

Dennis Speed

## Why and How America Must Return to a Classical Culture

*Dennis Speed is a frequent host of the weekly internet program, Fireside Chats with Lyndon LaRouche, and a long-time leader in the LaRouche movement. He delivered this speech to the first panel, “Reversing the Cultural Wasteland—The Urgency of a New Renaissance, Creating a Planetary Culture Worthy of the Dignity of Humanity,” of the March 20-21 Schiller Institute Conference, “World at a Crossroad—Two Months into the Biden Administration.”*



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12-year-old Frederick Douglass were educated by passages from Cicero, Plato, Benjamin Franklin, and Lazare Carnot, as well as American British and French teachers, clergymen, and statesmen. Shakespeare is a second great influence on American life of that period. The Astor Place riot of May 1849, which left at least 22 people dead and 120 injured, was between two Shakespeare factions, the one supporting American actor Edwin

Forrest, the other, British aristocratic actor William Charles Macready. California gold prospectors entertained themselves at night, by reciting whole passages of Shakespeare by heart. American Confederate and Union soldiers, thrown into the fratricidal War of the Secession, 1861-1865, if they were familiar with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, could not have avoided hearing the echoes of the soliloquy of the murderous King Claudius, who killed his brother to ascend Denmark's throne, in the words of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address:

[Read](#) by Dikran Tulaine, from *Hamlet*:

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;  
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,  
A brother's murder! Pray can I not,  
Though inclination be as sharp as will.  
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,  
And, like a man to double business bound,  
I stand I pause where I shall first begin,  
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand  
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,  
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offence?  
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up,  
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul  
murder'?

Tenor George Shirley [performed](#) Franz Schubert's famous song *On Music* on May 27, 1993, as part of a tribute to the recently deceased contralto Marian Anderson. At the concert conclusion, Mr. Shirley informed me, in an impromptu interview, that there was no essential difference between the spirit of a German art song, or lied, and this William Warfield [performance](#) accompanied by Sylvia Olden Lee on piano, performing *Lil' Boy, How Old Are You?!*

Why was George Shirley right? Why are Roland Hayes' Spiritual, *Lil' Boy* and Franz Schubert's *Hymn to Music*, brothers, in the sense of the spirit?

The Classical principle, and the poetic principle, are identical. That principle is, that there is an inherent Beauty in Truth itself. We hold these truths to be beautiful: That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

For 50-plus years, Caleb Bingham's book, the *Columbian Orator*, first published in 1797 and then in 23 subsequent editions, was the central text consulted by American school children and aspiring public speakers in the pulpit, on the law-bench, and within the Congress, because, in the words of one historian, "a republican discourse had to find the right pitch"—he meant the right tone, or what we might call the right voicing—a gentleman's language, but not an aristocrat's.

Both the 21-year-old Abraham Lincoln and the

That cannot be; since I am still possess'd  
Of those effects for which I did the murder—  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.

*And then Simon Estes, Bass-Baritone [reciting](#) from  
Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address:*

One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it.

Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other.

It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of the other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

The terrible truth of Lincoln's words, was, nonetheless, beautiful, especially in its concluding vision of a renewed Union "with malice toward none, with charity

for all." It was called by Frederick Douglass, who was present for the speech, and who had differences with Lincoln at various times, "a noble effort."

Assassination, however, proved the primary means for removing America's poets and men of vision.

### Assassinations Kill Men, But Not Ideas

Forty-one days after his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln was dead. President John Kennedy's Inaugural and Apollo speeches, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's 1963 "I Have a Dream" and 1968 "Mountaintop" speeches are etched in the history and the forward motion of America. But King was also assassinated, as was Kennedy. King's inspiration for creative nonviolent direct action,

India's liberator, Mahatma Gandhi, was assassinated in 1947. King's apparent opposite, the eloquent and fearless Malcolm X, whose international focus on Africa had superseded the narrow focus of the civil rights movement, and who was uncompromisingly dignified and fierce in his rejection of the slave mentality that then affected mostly African Americans, and today affects far more people in the country, was also assassinated. That murder, as well as the 1969 assassination in Chicago of Black Panther Party, 21-year-old Fred Hampton, has received new attention in the past three months.

