

Top violinist honors Martin Luther King

by John Sigerson

When Dr. Norbert Brainin, the former first violinist of the famed Amadeus String Quartet, had the idea late last year that he wanted to travel to the United States and play concerts in honor of the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, he probably would not have dreamed that his presence and his music would end up sparking a new civil rights movement. Yet judging from initial reports of his two concerts—one at Ebenezer United Methodist Church in downtown Washington, D.C., and the other at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama—he has succeeded in doing that and more.

For, the very idea that one of the greatest violinists alive today would feel it important enough to come play a Classical concert of works by Ludwig van Beethoven, Frederic Handel, and César Frank, brought human rights fighters, young and old, together under the highest and most fitting emotion—that of active, sacred love, typified by the theme anthem of the new international civil rights movement, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Especially at the Montgomery concert—held in the same church where Rev. James Bevel launched the "Children's Crusade" 30 years ago—many of those who came were old civil rights fighters who for many reasons had not seen or spoken to each other since Dr. King was assassinated in 1968.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to deal separately with the musical and the political significance of the two concerts. This intermingling of the best of both worlds was perhaps summed up best at the beginning of the second half of the Montgomery concert, which began with the presentation of a proclamation of March 24 as the "Dr. Norbert Brainin and Civil Rights Movement Day," signed by Birmingham Mayor Arrington and presented by a representative of the mayor's office.

Brainin and freedom

The concerts were indeed a natural step for Dr. Brainin (who has just turned 70) along his illustrious career, which for 40 years took him to every corner of the world with the other members of the Amadeus Quartet, playing Classical string quartets and specializing in those composed by Beethoven in later life. It was during the quartet's later years, in

the mid-1980s, that Dr. Brainin made the acquaintance of another great artist and scientist in his own right, Lyndon LaRouche, and the two have been fast friends since then. In January 1989, as LaRouche was about to be jailed by Henry Kissinger, George Bush, and company at the behest of Moscow, Dr. Brainin was among the first to appear on nationwide U.S. television, appealing for LaRouche's release. Later that same year, in November, Dr. Brainin greeted the German revolution which LaRouche had predicted, by giving a free concert in Berlin to celebrate German reunification's victory of Western culture over communist barbarism.

By that time, the Amadeus Quartet was no more, since it had been impossible to go on following the death of the group's viola player, Peter Schidlof, in 1987. But Dr. Brainin refused to put down his fiddle, and paired up with Günter Ludwig, one of Germany's best pianists and sought-after piano teachers, to give concerts demonstrating the superiority of the natural tuning-pitch setting middle C at 256 cycles per second—a step which LaRouche had identified as an indispensable one toward reviving the mental habits of the Classical culture of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven.

These two concerts followed that course. Günter Ludwig collaborated perfectly with Dr. Brainin in the three works—Ludwig van Beethoven's early Sonata in D major, Op. 12, No. 1; Handel's Sonata in D major for Violin and Figured Bass, Op. 1, No. 13; and Franck's big Sonata in A major. The Washington concert—attended by many leaders of the area's civil rights movement, along with music teachers, students, and participants in a just-concluded Schiller Institute conference held in nearby Reston, Virginia—was performed at the lower "natural" pitch, which was quite evident to the attentive ear in the increased richness of tone which Dr. Brainin could coax out of his 1716-vintage Stradivarius violin—the "Huberman" violin, so named because it was only rediscovered after having been mysteriously stolen in the 1930s.

The collaboration of the two artists was most striking in the final and largest work, the Franck sonata. Dr. Brainin had selected it because it is the product of the same profound religious sentiment which befits the memory of Dr. King. Here, Günter Ludwig was at his most impressive, because he refused to abuse his superb piano technique with pyrotechnical displays, and entirely subordinated his playing to the demands of the ensemble as a whole.

The concert in Montgomery, although marred by a mix-up which prevented the lower pitch from being used, nevertheless had a profound healing effect on the audience, especially since it was preceded by an eloquent address by Reverend Bevel, who said in conclusion that what the two artists were going to give, is "an image of what the new America is going to look like. . . . What [Brainin and Ludwig] have done, is to bring us back to the way that music is supposed to be. And once you hear this—and we have to get this to the people—the slavery will stop."