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The universal validity of aesthetic laws

The following is a portion of the keynote address which Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the international Schiller Institutes, delivered to a conference on "Music and Classical Aesthetics," in Milan, Italy, on April 9. It has been translated from the German original.

*Der Menschheit Würde ist in eure Hand gegeben,
Bewahret sie! Sie sinkt mit euch! Mit euch wird sie sich
heben! **

This dramatic call, which Friedrich Schiller issued to the artists in his so-named poem, is more timely today than ever before, and nowhere more so, than in the field of classical music. For, no other other art, and no other medium, provides more direct access to the human soul and the inner workings of the human mind, than classical music; and if we lose this, humanity will have lost nothing less than its own soul.

Today, we are threatened with the loss of any real understanding of the great works of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Verdi. Even the art of correctly interpreting classical works as they were intended by their composers, has become an all-but-forgotten secret. Of course, we still have all sorts of concerts and performances, and the recording industry has certainly opened up significant technical possibilities; but how often does the music-lover find that he must turn away in disgust, because instead of hearing Mozart or Beethoven, all he hears is a jumble of mere sounds!

In view of this, the goal of this conference is nothing less than to revive and safeguard our classical musical culture, so that soon, it will be impossible ever again to destroy classical musical interpretation, as has been done so insidiously following 1815, especially over the past 100 years. And in this endeavor, answering the question of the correct tuning of middle-C at a value of 256, is absolutely central, because upon this hinges our understanding of whether there exist universal, eternally valid principles for art, and thus, whether

music is indeed a universal language. That, in turn, provides the answer to the more fundamental question, whether man is in fact universal, or whether truth may vary from one person to the next. This is not merely an aesthetic question, but an eminently moral one, for it is precisely this which determines the image of mankind.

Although it has almost entirely faded from our memories today, it is nevertheless an indisputable fact, that all classical composers, from Mozart through Verdi, wrote their works for a tuning corresponding to middle-C set at 256 cycles. Mozart made the explicit discovery, that the soprano and the tenor voice execute their register-shift most naturally and cleanly at F-sharp. In making this discovery, Mozart was merely taking into account the fact that music is ultimately merely a form of expression evolved from sung classical poetry, which dates back to the Vedic hymns about 6,000 years ago. And since instrumental music evolved from the singing voice, all musical problems can be defined from the standpoint of the parameters of a beautifully trained singing voice.

During the age of the classical composers, that much was obvious, and consequently their instruments were all tuned to C = 256 cycles per second, while the instruments' configurations were essentially conceived as imitations of the human voice, corresponding to the various registral ranges. Thus, musical instruments were built on the same principles as well-tempered polyphony, and composers wrote their pieces from the standpoint of the lawfulness of vocal composition. This is why, in their instrumental compositions, they used the same descriptions—"duet," "trio," "quartet," etc. At the same time, instrumental music was more than a mere imitation of the singing voice; it was a more richly variegated form of musical expression, but always based on the same lawfulness.

Our problem today, is that the natural register-shift of the trained *bel canto* voice is not taken as the point of departure for tuning and interpretation; instead, this is determined by the substantially altered construction of the modern concert

* From Friedrich Schiller's *Die Künstler (The Artists)*:
Mankind's dignity has been given into your hand;
Protect it! It sinks with you! With you it shall rise up!

grand piano, and by the tuning of middle-C, which in the intervening period has reached $A = 440$ on the average, and has even risen as high as $A = 450$. This has resulted not only in the destruction of the human singing voice—and even of musical instruments—but also in the literal destruction of compositions, through arbitrary interpretations. The degree to which our knowledge of the internal lawfulness of classical compositions has been destroyed, can be gauged by the fact that today, the overwhelming majority of classical music concert-goers do not even question the $A = 440$ tuning, nor do most music students learn that it could ever be otherwise. When one considers how today, out-of-tune Beethoven pieces are mindlessly performed alongside pieces by Stockhausen, as well as how small the audience is for our abused classical music in comparison to rock-pop “music” and other horrors, one can see that correctly interpreted classical music is, in fact, a species threatened with extinction.

