

INTERVIEW

Dr. William Warfield, baritone

‘Music is the Kingdom of Heaven, Education is the Kingdom of Heaven’

Dr. William Warfield, baritone, is one of the world's leading experts on Spirituals and lieder, and the past president of the National Association of Negro Musicians (1985-1990).

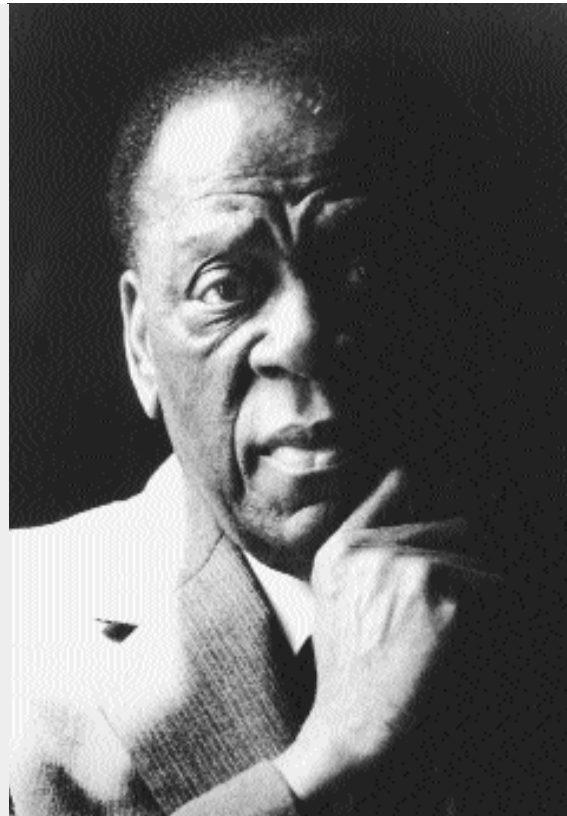
Born to a family of sharecroppers in West Helena, Arkansas and raised in Rochester, New York, Dr. Warfield won rave reviews in a sensational debut at New York City's Town Hall by the time he was thirty. In the course of a career that has spanned more than half a century, his incomparable voice and charismatic personality have electrified the stages of six continents, and earned him the title of "America's Musical Ambassador."

Dr. Warfield has been engaged recently in the efforts of the Schiller Institute to revive a movement for a National Conservatory of Music, first pioneered at the beginning of the century by Antonin Dvořák [SEE news article, page 62]. The following interview was conducted for Fidelio by Lynne and Dennis Speed on November 26, 1994.

Fidelio: Dr. Warfield, let me first of all thank you for being here, and participating yesterday in our performance of several scenes from Amelia Boynton-Robinson's musical drama *Through the Years*. Of course, this was preceded by a wonderful lecture-demonstration that you did together with Sylvia Olden Lee.

Through the Years is part of our project to restore universal education and Classical literacy to the nation's youth, starting in the nation's capital. And in reading your autobiography, *William Warfield: My Music and My Life*, I was very struck by the contrast between the high standard of universal and Classical

I studied Latin, German, French, and Italian in high school. I had a music teacher who insisted, that if I wanted to sing something in a foreign language, I had to take that up in school. She said, 'You're not going to sing German, if you don't know what the words mean.'



education *you* received, and the collapse of education that we see throughout the nation today.

William Warfield: Yes, as a matter of fact, when I look back on it, and even compare the education in Rochester, then to now, it was sort of Shangri-La. It was utopian.