The threat of an alliance, a sort of coincidence of opposites

between Dr. King and Minister Malcolm X that would organize *all* Americans through a particular effort around voting and elections, threatened to cause what Samuel P. Huntington and others called a crisis of democracy. But when Robert Kennedy stopped an outbreak of violence in Cleveland the night of Martin Luther King's murder, April 4, 1968, by reciting a passage from the Greek poet, Aeschylus, Robert Kennedy's favorite poet, he demonstrated what it actually takes to govern: Truth, recited as a poem, delivered to the people, until at last, in our despair, comes Wisdom, through the awful grace of God.



AP/Henry Griffin

*Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (left) and Malcolm X in Washington on March 26, 1964.*

He, King, Malcolm, and others actually threatened a renaissance of American Classical culture, through an intense public discourse, which from the founding of the nation had combined beauty with truth. How do we, now, educate a new generation to reject the Information Society in favor of the Truthful Society? That new generation must find beauty in music. Then they can find their way back to the truth.

### A Delicious Interlude

Economist Lyndon LaRouche gave an example of such an educational process, which he had witnessed in 1995:

Begin [video](#).

**Lyndon LaRouche:** One of the things that was most delicious, was when we stopped in Leipzig, and I had a very unusual experience, in the sense of participating for several hours in auditing a rehearsal of the Thomanerchor in Leipzig. And then, the next evening at the evening Vesper service, hearing the performance of the complete repertoire for that week at the service, and being able to compare what had been gone through at the rehearsal and what was heard in the evening.

Now, let me just qualify for those who may not know this—some of you may know this—the Thomas Cathedral choir (it’s a separate school) has been in existence since the year A.D. 1212. It has, according to all reputations, an unbroken singing program; that it would sing every week on Friday evening at Vespers service. And that’s been going on since A.D. 1212. The nearest thing they had to a break was in the middle of the Black Death in the middle of the 14th Century, at which point they were down to three boys, because the Black Death was killing off the singers, but they still sang. So, the word is that they’ve sung for almost 800 years.

The discipline is tremendous. The cantor who was conducting the performance is himself a product of the school, and was a very trained musician, about 40 years of age, but a full bearer of the tradition. Let me just identify the tradition, and then I’ll come back in due course on how it bears on here.



LBJ Library/Yoichi R. Okamoto

Robert F. Kennedy, on January 28, 1964.

These boys range from 7 to about 18. It’s a secondary school program. They are chosen for their voice and their musicality, but they’re given a full gymnasium education, like a secondary school, from that time until they complete graduation. Their musical work is done as a *part* of the total program of studies.

Each week, from the beginning of the week until Friday—four days a week, normally, except this particular week when they only had three days because of a holiday—they start from scratch with a completely new repertoire for that week’s Friday evening Vespers service. They learn from scratch. They then perform on Friday, and the following week take up completely new programs, so that

after three years or so, they’ve gone through pretty much the entire Bach motet and cantata repertoire. And they won’t forget it, I assure you. They never will forget it. I saw the performance.

Not only are they well-trained, but this particular discipline is very important. I’ve seen perhaps not as many rehearsals as some of you have seen, but I’ve seen a number, and I can tell you the *density* in the rehearsal, the density of direction, was about as intense as I’ve ever seen. But the boys were responsive, and trained, and able to do it.

During the three-hour rehearsal, there was a break of about 15 minutes, which these very serious, intent young boys and older boys, sitting in their chairs, cross-legged otherwise, but nonetheless singing and very intent in the most professional manner, suddenly turned into boys, fresh boys. And they raced out of the area into the yard, played soccer, then came back in, as fresh as they had left, and sat down sedately—or as sedately as boys can do—in their chairs, and they concentrated totally on what they were doing.

So, there was total concentration, and total training, and a masterful direction.