It therefore is all the more urgent, that we take up the aesthetic criteria on which classical artists have based their work. Classical aesthetics signifies nothing else than that beauty must be a reflection of the lawfulness of life; and it can be proven that all living forms are derived from harmonic orderings which are congruent with the Golden Section of a circle.

The laws of the development of the universe are so constituted, that the physical universe is continually developing negentropically into ever-higher manifolds, such that any one manifold passes over into the next higher one by accentuating all of its species-potentialities to a maximum, and at that single point, participating in the next-higher, more complex manifold. This idea of development, which one might term the Christian law of evolution, was formulated by the great 15th-century cardinal and father of modern natural science, Nicolaus of Cusa, and it was later proven from the modern scientific standpoint by Kepler, Gauss, and Riemann. Man, whose reason (the microcosm) reflects the laws ordering the creation of the universe (the macrocosm), is the “crowning of creation”; i.e., what all other organisms in the universe do more or less unconsciously, man does consciously, and in freedom. It is man’s duty, as *imago viva Dei*, the living image of God, to imitate the noblest activity of God the Creator, and thus to continue creation within the universe. Man is therefore the only creature who can freely, yet lawfully extend the order of creation.

Every time man, through his lawful creative contribution, furthers the negentropic development of the universe—and as Nicolaus of Cusa says, he can only do so if he takes that next step, and finds his solution, from the standpoint of the entirety of the knowledge of his era—then his action represents such a singularity passing from one manifold to the next-higher one.

By natural law, we mean that every man, as a microcosm, has been endowed by the divine order of creation with natural rights to develop all his potential abilities to their maximum,

so that he may in turn make his maximum contribution to the development of the human species. As Schiller describes, a nation which is based on natural law, is one in which the state does everything to enable all its citizens to unfold their abilities in the best possible way, whereas all citizens work to allow the maximum flourishing of the state.

Classical art is nothing other than the celebration of the creative human mental process, and as stated above, this process occurs within a universe which is harmonically, negentropically ordered, and thus a universe in which all problems presenting themselves to the human mind must be sensibly formulated in such a way that they correspond to the principle of negentropy. And this is just as true for art, as it is for science.

What is described as a “singularity” in the field of natural science and in Cusa’s tradition, appears in music in the form of the so-called “dissonance.” The central significance of middle-C = 256 lies in the fact, that with the classical composers, these dissonances are never introduced for accidental or inconsequential reasons—as they most certainly are with the romantics, such as Liszt, Wagner, and the modern composers. From Bach through Verdi, these dissonances are introduced only as the result of lawful developments within well-tempered polyphony. They are introduced as intentional, necessary harmonic dissonances, which at the same time serve to emphasize certain crucial metrical features, and they are resolved in a lawful way. Hence, by analogy, we are dealing with the same phenomenon which leads to singularities within the human mind during the process of creative problem-solving.

These necessary dissonances, pre-planned by the composer, are therefore, on the one hand, the points which most directly reflect the composer’s own creative process, and which reveal the greatest depths of his thinking; on the other hand, they are the moments which most directly intervene “into the innermost movements of the mind” of the listener, and so, move his soul. Therefore, if we are dealing with such an intense and momentous matter, is it not highly appropriate, that this occur in a lawful, and not an arbitrary or even destructive manner?

The fact that music has this unique effect of influencing human beings more directly than anything else, is generally understood. Listening to, or playing classical music, is beneficial to creative activity in any field of endeavor. And conversely, listening to any music containing mind-numbing, repetitive rhythms is destructive, while rock-pop music demonstrably ruins one’s creative faculties.

If music has such a profound effect, is it at all surprising, that the great demands Schiller places on the artist, have particular force for musical artists, both composers and interpreters? If mankind’s dignity has been placed in artists’ hands, what are these demands which they must fulfill?

Schiller is absolutely rigorous on this point. Precisely because the effect elicited by the artist is so extraordinary,

Schiller demands extraordinary things from the artist himself. Before he may ever venture to move his audience, he himself must first have lived up to the highest principles; he must have already ennobled himself into his species-being, into the ideal human being, and hence must have freed himself from everything accidental and unnecessary. The object of his action, for its part, must also be universally true, in order that the artist's effect on his audience be precisely calculable. The artist who does not aim at achieving a precisely precalculable effect within his audience, does not deserve to be called an artist, because his work is indiscriminate and accidental.