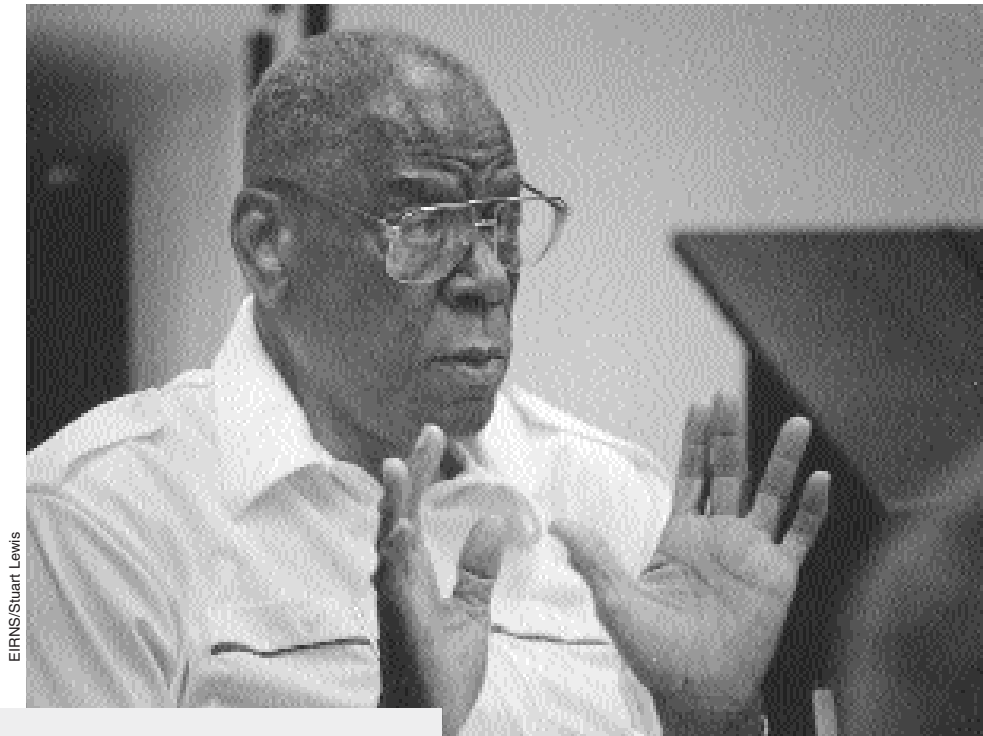
In high school, we could take Latin, we could take Hebrew, we could take other languages. All we had to do to study any instrument, was go down to the band-room and check out an instrument, and we could be in the band; or check out a violin, and we could be in the orchestra. Each school had its band,

it had its orchestra.

One of the reasons, of course, was that the Eastman School of Music was in Rochester, and most of the people who were getting their degrees in music education, taught. That's how they got their teaching experience, by teaching in the public schools, doing band work and things like that.

We had choirs in each of the schools, and each year we'd meet together in a Choirfest. They formed an international junior choir, an international high school senior choir—I even went to the World's Fair in 1938 as part of the senior choir from the international choir of Rochester.

All of this was open to us and available. And, I started out studying piano with my teacher in my father's church at the age of nine. By the time I was sixteen, in junior high school, I was into music and all kinds of things. I even studied a little violin myself, in addition to piano, because it was available to me and my brothers. One of them had trumpet, one had tuba—the one next in age to me actually went on to the Eastman School of Music and majored in tuba. Later on, he became a warrant officer in the Army, and even up until his retirement he would parade with the reserve band that he was still with. All this came out of the tremendous amount of opportunity we had for music education, beginning even in grade school and continuing to high school.



I lived in a neighborhood which we called ‘the melting pot.’ My next-door neighbors were Italian. Around the corner from us, was a Jewish neighborhood. About three blocks down, the Polish neighborhood began. So Washington High School was filled with Polish, Black, Italian, Jewish—the whole community. It was just a wonderful experience.

Fidelio: This was combined also with a tremendous amount of language study—you yourself are quite a linguist.

William Warfield: Yes. As a matter of fact, I studied Latin, German, French, and Italian in high school, even before I got to college. One of the reasons for this, was that I had a music teacher who insisted, that if I wanted to sing something in a foreign language, I had to take that up in school. She said, “You’re not going to come in here and sing German, if you don’t know what the words mean.” And so, as a result, I started studying German in high school.

As a matter of fact, when I was a senior in high school, I participated in a city-wide competition put on by the German Art Society, and won first place as a high school student reciting the poem “Das Lindenbaum” [recites]:

“Am brunnen vor dem Tore,
Da steht ein Lindenbaum.
Ich trämt’ in seinem Schatten
So manchen süßen traum.

So, long before I sang it, I had won first place in the German Society competition for reciting German poetry—in high school.

Fidelio: That would appear to be in marked contrast to what people assume to be the case, particularly in comparing, for example, educational opportunity in the 1920’s and ’30’s, to the 1950’s, ’60’s, and ’70’s. Yet, everyone will remember, or many people may remember, that by about 1966-67, language study, for example, was something that was very hard to come by. Languages were not only elective, but, for example, I remember very clearly that in high school and the prep

school that I attended, you could not take German. German was not available. French was available, Spanish was available, Latin was available. But only three years of Latin, perhaps four, but the fourth year was elective. Greek was not available, for example.

Yet, you’re speaking about a time now sixty or seventy years ago, when you had a fundamentally better education. Could you tell us something about the character of the students, and the character of the time? Why Rochester? You mentioned the Eastman School of Music, but of course, Rochester was also the home of Frederick Douglass for a long time.