Now, the particular work, which was the featured work of the Friday program, which they were rehearsing this Thursday morning until noontime when we were in there, was *Jesu meine freude*, which is one of the most difficult motets in the motet repertoire, to per-



form *adequately*, not just to perform it, but to perform it adequately. It has challenges in there, which are rather astonishing.

The boys were learning it. The direction was intense. The management of the direction was intense. Nothing passed. Everything was corrected: diction, approaches, everything was involved.

The following evening—I missed the intervening rehearsal, which was done as the dress rehearsal in the morning on Friday—I tell you, it was one of the few times in recent years that during a musical performance that tears came spontaneously flowing from my eyes; couldn't hold them back.

The performance was magnificent. Everything that they had been taught, that they had rehearsed, every correction *came through* in the performance—and better than the rehearsal. Much better. The boys came in, intent, about 80 of them. Two groups: the young boys who are pre-voice-change; and the young men, who are the older, after-voice-change, with the cantor behind. Everyone of them fully concentrated as a musical performer, prepared to perform: that moment of total concentration that is required before you got that idea of the composition in your head, before you start the performance. They came marching in with that idea in their head—a full program. They performed. They performed with *precision*, with shaping of tone. They sang, not *on* the notes, but they sang *between* the notes. They knew how to do that; they were trained for that.

It was the most remarkable performance of *Jesu meine Freude* I've ever heard.

[end video clip]

### A Campaign to Restore the Proper Tuning to Classical Music

Those who, 35 years ago, on March 18, 1986, may have first heard of Lyndon LaRouche in connection with the victories of two of his associates in state primary elections in Illinois, and think of



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Carlo Bergonzi

him as primarily a presidential candidate from the 1976 election all the way to 2004, may be surprised to now learn that at that very same time of those Illinois primaries, LaRouche initiated a campaign to restore the proper tuning of voices and instruments to opera houses throughout the world. Why?

Here, he explains it to you with the help of two of his friends, the great tenor, Carlo Bergonzi, and baritone, Piero Cappuccilli, two of the finest

singers of the 20th Century in opera.

A [video clip](#) from 1996 at the Casa Barezzi in Busseto, Italy was played for the conference audience:

**Liliana Gorini:** We begin with maestro Carlo Bergonzi, who is the honorary host today, as he has here his Verdi Academy of Busseto. And then, Piero Cappuccilli, who just a few days ago celebrated the 40th year of his singing career. And finally, Lyndon LaRouche, the international guest who commissioned the American [original](#), *A Manual on the Rudiments of Tuning and Registration*, of the Italian-language edition of our book, *Singing and Tuning*, which we're presenting today.

Well, maestro Bergonzi, why is this question of the



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Piero Cappuccilli, with Liliana Gorini.

Verdi tuning pitch so important for voices singing Verdi?

**Carlo Bergonzi:** As you know, we brought out the book in the United States originally, and I gave a demonstration of the two different tunings at Carnegie Hall. So, I'm honored to present the book here today, in the home town of Giuseppe Verdi. But, in the end, we've found that we really have not made a breakthrough, and this upsets me greatly, but I have to say it, because we always need to tell the truth.

We have Mr. LaRouche here today. He's very deeply committed to this question, which is so important to the young people, especially young singers since they have to misplace all their technique by a half tone. And that's when they're lucky. Sometimes it's even worse.

Now, we have not found a following among orchestral musicians, except for a few, especially among orchestral conductors, especially among the symphonic orchestras. They just don't want to lower the tuning. What they want to do, is to let the violins sing out, they want to let the brass sing out, but they don't realize that they can't regulate the human vocal cords.

And this is the big point. The big problem is this: If we don't arrive at the lower tuning, or at least a compromise between today's tuning and the Verdi tuning, then I have to tell you something which is really not very comforting. And that is, that in a few years, we can just forget about hearing opera singers, because all the voices will have been placed in the wrong way. We simply won't have the low voices; we won't have the high voices, because when it's half a tone too high, it destroys the entire vocal technique.

