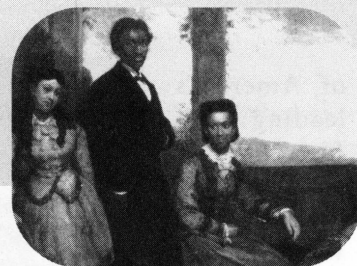


Celebrating Black History Month



'Through The Years' Staged in Chicago

The Feb. 13, Chicago performance of Amelia Boynton Robinson's 1936 musical drama *Through The Years* [SEE page 50, this issue] was the brainchild of Schiller Institute board member Sheila Anne Jones, a former public school music teacher, who conceived the performance of the play as a means to convey the importance of "saving the children of America." The way in which the musical drama was cast, rehearsed, and staged is as important as the performance itself. The initial concept was to use the play to begin building a Chicago-wide community chorus. Coaching in *bel canto* (beautiful singing) method and rehearsals of the script began about a month before the performance on Chicago's South Side, in the poorest neighborhoods of Chicago's Black ghetto.

As Mrs. Jones described the process: "Participants were mothers from homeless shelters and their babies, as young as three years old; former or potential gang youth; single parents; and teenagers from various community organizations. All who braved the Siberian weather and icy streets to sojourn to these rehearsals expressed their joy in many different ways at this project.

"Imagine a scene like the following: A flat in the poorest neighborhood of the city of Chicago, where

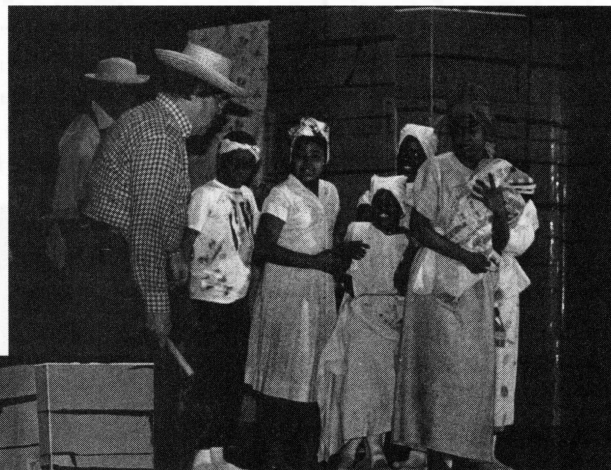


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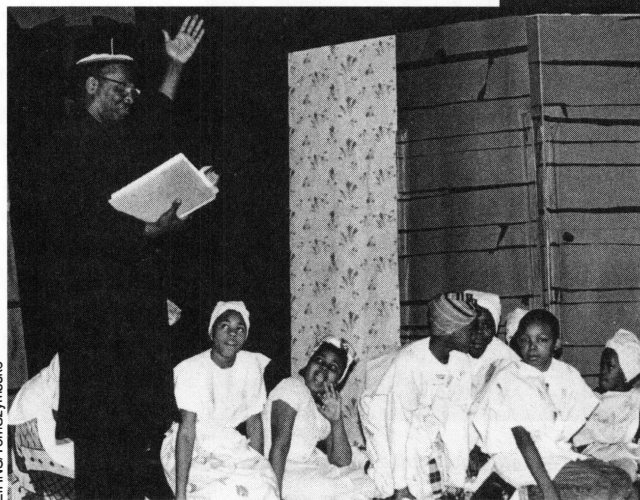
the pipes have burst. No heat. Virtually no infrastructure, virtually no lights. Huddled under blankets, with one little space heater in the middle, are ten little children, from five years up to eighteen years old, reading Amelia's play aloud, and shaping their little mouths as they learn how to round their tones to sing *bel canto*, with their attention so concentrated, that the cold and the broken-down physical conditions are of no consequence. This was the site and condition of one of the earliest rehearsals for the play.

"The dream of this play started

Scenes from the Chicago production of "Through the Years." Right: Slave auction (Act I, Sc 2). Below: Camp meeting (Act I, Sc 3). Above: Picking cotton (Act I, Sc 4).



