

# The Classical War Against Multiculturalism: Brahms' Compositional Method

by Dennis Speed

It is the purpose of my presentation, to identify what constitutes *universal* culture, as distinct from any “centrist” conceptions of culture, Eurocentric, Afrocentric, Sinocentric, or egocentric. Centrism is a noise word for what we previously called racism. The centrist theory entertains the idea that everyone in the human race should have his or her own theme park, or his or her own designer cage in a human zoo. And, this human zoo should be ruled, according to population control experts, like Gen. William Draper, by a force that will become “the Park Ranger for the human race”[!].

Many people are completely confused about the idea of universal culture and universal history. For example, a college student asked me: “Who would write this universal history, since everyone comes from a particular background?” My response was, “That depends on whose universe you think it is.”

If there be universal laws, then they exist in each section of the universe in the same way. Their manifestations may be different, but the law is the same. If these laws can be known to be true, and demonstrated to be

true, they are science. It is the communication, transmission, and improvement of these laws which is universal history.

For example, there are many languages, but the whole human race uses something called language, for the purpose of discovering universal law. Wilhelm von Humboldt states that

[t]he bringing forth of language is an inner need of man, not merely an external necessity for maintaining communal intercourse, but a thing lying in its own nature, indispensable for the development of his mental powers and the attainment of a world view, to which man can attain only by bringing his thinking to clarity and precision through communal thinking with others. . . . The mental power that intrudes from its inner depth . . . into the course of world events, is the truly creative principle in the hidden and . . . secret evolution of mankind . . . in contrast to the overt sequence obviously linked by cause and effect.

Lyndon LaRouche has pointed to the exponential growth in population which followed the Council of Flo-

**Anton Dvořák** (facing page, right) was trained to be a butcher, but showed greater promise as a musician. He was a street violinist for a while, but got some training at the organ between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. After that, he studied on his own. **Johannes Brahms** (facing page, left), born in Hamburg, came out of what we would call the ghetto in America today. His father was an above-average musician. His mother, who had made her living as a seamstress, was able to quote large sections of Schiller's poetry by heart. Brahms supplemented the family income by playing the piano in bars when he was thirteen. He was significantly self-taught. Obviously, neither Brahms nor Dvořák were from the elite of German or Czech society. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

rence and the Renaissance. It is important to identify the fact, that the people of the Italian Renaissance spoke a language that did not exist two hundred years earlier, but was invented by the poet Dante Alighieri. Dante, who lived from A.D. 1250 to the early 1300's, struggled to invent a language that could resurrect the most profound ideas of human thought even if his own era should ultimately commit suicide. This suicide, in fact, did occur through the banking collapse caused by the Bardi and Peruzzi families.

Without Dante's gift of the Italian language, which was shaped by him from over a thousand local dialects, there could not have occurred the Renaissance. Dante's *Divine Comedy* refined the *canto* form of sung poetry. His follower, Francesco Petrarca, sought to advance the language further with the invention of the *soneto* or sonnet. But, Petrarca's friend Boccaccio was assigned by Petrarca to a different project, called the *Decameron*. The *Decameron* was written in order to prevent the whole of Italian society from sinking into cultural pessimism and dying out during the Black Death of the 1340's and later. It consists of satirical stories, many quite bawdy and risqué, which recount the tragedy of Europe's suicide in a way designed to make people laugh at themselves and repeat the stories, and hopefully not the behavior which had destroyed them. Thus, they would learn Dante's Italian.

Geoffrey Chaucer attended a lecture by Boccaccio on Dante in 1375, and got the idea to do the same thing as Boccaccio had done, in English. Thus was born *The Canterbury Tales*, which recount the often-bawdy and hilarious tales told on a religious pilgrimage to the church of Canterbury. The English, being every bit as licentious as the Italians, also repeated the stories and thus learned how to speak English. Later, Shakespeare imported the sonnet of Petrarca into English. Your literate English is in large measure Italian, a sort of grandson of Dante's Ital-

ian. Later, the Christian humanist figure Erasmus of Rotterdam inspired his student, François Rabelais, to do for France what was done by Boccaccio for Italy and Chaucer for England. Thus was born the astounding character Gargantua, and with it, the French language. Gargantua explains to the French population, for example, thirty or forty ways in which the posterior may be wiped, finally settling on the warm neck of a goose, as the best means. You can bet that this story got repeated all over Paris. And in Spanish, we have the great example of Don Quixote, the Knight of the Sad Countenance, and his sidekick, Sancho Panza, a peasant and proud of it, who later on gives up being Governor of an Island in order to get a good meal.

