

## Schiller concert fills Constitution Hall

The Schiller Institute filled Constitution Hall with nearly 3,000 people on Friday evening, Aug. 27, for a "Musical Tribute to the Struggle to Secure the Inalienable Rights of Man" at the highest artistic level.

Schiller Institute vice chairman Amelia Boynton Robinson had proposed holding the concert to celebrate both the 30th anniversary of the March on Washington in 1963, and the late Marian Anderson's struggle to open Classical music to African-Americans. Mrs. Robinson, the heroine of the 1965 Selma, Alabama march for voting rights for black Americans, conceived the evening a more fitting tribute than the next day's "official" commemoration, which was directed out of the National Education Association headquarters and attempted to make the absurd case that "gay rights equals civil rights."

### No color barrier for Classical art

In 1939, Marian Anderson was denied the use of Constitution Hall, which is owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution, because of racial prejudice. Instead, she sang at the Lincoln Memorial, in a historic concert that drew 75,000 people. Anderson died last April 8 at the age of 96, after having become one of the world's most beloved singers of European Classical music. The Schiller Institute's concert was designed to celebrate Anderson's career, by performing some of her best-known repertoire of opera arias, German lieder, and Spirituals; and especially, to encourage youth to emulate her today.

The concert featured the works of Johannes Brahms, the last of the great Classical composers, as well as his pupil Antonin Dvorak, who worked in the United States from 1892 to 1895. Dvorak taught black American composers such as Harry Burleigh to apply to Spirituals the compositional method which Brahms used to transform the folk tunes of Central Europe into art-songs. The way in which all Classical music was developed out of the human singing voice by this process, was highlighted by the performance of Brahms's "Regenlieder" ("rain-songs") by Washington soprano Detra Battle, followed by the playing of one movement of the Brahms violin-piano sonata which picks up the "Regenlied" theme from the songs. This was played by violinist Seth Taylor, the concert-master of the orchestra in Eisenach, Germany (the birthplace of J.S. Bach), and Italian pianist Monica Ripamonti.

Baritone Robert McFerrin, who together with Marian Anderson broke the color barrier at the Metropolitan Opera with his debut there in 1955, was the featured soloist. He

sang works of Schubert and Verdi, and Spirituals arranged for him by Hall Johnson, the most outstanding of the school of American musicians engendered by Dvorak.

Other African-American artists who performed in the program were sopranos Regina McConnell, Elizabeth Lyra Ross, Detra Battle, and Melinda Young; mezzosoprano Hilda Harris, tenor Gregory Hopkins, and baritone Reginald Pindell. They were accompanied by pianist and vocal coach Sylvia Olden Lee, and concert pianist and scholar Dr. Raymond Jackson.

The festivities began with a surprise appearance by comedian and civil rights veteran Dick Gregory. Speaking for nearly 15 minutes, Gregory had the audience in stitches at the banality of the "gay rights" theme, and the grotesque state of race relations in America today.

Following Gregory, the Rev. James Bevel greeted the audience. As notes in the commemorative program point out, it was Bevel who initiated the 1963 March on Washington, as Direct Action Coordinator for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Then Amelia Boynton Robinson, who has spent at least 50 of her 82 years in the civil rights struggle, received warm applause when she stressed, "The battle is still engaged." Greetings were read from Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly by an official of her cultural affairs office.

Opening the musical program, and after the intermission, a 100-person chorus filed onto the stage. Directed by John Sigerson, they sang two verses of the "Star-Spangled Banner," followed by "Lift Every Voice and Sing," known as the Negro National Anthem. They then sang an arrangement of Beethoven's setting of Friedrich Schiller's "Ode to Joy" (Mr. Pindell sang the thrilling baritone solo); another anthem of freedom, the haunting prisoners' chorus "Va Pensiero" from Verdi's opera *Nabucco*; and Mozart's "Ave Verum." The singers combined the Schiller Institute chorus (including several youngsters) with the Nevilla Ottley Singers from Tacoma Park, Maryland, and volunteer singers from area neighborhoods and churches who are being trained by Schiller Institute personnel.

An important facet of the concert was that it was performed at the "Verdi" pitch of middle-C=256 Hz. Since 1988, the Schiller Institute has been leading the fight to reestablish this as the standard pitch, instead of the arbitrary higher tunings which prevail in concert halls today. Thousands of leading musicians worldwide have joined this campaign; recently, Metropolitan Opera tenor Carlo Bergonzi gave master classes for the Schiller Institute at Carnegie Hall and over WQXR radio in New York to promote the C=256 tuning as the only way to save the singing voices of the future and the Classical repertoire. At Constitution Hall, the richness of sound resulting from the lower pitch was evident throughout the concert. The three hours of music were offered free to the public. When there were no more reserved seat tickets available, but many more eager to hear, the program was piped over loudspeakers into the adjoining park.