Alex Nightingale Smith/almadeutscher.com

"If the world is so ugly, then what's the point of making it even uglier, with ugly music? ... So, if you want to hear how ugly the modern world is, then you don't need to come to my concert in July. You can just switch on the television."

In addition to the beautiful music, Alma also re-wrote the plot. The evil step-mother runs an opera company, the step-sisters are talentless divas, Cinderella is a composer, and the prince is a poet. The prince finds Cinderella because she is the only one who can sing the continuation of the song she composed for one of his poems.

Alma had previously written a short, one-act opera, *The Sweeper of Dreams*, and has also composed piano, violin, and chamber music, as well as concertos and orchestral works, many of which are available on her YouTube channel,⁴ and on her CD.⁵

But, for this author, that which most reveals the inner workings of Alma's musical creativity, is hearing her

4. [Alma's YouTube channel.](#)

5. *The Music of Alma Deutscher*, CD, mp3, Flara Records, 2013.



Rosa solemnis/youtube

Alma Deutscher greets conductor Zubin Mehta on his arrival in Vienna for the rehearsals of her opera, Cinderella. The performances, in December 2016, were sold out. It will be performed again at Schloss Kittsee near Vienna on July 12, 2017.

improvise, either alone, or in a musical dialogue with her teacher, Tobias Cramm, starting at the age of 5.⁶

Alma thinks and breaths music—beautiful, classical music, which modulates (between keys, between major and minor), develops, surprises, moves, and delights. She has developed her power of imagination to such a degree, that she can close her eyes and let her imagination develop musical ideas, while keeping the all-important “*Il Filo*,” or red thread, in mind. *Il Filo*, a metaphor used by Mozart’s father Leopold, among others, is “the cognitive thread that, like Ariadne’s thread which led Theseus through the labyrinth, guides the listener through a musical work.”⁷

Alma has developed this special power of creating musical development bounded by a unity of effect, which the legendary Amadeus Quartet’s first violinist, Norbert Brainin, and his friend Lyndon LaRouche, call “*motivführung*.”⁸

6. For example: Alma Deutscher (age 7) and Tobias Cramm [improvising together](#) on the organ, February 2012; Alma Deutscher (age 7), improvisation on “[Hänschen Klein](#)”; [joint improvisation](#) by Alma Deutscher and Tobias Cramm (around age 9); and “[Intermezzo with Arik Vardi](#),” Israel Educational Television, Alma Deutscher, Jan. 3, 2014. See others on her website cited above.

7. Gjerdingen, Robert. *Music in the Galant Style*. Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 369.

8. LaRouche, Lyndon. “[Mozart’s 1782-1786 Revolution in Music](#),” *Fidelio*, Winter 1992. In the article, LaRouche describes the musical *motivführung* revolution started by Haydn, then taken to a higher level by Mozart, by integrating Haydn’s discovery, with an earlier breakthrough by Bach.

Starting with a musical motif with pregnant possibilities, provoked by naturally developing paradoxes, the composition leaps from one discovery to the next, driven by a subsuming, generative musical thought-object. LaRouche’s criterion is, “Can the Many transitions, and developments linking transitions, all be subsumed under the directing governance of an unchangeable idea of the composition as a whole?”⁹ The origin of such a musical thought-object is a “divine spark of potential for rigorous forms of creative reason.”¹⁰

During the many interviews with her, Alma is self-reflective and tries to put words to her creative process. Her musical ideas come to her when she is improvising at the piano, during an “improvising mood,” but often, when she is not trying to produce them—while dreaming, just before or after sleeping, when skipping rope, relaxing, or doing something else. The melodies just flow into her musical mind. “I just hear this beautiful melody. It plays inside my mind.”

But then, she says, the hard work begins, to compose the other voices that will entwine the initial melody voice, and to develop the ideas as creatively as possible.

When asked to describe the process of how she turns these melodies into a piece of music, Alma self-reflectively responded, “Lots of people think that the difficult part of composing, is, actually, to get the idea, but actually, that just comes to me. The difficult bit is to then sit down and, with that idea, to develop it, and combine it with other ideas in a coherent way. Because it’s very easy just to throw a soup of lots of ideas, which don’t make any sense together, but to sit down and develop it, and to combine it, and then afterwards to tweak it, and polish it, that takes ages, sometimes even years.”¹¹

Alma is inspired by the composers Mozart, Schubert, and Tchaikovsky—who, she thinks, have the most beautiful melodies and harmonies—and by girls like Fanny Mendelssohn, Felix Mendelssohn’s sister, and Nannerl, Mozart’s sister, who were extremely talented, but were not allowed to become composers because they were girls.