In this way, languages, created by poets, lifted up the populations that had been dominated by ignorance and thereby ruled over. In fact, the nations were created by the languages, not the other way around.

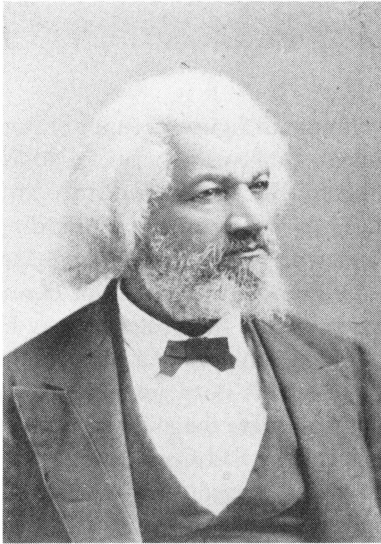
The same project was carried out in the field of music.

Musicians hear, not a particular language, but the music of language itself, its prosody. Brahms and Dvořák, among others, were able to hear in this way. The idea that such a universal experience of hearing language is possible, was attacked in a recent piece that appeared in the *The New York Times* written by Richard Taruskin. According to Taruskin,

As quoted by the critic Henry Krehbil, Dvořák urged that his pupils submit the indigenous musics of America, namely Indian melodies and Negro spirituals, "to beautiful treatment in the higher forms of art." . . . But as usual, what is most significant about this prescription is what it allowed to go unsaid. The "higher forms of art" that would justify and canonize the national were themselves considered not national but universal—or, to put it as a modern linguist would, "unmarked." Yet they were national all along. They were German. Mrs. Thurber's Conservatory, like all nineteenth century conservatories outside the German-speaking lands, was an agency of musical colonialism. Dvořák was brought in to direct it not as a Bohemian or a nationalist, but as a master of the unmarked mother tongue.

For those who might not know, this is completely opposite to the way that Dvořák is usually described—which is, in fact, as a "multiculturalist." What causes this writer's concern is, that there is a body buried which he hopes we don't discover. It is the still-living—faintly breathing, but living—presence of the transmission of Classical culture to the shores of America.

Actually, there is nothing controversial in Dvořák's advice. Bach used folk themes and popular songs in his



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*Like Brahms and Dvořák, Frederick Douglass (left) certainly did not come from the elite of society. His story is well known; what is not well known, is that he was an accomplished amateur violinist who learned to play while still a slave. Douglass' sons Lewis Henry Douglass and Charles Redmond Douglass (right), like their father, fought for the freedom of their country in the War of the Rebellion.*



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*Douglass' grandson Joseph Douglass (left) was an accomplished concert violinist. He and his father often performed pieces by Mozart, Haydn, and Schubert together for recreation. He was trained at the New England Conservatory of Music, and then went to Europe. In 1893, when twenty-four years of age, he played at the White House for President Grover Cleveland. Joseph Douglass performed with his friend Will Marion Cook at the 1892 Chicago Exposition, appearing together with his grandfather, who made a speech against the multi-cultural bias of the Exposition and its "Colored People's Day," "Bohemian Day," "Indian Day," etc. Will Marion Cook was trained by Joseph Joachim, the virtuoso violinist who was Brahms' closest associate in Vienna.*

Scottish, and Welsh texts, as well as piano and flute variations set to Russian, Tyrolean, Scottish, and other themes.

Franz Schubert made great music accessible to every household with a piano by perfecting the art song, or *lied*, which had been invented by Mozart (Bach and Haydn had written precursors to it). Schubert wrote over six hundred such songs, and was followed by Schumann and Brahms.

Brahms extensively utilized folk songs and themes as, for example, in his *Hungarian Dances*. Dvořák did the same with his *Slovenian Dances*. There was never a break, in short, between Classical composition and the transformation of popular music through its laws, because these musicians were engaged in the same language project that the poet Dante had involved himself in. They studied poetry and wrote music to elevate us, to improve us, because that is the nature of the artist: He is us at our best.

It was simply this that Dvořák recognized in his discussion and collaboration in America with the singer

music all the time. "Jesu, Meine Freude," for example, is taken from a bar song, "Leise, Meine Freude." Haydn and Mozart both wrote several such compositions. Beethoven wrote over two hundred songs set to Irish,

Harry Burleigh, who performed scores of spirituals for Dvořák, saturating him in this music. Let us now explore how the Classical compositional method was transmitted to America.