William Warfield: That’s right. It was quite an Underground Railroad station; that is, a stopover for people coming from the South to the North. It was a very vital part of the Underground Railroad, and right to this day we have a big statue of Frederick Douglass and Douglass Park in Rochester, New York.

Rochester has always been a city that was very forward. Mr. Eastman himself, of Eastman Kodak, who endowed the Eastman School of Music, was always into art and education, into learning, into teaching, and that kind of a thing,

Dr. Nathaniel Dett said to me, ‘Young man, when you feel the same way about your German and your French, as you feel about that Spiritual, you’ll be an artist.’ To this day, I can sing Schubert, and turn around and sing a Spiritual, and there’s basically no difference in making music. That is all part of the universality, when your spirit comes out, and your spirit shines.

so it was a natural for us in Rochester. We became heir to that, as we were coming up as youngsters.

I myself lived in a neighborhood which we called “the melting pot.” My next-door neighbors were Italian. Around the corner from us, was predominantly a Jewish neighborhood, and I remember, as a youngster, going over and lighting the stoves for Orthodox Jews who didn’t believe in doing that sort of a thing on the Sabbath. And then, just about three blocks down, the whole Polish neighborhood began. So Washington High School then, was filled with Polish, Black, Italian, Jewish—the whole community. We called ourself “the melting pot school,” and it was just a wonderful experience.

I did not know actual segregation as such, personally, until later on, when I left the city and experienced certain things, although I was not unaware of what was going on. We used to get the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* religiously every week, and our ties to the South, and our family, growing up, made us know exactly what was going on in the South. We were just as aware of lynchings as anybody in the South was, because that was the kind of home we lived in, and my father was in the tradition and made sure that we knew what was happening to us as a race. But so far as my actual *experience* with segregation—it never happened to me until I left Rochester.

I started my career before the 1954 Supreme Court decision came down, so during that period, I experienced segregation by going to other cities; although I did not experience a lot of these things in connection with my art and performing, like here in Washington at the National Theater. It had all been cleared up by

people before me, like Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson. Marian Anderson had made it clear that she would not sing where the audience was segregated, and so, as a result, whenever she went somewhere, it had to be integrated.

Actors’ Equity had made a ruling, before the Supreme Court ruling, that we would not perform in any theater that was segregated. Therefore, the National Theater, right here in Washington, was integrated *before* the Supreme Court decision, because our union had already decided that we would not subject people to that.

So when I got here and played *Porgy and Bess* in the National Theater, it was wide open. But several years prior to that, Blacks couldn’t be on the stage in the National Theater. So these were the things that were going on during that time.

Fidelio: What inspired you to want to become a concert artist and to perform *lieder* and oratorio and other Classical works, as well as the Spirituals?

William Warfield: First, let me explain something, which is partly an answer to that question, because I’ve had many people ask me, “How did you, as a Black youngster, come up and decide that you wanted to be in Classical music rather than jazz?”

There is a very good and very simple reason. If you remember, back in that day, to anybody who was in religion, jazz was considered sinful. My father was a Baptist minister, and there was not going to be any jazz around there.

And so, what was my alternative? I started studying music, I started studying piano, and out of that, came Classical music, and the only thing that was not Classical then, which is now (of

course, jazz itself is “classical” now), was the singing of the Spirituals. Spirituals were part of my inheritance, and part of what we did in church and all of that, and that was all very good. We did anthems and Spirituals—remember, sometimes, even in our history of the Spirituals, they used to be called anthems. We did anthems in church and Spirituals, and things like that.

Then, as I got into school, I started studying to sing. And, as I said, my music teacher said, “If you want to sing in German, you’ve got to take the language.” So I started studying the languages, and out of languages came *lieder*, the French, Saint-Saens, Italian opera; and all of this came out of that *method of education* that leads you into not just thinking English.

And *then* I went and heard, as a youngster—I remember they took me—a man who came to Rochester. He stood on stage and sang German, he sang English first, Spirituals, French, a little Italian thing, and I sat there and was absolutely entranced. And later on, a lady came there and started singing things like Schubert’s “Ave Maria,” as well as Spirituals. These two people were Roland Hayes and Marian Anderson. And *that’s* where I got the inspiration to do what I did, to learn and go into the field, from those two people.

Fidelio: The story you just told, has been told to us by various people. George Shirley told us this story, Robert McFerrin told us this story also.

William Warfield: Yes. That was part of it, that was what we were as we were coming up. That was what we were exposed to.