The artist must have developed himself into the universal—i.e., ideal—human being, and his object must likewise be true—i.e., universal. These two demands, according to Schiller, are indispensable. And in order that freedom in art may not be shortchanged, no other compulsion can be tolerated, save that which nature itself imposes on the world of things.

If the artist succeeds in meeting these demands, he is then able to elicit the effect he desires within the listener, and by so enabling the listener to directly replicate the composer's own creative process, and to participate, as it were, in the artist's creative discovery, he gives him access to the emotion which is associated with that creative activity: *agapē*, or love on the plane of reason and classical beauty. He thus opens up for the listener, that emotional quality, that power, which strengthens the listener in his own creative activities.

For the listener of classical music, there is no greater joy than when the artist, as it were, steps behind his performance and enables the listener to independently discover the musical idea upon which the composer has based his work. By knowing the idea, the person's agapic sense of beauty is strengthened, and in this sense, he becomes a better human being.

Against this background, it is clear that precisely this process of attaining knowledge becomes destroyed for both mind and soul, whenever a piece which the composer had written for C=256 tuning, is instead performed at A=440. If, from the musical context, a different tone-color, in a different register, is called for on F-sharp, and if the piece is instead played at A=440, the new tone-color arrives prematurely, namely at F-natural. If such alterations now turn up in other, completely different locations, the entire musical idea becomes destroyed, and is recognizable, at best, as a mere shadow of itself.

The destructive effects of excessively high tuning are perhaps most clearly demonstrated with respect to the German *Lied*, or art-song. Setting aside for a moment the destructive effects on the singer's voice, it is here in the *Lied* that the problem of correct tuning is presented in its most concentrated form. The classical art-song is the aesthetic form in which a classical poem, subject to its own poetic lawfulness, is transformed by the composer's art into a still-higher art form. A successful composition is never the mere underlay-

ing of the poem with notes—a so-called musical “setting”—but is always much more than that. The poetic idea is accentuated in such a way, that an entirely new dimension is added to the poem.

This is more readily achieved with inferior poems than with perfected ones. Thus, Beethoven emphasized that it is easier to compose Goethe's poems into *Lieder*, than it is with Schiller's poems. But precisely because the poetic idea is supplemented by this musical elaboration, the *Lied* suffers the most harm whenever the specific emphasis, established by the composer through changes in tone-color at register-shifts, is altered, changing its meaning and metric into a different, arbitrary idea.

This situation turns into utter devastation, whenever the register-shift appears not at the wrong place, but does not appear at all. Indeed, the modern trend goes in the direction of eliminating the different registral colors and transforming everything into an undifferentiated “carpet of sound.” If Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is performed in this way, one might just as well be listening to James Last!

Opposed to this, is the *bel canto* school, whose emphasis on the beautiful, coherent tone aids in the production of the various registers. This manner of singing differentiates the various voice-types, so that each scale-step is individually audible, instead of becoming engulfed in a sea of sound. It is up to the interpreter's artistry to bring out the individual tones clearly, while at the same time putting the primary emphasis on the process occurring between the notes.

In his *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller saw art as the sole pathway whereby the character of individuals, as well as of entire nations, can be ennobled, even during times when government has become decadent and the masses have lapsed into self-indulgence—a condition which is all the more true of us today. It is therefore incumbent on art, to improve humanity's powers, and in doing so, to distinguish man from all other living creatures.

Our vital concern, is that man bring himself into ever greater accord with the lawfulness of the order of creation, and that he come to resemble the image of his Creator. If he does this, he becomes increasingly able to engage in creative activity and to experience *agapē* and the joy of beauty. Listening to a great work of classical music, or better still, performing it oneself, helps people to develop the extended concentration-span which is necessary for any type of creative work. For such works can only be understood in their entirety; the significance of each note emerges from the entire piece, and as the person replicates the repeated arcs of poetic tension on successively more intense levels, he learns to grasp the entire composition in all its complexity as a single musical idea. To understand the posing of the problem, to develop it, and then to solve it—this is what gives human joy to human beings. And what pleases us, is ultimately what defines us morally as either beautiful souls, or as ugly monsters.