## Brahms' Compositional Method

Let us begin with Brahms' "Wiegenlied" ("Lullaby") (SEE Figure 1). This piece was written before Brahms had gone to Vienna. He had met a singer from there by the name of Bertha Porubsky, who performed many of the songs of the countryside for Brahms, and composed the song in honor of her marriage to Arthur Faber. He set this song to utilize a particular rhythmic motif that was used in this music. This is heard in the piano accompani-

ment, in which the gentle off-beat motion in the voices played by the pianist's right hand, is contrasted to the steady motion in the left-hand voice.

This song is so well known today, that many people believe it to be either (1) a folk song, or (2) an adaptation of a folk song. It is neither; but in exactly the same way that Don Quixote became a figure of folklore in Spain, and Gargantua such a folk figure in France, so Brahms achieved the same with this song.

He uses the musical interval of a third, and also the vocal principle of registration. Look, for example, at the bass line in Figure 1. The three notes are E $\flat$ , G, and B $\flat$ . Rather than having these notes played in the same vocal register, Brahms places the E $\flat$  in a low "basso profundo" register, after which the G moves to the very top of the bass' regular "chest" register. The singer, too, opens with a third between "Guten" and the first syllable of "Abend."



*Jeanette Thurber, head of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, successfully had legislation passed in the U.S. Congress in 1891 to commit the nation to a program of Classical culture which was to be led by Dvořák as the director of a national school of music. The school was to be located in Washington, but was never built. (Reprinted with permission from "Dvořák in America, 1892-1895," edited by John C. Tibbetts. Photograph courtesy of the Ontario Club Library. ©1993 Amadeus Press.)*



*Harry Burleigh (left) taught spirituals to Dvořák, who saturated himself in the music and then wrote his own themes based on them. Burleigh's grandfather, Hamilton Waters (above), who had been born a slave in Maryland, became a captain on the Underground Railroad. No doubt, Burleigh conveyed to Dvořák more than a simple musical sense of the content of the spirituals. (Reprinted with permission from "Dvořák in America, 1892-1895," edited by John C. Tibbetts. Photograph courtesy of Harry T. Burleigh, II. ©1993 Amadeus Press.)*

FIGURE 1. From Johannes Brahms, "Wiegenlied."

Zart bewegt

Gu-ten A - bend, gut Nacht, mit Ro - sen be - dacht,

*p*

The first note of the interval is repeated twice, but is rhythmically different from the piano accompaniment.

When the song is sung in English, this difference is often obliterated. In this case, the notes sung are usually G-A $\flat$ -B, as in Figure 2, which actually never appear in the piece. Also, in such arrangements the singer usually enters before the first note of the piano is played, thus giving us a clearly different voice entry. Contrast this to Brahms's original setting in Figure 1, where we have three distinct voices: the bass line, the

treble line, and the singer, all of whom sing the interval of a third.

The text of the song is taken from a collection of poetry known as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. This was a popular album of poetry based on folktales of the time.

We see a second example of the use of folk music in the first intermezzo Op. 117 in E $\flat$  (SEE Figure 3), which is in the same key as the "Wiegenlied." Here, a text appears at the top of the score, marked: "From Herder's Scottish Folk Songs":

FIGURE 2. English version of Brahms' "Wiegenlied."

Lul - la - by, and good night,

Sleep softly, my child, sleep softly and beautifully;  
It pains me much to see you cry,

so that the melody would be sung as in Figure 4. Here we see the way in which a poetic text can be used as a "model" or *motiv*, to stimulate the musician. It also demonstrates the vocal root of so-called instrumental music, and we should hear a "song without words." This

FIGURE 3. From Johannes Brahms, first intermezzo, Op. 117 in E $\flat$ .

Andante moderato

*p dolce*

FIGURE 4. Melody from Brahms' first intermezzo, Op. 117 in E $\flat$ , set as a song.

Schlaf sanft mein Kind, schlaf sanft und schön! Mich dau - ert's sehr, dich wei - nen sehn.

idea of “song without words,” points to that place where language originates before it is spoken, to the thought-object of language. Edgar Allen Poe referred to this as “unthought-like thoughts which are the souls of thought.”

Our third example is the song “Nachklang” (“Echo”) written by Brahms, and the beginning of a song that immediately precedes it, called “Regenlied” (“Rain Song”). What we wish to here show is the way in which the composer uses intervals to accelerate the rate of development in a composition. Let us look at the text in Figure 5. The piece begins with a repeated C#. This C# is a pivot around which the poetic action is initially shaped. Look at how far our line rises and falls. It rises to an F#, a fourth above the C#, on the word “aus” (“out”) and falls to a G#, a fourth below C#, on the second syllable of “fallen” (“fall”). Even where it falls lower, to F#, Brahms repeats the G# twice on “grüne Gras,” the first time a note is repeated other than the C#. He does this to emphasize the interval.

