

A Musical Dialogue of Cultures In Houston

by Brian Lantz

We have always made the point that for this New Silk Road to succeed in the tradition of the old Silk Road—which was also an exchange of ideas and cultures, not just products and technology—you have to combine economic cooperation with dialogue between cultures. This dialogue must be on the highest level, so each culture has to present examples of its best, such as Confucianism, the Italian renaissance, and the German classical period. Each must present the best works of its arts—in music and poetry, painting, and other forms of art.

—Helga Zepp-LaRouche

May 19—On May 16, the day after the Belt and Road Forum closed in Beijing—with the participation of 28 heads of state and government, and Schiller Institute

founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche—an extraordinary concert in Houston, Texas, demonstrated the potential for bringing the United States into the New Paradigm represented by the Belt and Road. Under the banner of “A Musical Dialogue of Cultures,” more than 100 guests celebrated the successful conclusion of the Beijing Belt and Road Forum—or were introduced to it by members of the [Houston Schiller Institute Community Chorus](#)—in a musical journey that circled the globe.

The response was a mixture of delight and surprise, with thoughtful reflection. As one participant commented, “I’m trying to figure out this A=432 thing. I think music is really important; the problem in the country goes so much deeper. . . .” The audience came from every walk of life, and every nation of origin found in Houston, and many were hearing music they had never heard before.



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Houston Schiller Institute Community Chorus.



Left: The audience at the Houston, Texas, Belt and Road cultural celebration.

Below: Arturo Domingo

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This concert represents a new stage in a pattern of growth, as well as recognition, of the Schiller Institute's role in organizing the residents of Houston, the fourth largest city in the United States, to open up to the world, learning about China's Belt and Road Initiative, and joining the Schiller Institute's efforts to cause the United States to become a partner in transforming this great endeavor into a true World Land-Bridge. To this end, there had been a coordinated outreach effort by members and activists, including distribution of fliers at events, campuses, workplaces, and online postings.

The community center which sponsored the event, also organized to build attendance. All of the musicians—who volunteered their time and efforts—invited friends and family. For example, Arturo Domingo, a Mexican-American tenor who performed two arias, had e-mailed out invitations, and brought a dozen guests—members of an international chorus that he sings with. Others posted colorful announcements on their Facebook pages, and otherwise helped build attendance. All these musicians are wrestling, in various ways, with the ideas of Lyndon and Helga LaRouche, the Schiller Institute, and the new Belt and Road/World Land-Bridge paradigm.

The Power of Music

Brian Lantz, who served as the Schiller Institute's Master of Ceremonies, began by briefly defining the inspiration for the concert: the Belt and Road Initiative, the success of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, and its global scope—in contradistinction to the horror sto-



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ries dominating the U.S. media. There is actually reason for great optimism, Lantz stressed—nations and cultures can communicate. They can do so because they produce scientists and artists who believe in universal principles, which are actually true everywhere. The common ground of such principles, and the recognition of a higher principle of principles, create the basis for real dialogue. (There were affirmative murmurs and “Amen” in response.) This is the true basis for peace, through the development of all mankind. Throughout the evening, Lantz introduced the musicians and wove the various musical contributions together, as a kind of travel guide to the music, which circled the globe, nation by nation, throughout the ages.

The Houston Schiller Institute Community Chorus opened the program with “The Star Spangled Banner,” followed by Mozart’s “Ave Verum Corpus” and his “Bundeslied,” a masonic piece pledging brotherhood to God and your fellow man, north and south, east and west. (All selections were preceded by short introductions, which included words from the musicians ex-

plaining them.) Tenor Arturo Domingo followed with a well-placed, ringing performance of “Jurame,” by Maria Grever, to much delight. Two Indian-Americans, M.G. Shetty and Mrs. Sangeeta Panse, both ambassadors of classical Indian music in Houston, then performed two classical Indian compositions—the “Ragg Yaman,” followed by a short Dhum of Indian folk melodies, both on Tabla and Sitar, further “stretching” and intriguing the responsive audience. Dorceal Duckens, bass-baritone, followed with a profound performance of “Dormiro Sol” from Verdi’s opera *Don Carlos*. Duckens, also the maestro of the Community Chorus, brought real gravitas to the event throughout. Violinist Xia Xia Zhang, a noted soloist who has performed with us twice before, followed Mr. Duckens, which was perfect. She gave a skilled and impassioned performance of the Adagio and Fuga movements of J.S. Bach’s Violin Sonata No. 1 in G minor. (One guest exclaimed afterwards that he had to look around a corner to see if Xia Xia was not playing *two* violins!) All of these performances drew great applause from an animated audience.