Fidelio: I’d like to ask you a question about that, because it seems that both Hayes and Anderson (I think Hayes earlier than Anderson, because actually Anderson heard Hayes)—when he did his concerts, he must have been going through a certain circuit, since he was prohibited from doing a lot of the regular concert halls, and certainly he couldn’t be on any of the opera stages. When you saw him, and when he was seen by others, how was this done? Was

this done through the churches?

William Warfield: No. For instance, I heard him in connection with the series they had at the Coliseum Theater, which was the big theater—it seats 3,000. And they had a concert series there, which included people like Heifetz and Rachmaninoff, whom I heard in a concert in Rochester, playing piano. This was the concert series that Roland Hayes was in, and later, Marian Anderson.

So, it was *after* the period you're referring to, that I saw Roland Hayes. By the time I heard him, he was pretty well accepted, and was singing in most of the big concert halls. If you remember, in his book, he talks about one of his first experiences, during his tour in Germany, where he was standing there, and they jeered him. They wouldn't accept the fact that this Black man was going to sing *lieder* to them. So he just opened his mouth and started singing—this was in Europe—and before his concert was over, they carried him on their shoulders, screaming and hollering all through the auditorium. He had just opened his mouth and started singing, and that stopped everything.

That's why I said that he was the forerunner of all of us, in breaking down that barrier of Blacks being able to do Classical music, or singing in foreign languages, and the like. It was Roland Hayes.

Then, of course, later on, Marian Anderson really put the death knell to those sort of restrictions, when she walked out at the Lincoln Memorial and sang a recital, because the Daughters of the American Revolution wouldn't allow her to sing in Constitution Hall. A few years later, when I came along, I walked right into Constitution Hall, and nobody even questioned it.

That's why I said, *these* were the people who were the forerunners. And Paul Robeson; we know his story, how he opened up things by just refusing to bow down to them.

So by the time I came along, even though, at the start of my career, there was not yet the non-segregation ruling issued by the Supreme Court, I was the recipient of all of the efforts of Roland

Hayes, Marian Anderson, and Paul Robeson, that had broken down these things. And I had very few problems, career-wise, when I came along—except for opera, which was just not open to Blacks at that time. That only happened in the 1950's, and by that time, I'd done *Showboat*, *Porgy and Bess*, and I was well on my way in my specific career, and I didn't really need opera to have a career.

Fidelio: A couple of questions, actually, about what you just said. You mentioned Hayes' experience, which was actually 1927 in Germany, when he was able to transform an audience which would usually be assumed to have been a profoundly racist audience. But, in an instant, he seems to have transformed them. What allows a musician, a singer, to do that? What is the quality of art, and the insight into art, that allows a singer to do that?

William Warfield: I think, basically, we're in a field in which there is a universal communication. Everyone, whether they're Black, white, Ethiopian, or Swedish, Scandinavian, responds to music.

I was sitting in a session with Pablo Casals, the great 'cellist. During the latter part of his life, I was fortunate enough to be able to perform with him, and we were working on the "St. Matthew Passion," I think, and we were singing and talking about various things. And all of a sudden he stopped, and he looked at us, and he said, "Aren't we fortunate to be musicians?" And I'll never forget the look on his face. *That* was international communication.

Now, to get back to answering your question specifically. If you are sincerely immersed in a communication of music, and you just stand there and just do that, something in every one of us is going to respond to that. This is true, as night follows day. You walk out on the street, you see youngsters walking down the street with earplugs in their ears, listening to the boombox. I have been in places in which suddenly, music started, and all of a sudden it got quiet. There is something in all of us that relates to music; and music is one of the big communication connectors, whatever form

it comes in. I have seen youngsters stop their "bup-de-bup-de-bup-de-bup-de-bup-de-bup-de-bup . . .," and listen to something that was like, "I'm gonna tell God all of my troubles . . .," dead in their tracks. Because it was a communication that is automatically in all of us.

Now, if you want to go a little step further, being the son of a Baptist minister as I am, it 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.

I remember he made this sermon at the opening of the new chapel at Tuskegee, when I was down there for the dedication. 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, then, are endowed with that basic thing, and music is it. That's why we can communicate.

Fidelio: You've been called the "musical ambassador from America," and I read again in your autobiography, that you had quite an extensive tour during the 1950's and '60's, and opened up many, many doors for the United States, friendship relationships, through precisely what you've been describing, this universal quality of music. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

William Warfield: It was after I first made my debut in 1950, shortly thereafter. You know, in the 1950's, the State Department had reciprocal artists going back and forth, even with Russia. (Actually, I think, the Russians started it first, sending their people here, and the United States said, "Oh, gosh, let's get on this bandwagon. That's the best way to promote America, is through music and through our artists." And so we started to do it.) And I was one of the people who, at various times, from the 1950's through the 1970's, was fortunate enough to have been on quite a few of the tours.