I don't want to seem to be a bird of ill omen. I want the Schiller Institute to go battling forward, always move forward, always remain strong. I want LaRouche to persevere; I want him to keep going on this issue, and I will give all the help which is possible. But, in the end, I'm afraid that we really have not had a very big success. So, thank you.

**Gorini:** Thank you. We hope so, too. The most difficult battles are the ones *we* like to fight. Now, I'll ask maestro Cappuccilli, who's been with us in this campaign for the Verdi tuning ever since the first international conference at the Casa Verdi in 1988, where he sang musical examples in both tunings: high and low. This began a tradition which will be followed today, here, in the *Sala Barezzi* by Antonella Banaudi.

**Maestro Cappuccilli,** from your 40 years' experience as a singer, what's the importance of the Verdi



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*Addressing a gathering at Casa Barezzi in Busseto, Italy in 1996—to present the Schiller Institute's Italian-language edition of the Manual on Rudiments of Tuning and Registration—are (l. to r.) tenor Carlo Bergonzi, Lyndon LaRouche, Liliana Gorini, and baritone Piero Cappuccilli.*

tuning for preserving opera, especially for Verdi?

**Piero Cappuccilli:** It's easy to say why. The Verdi tuning is the right one. Human voices are made for the Verdi tuning, in the sense that when the pitch is increased, the voices get tired and, in long roles, they can't stand the strain. That's the fact.

But the orchestral directors are only concerned with the orchestra, because they want the violins to sound off with a certain tonality, *loud*, because they must ring out. The brass must ring out. But the voices are not brass. Nature made them natural. They are not brass.

And now, what should we do? We should try to make really sure, to try, with Mr. LaRouche, that we

*insist* to fight for the Verdi tuning. At least for all the new voices coming up. To be able to sing; to be able to do it right, without forcing it.

**Gorini:** Now, I'll ask Mr. LaRouche a question. How can the Schiller Institute, and you with this international campaign, change the attitude of the music world on this question of tuning?

**Lyndon LaRouche:** Well, it goes to a deeper question. In my position, my specialty is a branch of science called physical economy, I recognize as few have recognized, that the development of music in Europe—Bach, and especially after Bach: Mozart, through Verdi and Brahms—this school of music—plays an essential part in the very functioning of a culture. There's a certain relationship to the creative powers of mind with this music, which does not exist in any other form.

We're in danger not only of losing this form of music, but civilization right now. Therefore, I thought it urgent to try to preserve the distillation of those principles of music that are essential to our culture, and to look at these principles, not only from the musicians, but also from the standpoint of science, so we can educate a new generation of teachers.

**Cappuccilli:** Let me add that, in fact, its not only the voices that are at stake. If you have a good voice, but with high tuning, even the heart is at stake. It makes for enormous fatigue when singing. Right? It's not just bad for the heart; it's bad for the whole body. Now we have to go back to singing normally, as Verdi had in mind.

[end video]

## Proper Public Discourse in Sovereign Republics

LaRouche was seeking a way for Americans, and for all people, to find their voices, and to properly place their voices once again. As we said at the beginning, a public discourse in a Republic has to find the right pitch.

All of the citizens must be called upon to deliberate as *one sovereign republic*, the idea that Lincoln successfully, finally achieved, through his four-year Presidency. And as not only a physical economist, but a statesman, Presidential candidate LaRouche realized that if a nation has lost its voice, the greatest ideas cannot resonate in the hearts and minds of the people.

For a nation to respond to a great crisis, a great

task, a great moment, the people must hear that challenge as a voice from within *them*. And in the midst of crisis, of destruction and death, the tragedy of the moment must be *enveloped* in the promise of a far greater future that must be experienced as in harmony with what resonates from within them. Lifting citizens from a condition of self-imposed tragedy, to a sublime recognition of our available immortality, is the task of both the poet and the statesman. It is the task that best qualifies an American Presidency and its citizenry, and as with the Spiritual, is our unique contribution to the world's classical culture should we choose to make that so.

*The presentation closed with a [video](#) of a recitation by Simon Estes of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.*

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.