Alma is also inspired by other creative people, not

9. LaRouche, Lyndon. “[That Which Underlies Motivic Thorough-Composition](#),” *EIR*, vol. 44, no. 6, Feb. 10, 2017, first published in 1995, p. 62.

10. Listen, for example, to her [Variations in E-flat major](#).

11. [Alma Deutscher, Composer—Violinist and Pianist—The World Around Us](#), ZeitgeistMinds.

only in the field of music, but also in science. When asked about her creativity, she responded:

I don't go to school. I learn at home. I'm home-schooled. I read lots of books, I love reading. . . . I read biographies about scientists and composers.¹²

There is no TV. She reads books, “and imagines how it must be.”

And, she is also inspired by others who made a difference: “I want to change the world too.”¹³

Nourishing a Musical Genius

Alma sang before she could speak. The two-year-old Alma started playing the piano, and the violin at three. At the age of four, her parents prepared a CD for her with classical music lullabies, and the one that she loved the most was by Richard Strauss, especially because of a specific harmonic shift in the first few measures.¹⁴ “How can music be so beautiful?” she asked her mother.

At three, Alma started improvising music at the piano, and wrote her first compositions at four. Her father, Israeli linguist Guy Deutscher, said, “The greatest moment was when we realized that she was playing her own melodies.”¹⁵ He decided to take Alma's musical soul seriously, and began searching for methods of teaching classical music composition to children—and for a teacher.

He discovered a book, *Music in the Galant Style*,¹⁶ by Robert Gjerdingen, professor of music at Northwestern University's School of Music. Gjerdingen reveals the results of his exhaustive search through the libraries of Naples and other Italian cities to find the original sources, the pedagogical workbooks, known as *partimenti* (or singular, *partimento*, using the word to mean the method itself) of 18th-century music masters. *Partimento* was also taught to, or by, non-Italians such as Bach, Händel, Haydn, and Mozart.

12. “British Child Prodigy's [Cinderella Opera](#) Thrills Vienna,” BBC News.

13. She also plays the violin in opera productions. “I go to a summer camp in Salzburg, where we put on an opera with some members of the Vienna Philharmonic. That's a lot of fun. This year it was *Fidelio*, and I was the concertmaster. I have a lot of friends there who play instruments.”

14. “Wiegenlied,” Op. 41, no. 1, from a D-major triad D-F#-A-D, to a D-E#-G#-B (followed by a C#), which we have referred to as containing “double Lydian” dissonances between D-G#, and E#-B.

15. “[CBS This Morning](#),” Dec. 27, 2016.

16. Gjerdingen, Robert. See note 7.



Alma Deutscher/youtube

Alma Deutscher, at age 7, improvising at the organ jointly with her teacher, Tobias Cramm, in “question and answer” form—each responding to the other's contribution by turns.

For example, Joseph Haydn recorded that:

I wrote diligently but not in a well-founded way until, finally, I had the good fortune to learn the true fundamentals of composition from the celebrated Herr Porpora (who was in Vienna at that time).¹⁷

Nicola Porpora was educated in, and then taught in the *partimento* tradition in Naples.

In the 18th Century, Italian children living in “conservatories,” or homes to “conserve” (provide for) orphans, or poor children, were taught musical composition as a trade, by music masters, with *partimenti* as a guide.

The first step was to learn *solfeggi*, or studies in melody, in which the children would begin to learn counterpoint by singing, and listening. They would sing soprano melodies, always accompanied by a keyboard instrument, which would play the bass and, most probably, other voices. In this way, the children would start their journey toward immersion in the world of polyphony (multiple voices).

Then, it was time for *partimenti*.

17. Diergarten, Felix. “‘The True Fundamentals of Composition’: Haydn's Partimento Counterpoint,” [Eighteenth-Century Music](#), vol. 8, no. 1, March 2011, pp. 53-75. This article shows how the *partimenti* tradition influenced Haydn, using several of his fugues as examples.

“In a sense, *solfeggi* and *partimenti* (instructional basses) were two sides of the same polyphonic coin. *Partimenti* provided a bass to which the student added one or more upper voices in a keyboard realization. . . . Thus the melody-bass duo at the heart of eighteenth-century music was taught and reinforced from both the top and the bottom,”¹⁸ or, as in another description, a “musical *pas de deux* [ballet duet] of *solfeggio*-melody and *partimenti* bass.”

