
New fronts open up in 'war of the tuning forks'

With the London Philharmonic entering the fray, the Schiller Institute's campaign for a return to the scientific musical tuning looks like it's unstoppable.

"A return to the natural A is totally possible, and I will demonstrate this in September when I will sing *Rigoletto* with the London Philharmonic, which will respect the A at 432 vibrations." This sensational news, which crowns a year of efforts by the Schiller Institute to get the scientific tuning fork advocated by Giuseppe Verdi adopted as law in Italy, was reported on May 19 by the Italian daily *Il Giornale* in an article titled "The Tuning Fork that Divides Uvulas from Brasses."

Cappuccilli's announcement comes as the culmination of a series of concerts held in Europe and the United States this year, which in a preliminary way demonstrated the superiority and benefits of natural, scientific tuning, over the current arbitrary standard of $A = 440$ —not to mention over the still higher tunings which many musicians have been forced to perform at in concert halls around the world, destroying both their own voices and the intentions of the great classical composers.

An initial effort to have $A = 432$ made into law in Italy failed earlier this year, when a byzantine parliamentary maneuver changed the wording to read " $A = 440$ "—i.e., no change from the current standard. But the backers of the legislation view this as just the beginning of the fight. Retired Metropolitan Opera "prima donna" Renata Tebaldi, the renowned Verdi baritone Piero Cappuccilli, along with Prof. Bruno Barosi who directs the acoustics laboratory at the Cremona Institute of Violin Building, and Maestro Arturo Sacchetti, who is an organist and the artistic director at Vatican Radio, jointly addressed a letter to the editors of all Italian daily newspapers, which reads in part:

"We have learned that even the Entertainment Committee of the House of Deputies, after that of the Senate, has approved a modification to the orchestral tuning bill which had been presented last July in the wake of an initiative by the Schiller Institute.

"We were present at the Schiller Institute's initiative on April 9, 1988. Following that conference, more than 2,000 musicians from all over the world, among them such colleagues as Placido Domingo, Carlo Bergonzi, Joan Sutherland, Fiorenza Cossotto, Fedora Barbieri, Mirella Freni, Renato Bruson, endorsed the petition favoring Giuseppe Verdi's $A = 432$."

"If, for purely commercial reasons," the letter continues, "the gentlemen of the political realm have chosen to not take into the slightest consideration the plebiscite of the entire musical world, they could at least have been smart enough not to attribute to poor Giuseppe Verdi their own compromises which having nothing to do with Italian art. Therefore, we dissociate ourselves from the decision of Parliament, which is so unworthy of Italy, the cradle of bel canto and the most beautiful voices in the world, and which ought to do a better job of defending its musical tradition."

A good negative measure of the the campaign's success, has been the recent fits of incoherent babbling from music critics and Liberal Establishment newspapers such as the *New York Post* and the *Washington Post*, over the fact that the campaign is being steered in part by Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche and her husband Lyndon LaRouche. But the media antics seem to have only encouraged more musicians to add their names to the call for getting the scientific tuning made into law in Italy and then instituted worldwide.

The very fact that not a single significant opera singer has come out in opposition to the "Verdi A," has made it exceedingly difficult for the opposition to come up with convincing arguments against it. This was highlighted by the Rome paper *Il Messaggero*, which in reporting the above-mentioned musicians' letter, noted that supporters of $A = 432$ include world-famous singers Tebaldi, Domingo, Bruson, Freni, and Suth-

erland (in favor of Verdi's A = 432), while the leading opponent in Italy is a physicist named Pietro Righini, whose authority on making beautiful music is questionable, to say the least.

In the United States, the press has trotted out one Stefan Zucker, editor of a New York-based publication called *The Opera Fanatic*, to oppose the Schiller Institute's initiative. Zucker, who claims he is "the highest tenor in the world," is also known to advocate the re-introduction of castration as a means of producing more higher-pitched voices—scarcely a credible figure to rally the masses against the natural tuning demanded by Verdi.

Historic concerts

Late last year, the Schiller Institute set out to prove the superiority of Verdi's (and Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven's) tuning pitch by a series of unique concerts contrasting each tuning onstage, so that listeners could decide for themselves. At the first such concert, on Dec. 12, 1988 in Munich, West Germany, Norbert Brainin, formerly first violinist of the Amadeus Quartet, conclusively demonstrated that the great Stradivarius violins were originally constructed to sound best at a C = 256 (the middle C from which Verdi derived a concert A of 432 vibrations).