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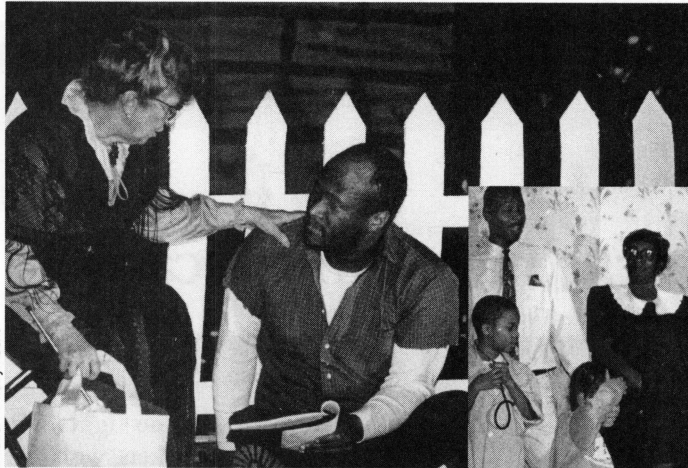
EIRNS/TomSzymecko

with this small wonderful group. These little pearls gave me hope, and this little army became the initial recruiters from the neighborhoods of the city."

Hope to Future Generations

The playwright, Amelia Boynton Robinson, who at eighty-two years old is today widely recognized as one

of America's leading Civil Rights figures, traveled to Chicago to witness the performance and encourage the participants. She commented on the importance of the play for today's audiences: "Music



EIRNS/TomSzymeko

cannot be separated from the struggle in the Civil Rights movement, because it is a struggle for the inalienable rights of all men. We recently saw this force of love in November of 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Often it was music which carried the day against munitions . . .

"This play was written to give the necessary hope and beauty to future generations. I believe that because Dr. King was killed, many people cast aside this powerful weapon. Fear, rage, and hate took hold of our children's souls. Therefore, my dream for the performance of *Through the Years* in Chicago during

Black History Month, is to inspire a new movement which empowers our children with love and respect for themselves and others."

Excitement Tangible

People began arriving at the auditorium on Chicago's South Side as early as 4 p.m. for a five o'clock performance. The excitement at the unique new opportunity the play provided for the participants, was tangible.

The evening opened with a written greeting from Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche.

Scenes from the Chicago production of "Through the Years." Left: Learning to read (Act I, Sc 5). Below: At Joshua's deathbed (Act III, Sc 4).



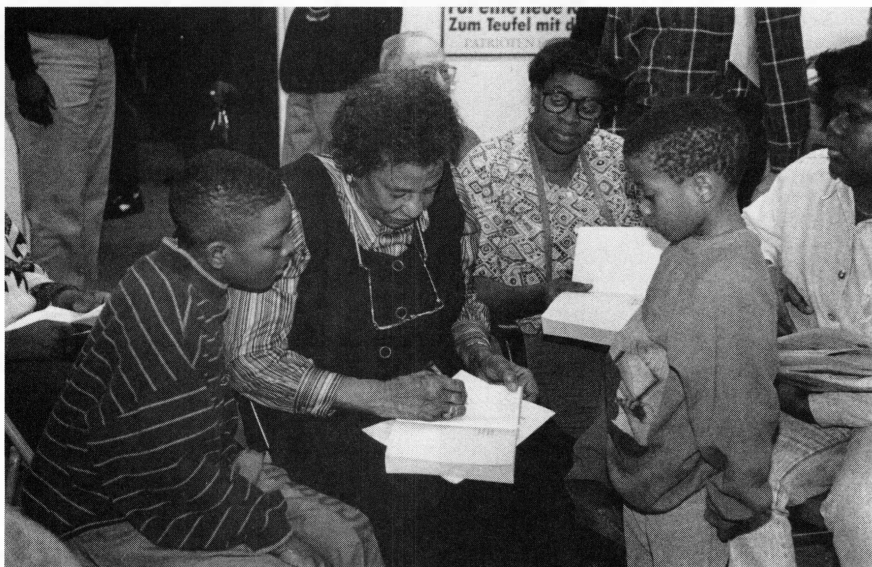
EIRNS/TomSzymeko

Sheila Jones presented the greeting, together with a rendition of the spiritual, "His Eye Is on the Sparrow."

Following this came the recitation of a poem written by James Weldon Johnson entitled "Fifty Years," recited by cast member Beverly Eldridge. Then nationally known composer and singer Charles Bevel performed one of his most powerful compositions, "What Really Bothers Me, Is Not Many People Really Want To Be Free!"

The stage was then transformed, twig by twig, into a cotton field (all scenery had been crafted by the cast and Schiller Institute volunteers). Then, as the lights came up, onto the stage wandered twenty small Black children, dressed in white-muslin slave garb. They began singing, "Cotton needs a pickin' so bad, cotton needs a pickin' so bad . . ." This was the first of more than a dozen spirituals around which the play is constructed.