With the aid of *partimenti*, the children learned how to discover the unseen and unheard “missing” three voices above a given bass melody, that is, the soprano, alto, and tenor voices, to create a full, four-voiced polyphonic composition. “[*P*]artimento was but one voice in a virtual ensemble that played in the mind of the student and became sound through realization at the keyboard.”¹⁹

Partimenti were not limited to the bass line, however, and there could be clef changes. Giorgio Sanguinetti, another leading *partimenti* researcher, provides this definition: “A *partimento* is a sketch, written on a single staff, whose main purpose is to be a guide for improvisation of a composition at the keyboard.”²⁰

As Gjerdingen stressed in an interview, the primary focus was not vertical chords, but developing the facility to improvise horizontal voices—four independent voices that would weave a beautiful, developing tonal carpet—the essence of counterpoint.

The student also learned to recognize commonly used musical building blocks, with which they could enrich their powers of imagination, needed to realize the given *partimenti* line (play the other voices), improvise impromptu, or compose new works. Gjerdingen writes:

Viewing *partimenti* as traces of a lost culture of music training, one can see that while *partimenti* did provide students practice in keyboard accompaniment, harmony, and counterpoint, the more talented and devoted students also gained a rich training of the musical imagination. One might say, without too much exaggeration, that for the eighteenth-century court musician, *partimenti* were a mode of musical thought. Today the *partimenti* provide a window into the musi-

cal world of that time, and they can still help train young musicians who want an insider’s understanding of this great musical heritage.

The German Version of *Partimenti*

The Italian *partimento* was similar to, but not exactly the same as the German *Generalbass*, known in English as figured bass or thoroughbass. During the 17th and 18th Centuries, the distinction between composer and performer was much more fluid than today. Musicians were expected to be able to improvise four-voiced counterpoint, given only a bass voice, sometimes with and sometimes without small numbers associated with some of the notes, indicating musical intervals above the bass line—a series of vertical clues that the musician used to improvise the other horizontal voices.

Johann Sebastian Bach said:

Figured bass is the most perfect foundation of music. It is executed with both hands in such a manner that the left hand plays the notes that are written, while the right adds consonances and dissonances thereto, making an agreeable harmony for the glory of God and the justifiable gratification of the soul. Like all music, the figured bass should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the recreation of the soul; where this is not kept in mind there is no true music, but only an infernal clamor and ranting.²¹

Bach’s first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, in his chapter, “Bach the Teacher,” wrote:

Bach’s method of teaching composition was as sure and excellent as his method of teaching how to play. He did not begin with dry counterpoints that led nowhere, as was done by other teachers of music in his time; still less did he detain his scholars with the calculations of the proportions of tones, . . . He proceeded at once to the pure thorough bass in four parts, and insisted particularly on the writing out of these parts, because thereby the idea of the pure progression of the harmony is rendered the most evident.

He then proceeded to chorales [hymns]. In the exercises, he at first set the basses himself and made the pupils invent only the alto and

18. “[Solfeggi in Their Historical Context.](#)”

19. “[Partimenti in Their Historical Context.](#)”

20. Sanguinetti, Giorgio. *The Art of Partimento: History, Theory, and Practice*. Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 14.

21. Schweitzer, Albert. *J.S. Bach*. Vol. 1, p. 167.



Alma Deutscher/youtube

Alma Deutscher was the soloist when her own violin concerto was performed by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, when she was 9.

tenor to them. By degrees, he let them also make the basses. He everywhere insisted not only on the highest degree of purity in the harmony itself, but also on natural connection and flowing melody in all the parts. Every connoisseur knows what models he has himself produced in this kind; his middle parts are often so singable that they might be used as upper parts.²²

The great composer Georg Friedrich Händel has bequeathed to us his own teaching exercises, which enable the reader to learn how to “realize” the given thoroughbasses, and also, thoroughbass fugues. Fugues, both learned (more elaborate, worked out on paper) and thoroughbass (improvised), are the epitome of counterpoint. The lessons that Händel wrote to teach the daughters of King George II and his wife Caroline, herself a collaborator of Leibniz, have been published as *Continuo Playing According to Handel: His Figured Bass Exercises*.²³

22. David, Hans T., and Mendel, Arthur, eds., *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*. Revised and expanded by Christoph Wolff. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998, p. 454. Bach’s own rules of thorough bass are included at page 206, although Bach ends by saying that the other precautions to be observed are better explained in oral instruction. If only we had had recording equipment at that time!

23. *Continuo Playing According to Handel: His Figured Bass Exercises*, with a commentary by David Ledbetter. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

other. They call it “Question and Answer.”