On April 9, in New York City, members of the New Jersey-based Lubo Opera Company and guest singers from Italy dropped a bombshell on the jaded New York music scene, with a concert of opera arias and ensembles, all sung at A = 432, along with one demonstration of the same piece sung at both tunings. Parts of the New York establishment threw a fit, with the May 3 *New York Post* peddling the line that the Schiller Institute was merely "trying to mine a rich new vein of cash [for Lyndon LaRouche] by appealing to the interests of the opera community."

But even the New York establishment showed deep fissures on the issue. On May 1 the *New Yorker* magazine music critic Andrew Porter observed that with the long list of top operatic singers endorsing the campaign, "victory could surely be won. All that the singers and conductors need do is insert a pitch clause in their contracts, such as Tebaldi (even though down to only A = 440) used to have written into hers: any higher, and I won't sing, won't conduct. . . . In its campaign to lower pitch—to reduce strain and stridency, to replace 'automatic' brilliance by fullness, naturalness, and eloquence—the [Schiller] institute is likely to have musicians' support. The mathematical difference is small—less than a semitone—but singers claim that it makes a big difference: puts the breaks between registers and the *passaggio* notes where the composers put them." (See interview with Fiorenza Cossotto, p. 22).

On May 28, the Lubo Opera Company repeated their demonstration concert in Washington, D.C., this time with three different demonstrations of the same piece sung at the two different tunings. With one aria, "Tu che la vanità," from

Verdi's *Don Carlo*, sung by soprano Jodi Laski-Mihova, a violinist also demonstrated how the same aria sounded at the absurdly high pitch of A = 452—the pitch at which the performer had been made to sing Verdi works during a recent tour of Bulgaria!

The Washington, D.C. concert elicited the same schizophrenic reactions from the heavily Soviet-influenced Washington musical scene. "Question: Why has Lyndon LaRouche rented the Lisner Auditorium for tomorrow night?" began the lead article in the *Washington Post*'s prestigious "Style" section. "Answer: He wants to change the way people sing." The *Post* deigned to agree that the Schiller Institute's insistence on the coherence of classical beauty with natural law "perhaps . . . deserves a few minutes of thoughtful attention," and snidely recommended that people go and hear works from the great Verdi operas "sung slightly and consistently off-key."

Just before that, in Milan, Italy on May 22, the Schiller Institute sponsored yet another demonstration concert by the mezzo-soprano Graziella Biondini accompanied at the piano by Walter Frazzi, who had the piano tuned to Verdi's concert A of 432 Hertz.

The audience, which included many experts, remained in the hall long after the recital to discuss the experiment, and most of their judgments were positive.

Meanwhile in Parma, the north Italian city adopted by Verdi as his personal musical capital, the Verdi Choral Society and a group of the most dedicated opera fans gathered to reiterate the need to get back to Verdi's tuning fork and harshly rebuking the "swindle law" of the politicians which sanctions the unscientific, unmotivated paradox of A = 440. Umberto Tamburini, president of the "Club of 27," an organization for which each component stands for a different Verdi opera, stated that "440 Hertz just does not fit the Italian voice." Ernesto Matteucci, chairman of the Verdi Choral Society, says, "We absolutely have to go back to 432 Hertz." Nestore Montagna, the 86-year-old "dean" of the Parma opera-goers, adds, "Any way you look at it, you have to conclude that Verdi was right."

Now all eyes and ears will be trained on London, where Mr. Cappuccilli will make his grand demonstration with Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Reached in Japan, the legendary "bel canto" tenor Carlo Bergonzi was apparently delighted to hear about Cappuccilli's announcement. "For sure, if a *Rigoletto* is performed at A = 432, no one can deny any more that the Verdi A is feasible." He added, "After *Rigoletto*, it will be obligatory to perform other operas at the Verdi tuning. What sense does it make to adopt A = 440 which has been around for years? In Busseto [Verdi's home town, where Bergonzi leads a master class] we have been doing Verdi's operas at A = 440 for years, so there was certainly no need to conduct a battle for *this*. But it *is* worthwhile to fight for Verdi's scientific tuning fork, A = 432, which respects the color and the registral passages which the great master wanted."