The second half of the program opened with Arturo Domingo giving an operatic treatment to another Mexican composition, “Dime que si,” riveting attention of the gathering. With his own “cheering section” of friends, he further livened up the on-going interaction of musicians and audience. Domingo was followed with an introduction to the traditional music of China, by Sylvia Yan, Francine Di, and Amanda Cheung, members of the ensemble Eastern Echo. They performed—on Dizi, keyboard, and Pipa respectively—the well known “Molihua” (Jasmine Flower) and “Song Ni Yi Zhi Meigui Hua” (Send Me a Rose), an intriguing folk song from Xinjiang province (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) with a real Silk Road feel. It featured the Pipa, a popular, plucked instrument which has been played for almost two thousand years in China. The keyboard-playing introduced a western aspect which was somewhat distracting in the first song, but the audience was delighted all the same, particu-



Schiller Institute/Dwight Jarrett

Mrs. Sangeeta Panse



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Dorceal Duckens

larly by “Send Me a Rose,” and by the deep participation of these three talented Chinese-American musicians in the evening’s musical dialogue. Dorceal Duckens then followed, with “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?” arranged by the great African-American composer Harry Burleigh. Dorceal again established a real moral high ground with a beautiful and powerful performance. He then brought the Schiller

Community Chorus back to the stage and led them in two Spirituals, “I’ve been ’Buked,” and “Deep River.” Then followed another spiritual, the chorus of Hebrew slaves, “Va Pensiero,” from Verdi’s opera *Nabucco*, which awed the audience into hushed participation. “The Lord Bless You and Keep You,” which Sylvia Olden Lee might consider a “white spiritual,” closed out the program, with a diverse group of audience members quietly singing along to themselves.

Beauty that Moves the Soul

Part of what made the concert so successful was the wide variety of “hyphenated Americans” who came, and brought friends and their spirit. There was a



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Xia Xia Zhang

great range of responses and comment. One young man in his 30s exclaimed, “This was just amazing! You know, all these different cultures are really talking about the same thing. . . . I see why this is so important right now.” An Iranian salesman, who almost didn’t come, was profusely grateful. There were Malaysian-Americans, Indian-Americans, African-Americans, Irish-Americans, and other groups. A Chinese-American lady, from the community center, brought a friend, and was very happy—it just showed. Other groups from the community center also came: members from a Bible study group and a “Point-Counterpoint” discussion group. A small businessman drove four hours (each way) just to come to the event, despite having come upon hard times just now, telling us afterwards, “I’m not good at adjectives. It was real good.” An Egyptian-American (who is currently unemployed), said, “I just can’t believe the quality of the singing. I didn’t think I would come across this. . . .” One friend commented that he enjoyed the chorus best. It reminded me of when I was young, he said—as if that said it all. A young profes-

sional, who works on NASA-related programs, was totally happy and appreciative. She responded to a last minute call and brought a friend. A former youth activist was singing along with one of Arturo’s Mexican pieces—he was so happy that Mexico was part of the program. A Bernie Sanders supporter, who knows us from various events, and was still put off by the slanders against LaRouche, loved it all. Challenged afterwards as to what he now thought about LaRouche, he quipped, “Oh, I’m coming around.” He later e-mailed in his thanks: “I really enjoyed it. I’m looking forward to your next event.” In sum, the audience was moved by the overlap of beautiful music, personal happiness, and the real world mission of the Belt and Road Initiative, as captured in a two-hour concert.

This Houston event was truly a contribution to a dialogue between cultures, sharing among the participants gifts of traditional and classical music from many parts of the world. Through these community concerts the Schiller Institute is unleashing an exchange of ideas, and giving voice to the shared principles of humanity, through expressions of profound beauty. We thereby illuminate the true purpose and reason to unify Mankind through the Belt and Road.



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Sylvia Yan (left) and Amanda Cheung.