(This author has been engaged in a very fruitful “Singing Question and Answer” improvisation game process with the very musical seven-year-old son of two Schiller Institute colleagues, after the three of them had started playing it. We alternate starting off, and it is fascinating to hear how much his singing responses cohere with the opening statement, how he responds directly to the preceding phrase by the other and to the jointly developing melodic and/or rhythmical theme. Some examples are available on the website of the Schiller Institute in Denmark.²⁴)

Cramm’s teacher was Rudolf Lutz, organist at St. Laurenzen church in St. Gallen, Switzerland, who is one of the foremost improvisers in the style of Bach. He is also the artistic director of the [J.S. Bach-Stiftung](#) (J.S. Bach Foundation), which is in the process of recording all of Bach’s vocal works.

Alma’s father also plays a role in facilitating her composing. Sometimes he helps her write down her musical ideas, and advises her if he thinks some parts of her composition are too boring. Alma also sends her compositions to Gjerdingen for advice.

24. [Singing Question and Answer](#) with Alexander Gent Gillesberg and this author.

Classical Music or Modern?

Alma said, in a 2016 interview with the German daily, *Die Zeit*, “Modern music I find annoying. It’s noise that hurts my ears. I prefer to listen to beautiful melodies. . . . I love to write beautiful melodies and beautiful harmonies, and I mix in my melodies harmonies used by different composers.”²⁵

She has also transformed her teacher’s view about composition in our time. *Die Zeit*’s interviewer: “What is innovation in music? Previously, Alma’s teacher Tobias Cramm thought that serious ‘classical’ music must sound contemporary, must therefore be ‘modern classic,’ otherwise it would be pure imitation. But he says that he has learned better. One can be creative even with the tradition. Alma revives the old language again, and ‘her tunes accompany me.’”

The interviewer asks, “Alma, what is your main goal?” Alma responds:

I want people to love classical music again, not just listen to pop music. There should be more real composers again, like there used to be. I want to change the world, to make it more beautiful.

In conclusion, the author will leave you with a more in-depth personal statement by Alma about what she is striving to accomplish. It is from a video she made for the Feb. 21, 2017 press conference held by the Carinthian Summer Music Festival in Austria. Alma will hold a concert there on July 16, consisting solely of her own compositions. She says:

I want to tell you something important about my music in general, about my style, and my musical language, about what’s the point of music. Some people have told me that I compose in a musical language of the past, and that this is not allowed in the 21st Century. In the past, it was possible to compose beautiful melodies and beautiful music, but today, they say, I’m not allowed to compose like this anymore, because I need to discover the complexity of the modern world, and that the point of music, is to show the complexity of the world.

Well, let me tell you a huge secret. I already

know that the world is complex, and can be very ugly, but I think that these people have just got a little bit confused. If the world is so ugly, then what’s the point of making it even uglier, with ugly music?

Alma then tells the story, recounted here, of hearing Strauss’ lullaby and asking her parents, “How can music be so beautiful?”

Soon after that, I started to invent my own melodies, and in all the music I have composed since, I have always tried to make it sound as beautiful as I can, otherwise, what’s the point? Maybe I can’t do it as beautifully as Strauss, but I’m trying.

So, if you want to hear how ugly the modern world is, then you don’t need to come to my concert in July. You can just switch on the television, and listen to the news. But I think that most people actually go to concerts because they want to hear beautiful music—music full of melodies that you can hum or sing, music that speaks to the heart, music that makes you want to smile, or cry, or dance. There’s enough ugliness in the world. I want to write beautiful music—music that makes the world a better place.”²⁶

Well, Alma, you have actually already done that. Of the some four million people who have seen Alma’s YouTube videos, many have left written comments that express that the beauty that you, who are so young, have created for them, has brought tears of joy to their eyes. You have given us the hope that all children can become geniuses, if only they can be allowed to develop their creative potential.

To LaRouche, classical music, displayed in “a domain of empyreal beauty,” in the mind, not the senses, is an “indispensable spiritual nourishment of the agapic creative powers of reason.”²⁷ You, Alma, have given us the hope that the lost art of classical music composition, may not be lost, after all.

Other articles on music and culture by Michelle Rasmussen may be found at http://schillerinstitut.dk/si/tag/michelle_rasmussen/.

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25. Uwe Jean Heuser interviewed Alma Deutscher in *Die Zeit*, January 7, 2016. Excerpts in translation are posted on her Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/AlmaDeutscher/posts/487087171495436>

26. www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yf_pbVvIWk

27. LaRouche, Lyndon. “That Which Underlies Motivic Thorough-Composition,” p. 70. See note 9.