Other intervals are contained within this interval. But there is a higher order to this, which I want to show by looking at the two lines of poetry:

Regentropfen aus den Bäumen  
Fallen in das grüne Gras

Raindrops, out of the trees,  
Fall onto the green grass.

The first word of each line is set with a repeated tone: the word “Regentropfen” has a C#, and the word “Tränen” has a D. They are a half-step apart. Now look at the cadence in the piano (SEE Figure 6). There we have a C# in the voice played by the left hand, and then the right hand plays D immediately on top of the C#. This pulls the message of the two lines of poetry into a single instant. It creates a singularity using the half-step, the smallest possible interval, to do so.

This has the effect of a shock wave, into which we are accelerated in measures 12-15 in Figure 5. There, on the words “machen mir,” we have the tones D-D-C#, which bring to mind both the words “Regentropfen” and “Tränen.” This is also a half step. Then, we have the fourth, the interval, combined with the half-step interval, in the tones C#-F#-A-G# on the words “die Wange naß.”

Yet, this is only a negative representation of what is occurring. These are, perhaps the footprints—and, I hope, not the muddy footprints—of the musician’s attempt to capture the spirit of the poet.

Brahms uses this theme in the third movement of the Sonata in G Major, Op. 78 (SEE Figure 7).

Our next example is from the first movement of the same piece (SEE Figure 8). This theme appears in the

FIGURE 5. From Johannes Brahms, “Nachklang.”



FIGURE 6. From Johannes Brahms, “Nachklang.”



FIGURE 7. From Johannes Brahms, Sonata in G Major, Op. 78, third movement.



FIGURE 8. From Johannes Brahms, Sonata in G Major, Op. 78, first movement.



beginning of the “Regenlied,” the song that immediately precedes “Nachklang” (SEE Figure 9), where the same interval-sequence, C#-B-A-F#-C# is repeated, first in the “mezzosoprano” voice in the piano’s right hand, and then in the lowest “bass” voice played by the left hand.



by a singular poetic idea, that is distinctive.

We cannot investigate this thoroughly at this point, except by way of another example, from the second movement of the “From the New World” symphony (SEE Figure 13). Here, Dvořák achieves what Brahms achieved with the “Wiegenlied” and Rabelais and Cervantes achieved in their works. He writes a theme that, to this day, many think to be taken from the spiritual called “Goin’ Home.” In fact, *the words were written after Dvořák’s music*, not the other way around.

By the way, the translation into Czech of “New World” is *Novy Svet*, which in Dvořák’s time was the popular name of a village-like area at the outskirts of Prague, where people came to listen and dance to folk music. This may explain why Dvořák despite the fact that many in America and Europe who were music critics couldn’t seem to understand why he called the symphony “From the New World,” nevertheless any local Czech villager would have had no problem understanding it.

Whatever his limitations as a composer, Dvořák had an understanding of the Classical method of composition

and conveyed that to his students as practiced by Brahms, and conveyed via Brahms from Bach through Beethoven and Schubert.

One notices, in reading most Classical musical scores, that the entire language of music is Italian. That is a tribute to the earlier language project successfully carried out by Dante and his followers, which created a society and civilization that sang as none before it had sung.

Dvořák had said,

It is to the poor that I turn for musical greatness. The poor work hard: they study seriously. Rich people are apt to apply themselves lightly to music, and to abandon the painful toil to which every strong musician must submit without complaint and without rest. Poverty is no barrier to one endowed by nature with musical talent. It is a spur. It keeps the mind loyal to the end. It stimulates the student to great effort.

Thus it was natural for him to seek to convey the best of himself and of universal culture to those whom he met who best represented, in their struggle for freedom and the inalienable rights of man, that universal culture.

FIGURE 12. From Franz Schubert, *Symphony No. 5, first movement*.

The image shows a musical score for Violin I and Basses. The Violin I part is in the upper staff, and the Basses part is in the lower staff. The music is in G major and 2/2 time. The Violin I part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the Basses part provides a harmonic accompaniment with quarter and eighth notes.

FIGURE 13. From Anton Dvořák, *Symphony No. 9 (“From the New World.”), second movement*.

The image shows a musical score for English Horn Solo. The music is in G major and 2/2 time. The score is written on a single staff. The tempo is marked *Andante*. The music features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings of *p*, *pp*, and *f*.