

The Harmony of Mental Spheres: 'God's Brain,' William Warfield's Mind

by Dennis H. Speed

(Music) is that part of us that is connected with the Divine One. I remember Dr. Thurman once said, God created man in His own image in the dead center, so that in the dead center of God's brain, there is this image of what man *is*; and at a point at which man reaches the full development of that image, then he will be on a par with the angels. . . . And I never forgot that: "Ah! So that's what evolution is about! Man finally coming *into the image* that is in the dead center of God's brain, of what man *is to be!* . . . And all of us are endowed with that basic thing, and *Music is it.*

William Warfield, interview with *Fidelio*, November 1994

Olden Lee would say, "It is necessary that one deserve perfection, in order to achieve perfection."

A year later, in May 1994, Warfield would collaborate, together with baritone Robert McFerrin, tenor George Shirley, and accompanist Sylvia Lee on behalf of the Schiller Institute's National Conservatory of Music Movement at a day-long seminar and evening concert at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Both Warfield and Lyndon LaRouche spoke at that seminar, and it was there that they met for the first time. From that time until Warfield's death nine years later, the two remained "dialogue partners" and friends (see LaRouche's remarks about Warfield in this issue).

Sept. 20—When baritone William Warfield (1920-2002), later a board member of the Schiller Institute, first met its representatives at a conference of the National Association of Negro Musicians in 1993, he autographed a copy of his autobiography *My Music And My Life*: "Sincere regards, and keep up the fight (for) A=430." That was Warfield, known affectionately by his students as "Uncle Bill." He could appear easy-going, but would always admonish anyone whom he thought had talent, in any field, emphasizing that it was above all a fierce, untiring, single-minded focus on the musician's art, or in the chosen profession, that must always come first. As his friend and fellow Institute board member Sylvia



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William Warfield performing at the Schiller Institute conference in February 2002, the year of his death.

Youthful Preparation

LaRouche and Warfield were both World War Two veterans, each of whom would discover the missions they would devote the rest of their lives to through the fiery crucible of that conflict. Warfield had a way throughout his life of turning every seeming disadvantage into the very means that propelled him forward, often inadvertently accomplishing unintended good in the process. For example, there was the time that, as a 17-year old, he unintentionally integrated a St. Louis hotel as the "dark horse" winner of the National Music Educators League competition. As he recounted in his autobiography:

There were several of us

from Rochester who went to the regional, and several of the regional finalists went to the national in St. Louis in the Spring of 1938. Rochester's showing was the best case that could be made for the quality of music education in our school system. One of my close friends, Anthony Giardino, made the first cut with me... The only discomfort I felt, when I took first prize, was that I had beaten out Tony.

The prize gave me the option of attending a number of music schools, including Juilliard... I was the only black singer in the local or regional competitions. I don't believe there were any other singers in the national either, because I was told that I had later inadvertently desegregated the Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis by becoming the first black guest ever to be registered there. My reservation was made in advance along with the other finalists. I suppose they never imagined that any of them would be African-Americans.

By age 21, thanks to his work with dedicated teachers at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, as well as excellent preparation gained at Washington High School, Warfield was fluent in German, Italian, and French. He had also accumulated a hefty repertoire of English-language accents which would stand him in good stead in the "radio days" of the late 1940s and 1950s. Recordings from that period testify to his formidable command of diction, projection, intonation, delivery, and, most importantly, communication of the intent of a song.

This extraordinary skill was particularly useful to him in his job as an intelligence officer during the Second World War. Part of a unit charged with preparing seven-man intelligence units for missions in Europe, on occasion Warfield encountered German POWs. Others marveled at Warfield's ability to gain the confidence of these men, by simply singing Schubert and Brahms lieder for them, or with them, as the case might be, after which they freely shared information which they were severely reluctant to give to "hard cop" interrogators.

Unrelenting Dedication

Warfield wrote in his autobiography:

It was becoming clearer all the time that when



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William Warfield and Silvia Olden Lee, after their performance at Howard University Rankin Memorial Chapel in May of 1994.

the war ended and my military service was through I would be stepping out into a no-man's land. There simply was no career ladder for a black classical singer. The opera world wasn't ready for me or any other black male. Hollywood, too, offered only stereotypes for the most part, and the situation was the same for mainstream Broadway theater. The concert world was all there was, it seemed, and that was shaky, at best.

In that five-sentence summary is contained almost a century of injustice and American cultural self-sabotage. While the Fisk Jubilee Singers enjoyed some popularity in the United States (and more in Europe) during the 1870s and 1880s, even composer Antonin Dvořak could not convince the Metropolitan Opera to allow African-Americans, such as the great Sissieretta Jones, to sing on its stage in the 1890s. (In 1892, Jones became the first African-American to perform in Carnegie Hall, and worked with Dvořak when Dvořak lived in New York City in 1893 and 1894.)

Warfield's fellow Schiller Institute board member and sometimes accompanist, renowned vocal coach Sylvia Olden Lee, never tired of pointing out that her very mother had been offered a lead role in a Puccini opera debut at the Metropolitan Opera, if she would "pass for white" and live a separate life, pretending not to be married to her darker-skinned, obviously African-

American husband. (Sylvia Lee, as the first African-American vocal coach at the Met, would be responsible for the Met hiring Marian Anderson to sing there in 1955—six decades after Dvořak’s work with violinist Will Marion Cook, soprano Sissieretta Jones, and singer, arranger, and composer Harry Burliegh, one of Warfield’s heroes.)

Lyndon LaRouche recently emphasized, including on the occasion of his own 93rd birthday, that the injustice that was faced by, and overcome by those of Warfield’s and earlier generations, in their not being allowed to perform on the opera stage, cannot be separated, either from the terrible legacy of the Confederate system—a system that has taken over the Presidency today in the form of the Cheney/Bush and Obama Administrations—or from the wholesale destruction of American education that has occurred since the 1890s, and became hegemonic in 1900 through the work of Bertrand Russell, John Dewey and others.

The music and language-study curriculum that was available to Warfield in high school in the 1930s is virtually unavailable in nearly any American public high school today, and certainly to the population of such cities as Warfield’s own Rochester, New York. The popular culture that began its descent into hell in 1913 with Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* ritual murder of beauty, has resulted in cultural tone-deafness. That is the reason our population cannot discern, or, even worse, chooses not to discern that there is *no* distinction between the bellying of a Donald Trump, the hissing of a Dick Cheney, the snarling of a Barack Obama, or the braying of a Bush “43.”

Were our civilization to survive, the prohibition of the discovery by a child of the idea of harmony, is what is necessary to reverse. Our moral elevation and progressive evolution in a thermonuclear age, to become capable of carrying out the mission for which mankind is designed by subsuming the dissonance of inferior non-human expressions of speech and music, requires that unrelenting dedication to the mission of mankind—universal harmony—that William Warfield exemplified. He was humanity at its best, transcending widespread injustice and adversity through a far more universal musical harmony of the soul.

Where is the dead center of the mind of God? It is everywhere; its circumference, nowhere. “All of us are endowed with that basic thing, and *Music is it!*”