The Schiller Institute hopes to perform *Through the Years* in other American cities, and to expand the process of "saving the children" through the kind of cultural efforts that were demonstrated so successfully in this performance.



EIRNS/TomSzymeko

Author Amelia Boynton Robinson autographs copies of her autobiography "Bridge Across Jordan," following the Chicago performance of "Through the Years."

Concert Features Brazilian Requiem

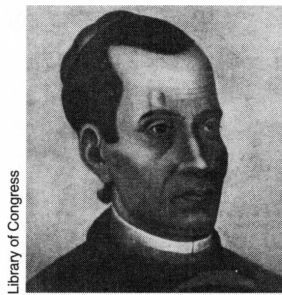
A concert in celebration of Black History Month, featuring one of the finest examples of an African-American's expression of the universal principles of Classical composition—the Requiem Mass by Brazil's finest composer, José Maurício Nunes Garcia—was sponsored by the Schiller Institute on Feb. 27 in Washington, D.C.

The production of this work also marked a landmark in the Institute campaign—launched by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.—to lower the standard tuning pitch to the natural level of C = 256 cycles per second, as it is the first time it has produced a work with full orchestra in which all the instruments used were designed to play at the lower, Classical tuning.

The concert was held at the historic Ebenezer United Methodist Church, which was founded in 1801 as a fully integrated congregation by people opposed to the practice of setting off a segregated “Negro pew.” The church also established the first public school for Blacks in Washington, D.C.

That tradition was maintained in this performance, which represented the combined efforts of the Schiller Institute Chorus and the Neville Ottley Singers, a group that has for years specialized in bringing choral programs containing works of both the great European Classical masters and Classical works of Black and other “minority” composers to the Washington, D.C. area. Led by the dynamic Neville Ottley—who also directed the Feb. 27 performance—the group has served as the “launching-pad” for a number of fine singers, one of whom—the mezzo-soprano Kehembe (Valerie Eichelberger)—was also a soloist in the Nunes Garcia Requiem.

Other soloists in the Requiem were soprano Elizabeth Lyra Ross, tenor



Library of Congress

Soloists, chorus, and orchestra perform Requiem by Brazilian composer José Maurício Nunes Garcia (left).



EIRNS/Mike Hodgkiss

John Gilbertson, and bass-baritone Ronald Jackson. Following the mass, each soloist performed arias from Handel's *Messiah*, which were then capped by a very special treat: baritone Robert McFerrin, the first African-American singer to receive a contract with the New York Metropolitan Opera, sang Handel's “The Trumpet Shall Sound,” followed by a rendition of traditional spirituals arranged by his friend Hall Johnson. All soloists were accompanied by the remarkable Sylvia Olden Lee, herself the first African-American vocal coach engaged by the “Met.”

Listening to this Requiem is enough to dispel the myth that the composition of Classical music was confined to some racialist category now referred to as “Dead White European Males” or similar Politically Correct claptrap. José Maurício Nunes Garcia was a mulatto, more or less contemporary with Ludwig van Beethoven, who rose to prominence in the Rio de Janeiro area and became famed for his skills in Classical improvisation on the piano. He flourished in the 1808-21 period, when the Portuguese royal court resided in Brazil, giving a great boost to the colony's musical culture. In 1808, he was appointed as musical director at the royal chapel. In 1816, he was joined Sigismund Neukomm, a relative of

Joseph and Michael Haydn who played a crucial role in a project (in which Beethoven participated) to publish Classical settings of English, Irish, and Scottish folk songs.

Although not very frequently performed and only recorded once in the United States, the Requiem is the best-known of Nunes Garcia's hundreds of works, 237 of which are still extant, including masses, choral motets, and other religious pieces. It was composed in 1816, and shows strong evidence of the composer's close study of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Requiem (composed in 1791), which was likely available to Nunes Garcia through the splendid music library at his disposal. In fact, Nunes Garcia derived much of his Requiem's thematic material directly from the Mozart work, which he himself presented in its Brazilian premiere in December 1819. Thus, as the Program of the Feb. 27 concert explains, the two Requiems present us with a dialogue between creative minds, made musically possible by the 1781-85 breakthroughs of Joseph Haydn and Mozart in the method of Classical composition called “Motivführung,” or “motivic development.”