I went on a tour of Africa, all over Africa, for the State Department. I went to the Far East, on the same routing that Marian Anderson had gone on earlier, from Hongkong all the way down to Singapore, and, on my own on two occasions, I was engaged by the Australian Broadcasting Commission to make two tours, one in 1950, then one in 1958, of the whole continent of Australia.

Then, I was even sent by the United States government to Cuba, while we were still on friendly terms with Castro, and I did concerts in Cuba under U.S. auspices.

Then, later on, I went with the Philadelphia Orchestra as the guest soloist, on a government-sponsored tour to Europe. That was the first time I sang at La Scala in Milan—not opera, just as a guest with the Philadelphia Orchestra. When you add it all together, I probably did more government-sponsored tours

than any other artists. And that's, of course, why my manager went crazy! But it just happened, that one thing after the other occurred, and I was going and representing the United States government.

It was most interesting when I did the Africa tour. Some places in Africa, of course, did have concert series and regular concert halls, and the others were arranged by the consulate or the embassy of wherever I was. For instance, I went from Liberia down what was called the Gold Coast. I went even as far as Salisbury, down in that area; but I never got into South Africa as such, because that was just too difficult to manage for the State Department. But I did get into Rhodesia.

One of the things that we insisted upon, was that the native population be absolutely represented. So wherever we were, the State Department made sure

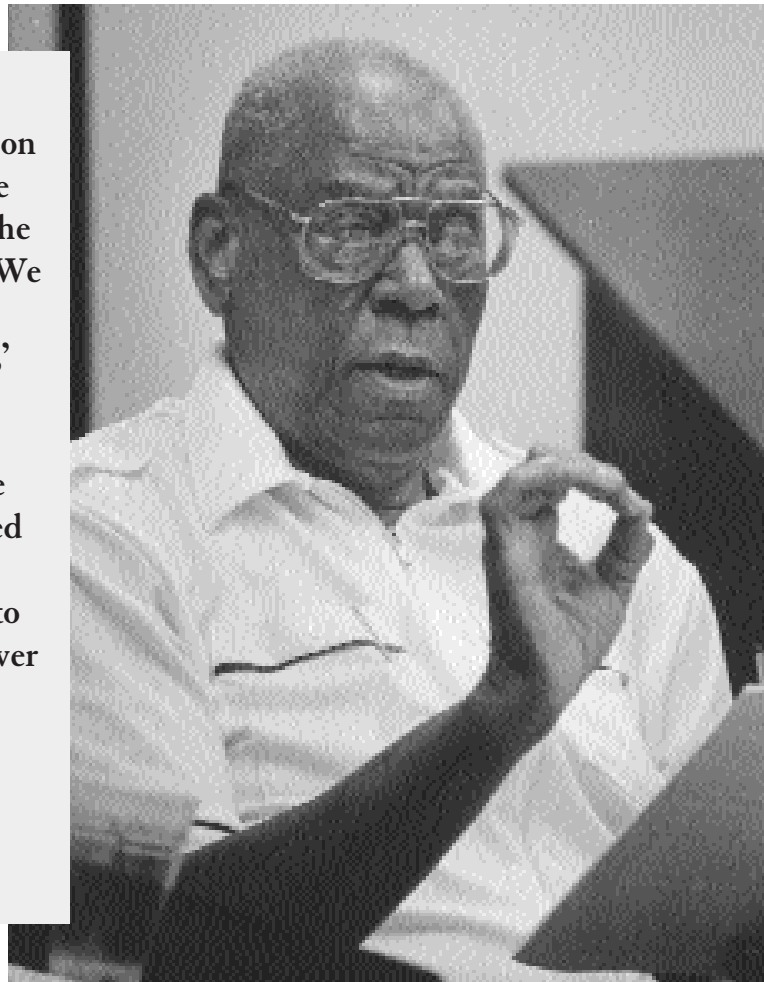
that there were many of the Blacks from the neighboring community. For instance, we had a whole bloc of youngsters and people that were there from various schools when I was in Ibadan, Nigeria. It was very interesting to note their reactions, because sometimes they responded emotionally to what was going on in the program. And their applause was spontaneous, and it could come right in the middle of a song, if they were moved. I was singing a little German piece that was a tongue-twister—Karl Löwe's "Hochzeitleid." And they started saying "Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!" all through the song, right in the middle of the song as I was singing it; they were just so excited about what they were listening to. And then, when I was finished, there was thunderous applause.

And this was also true when I was touring in India. I would be singing something beautiful, "Bois épais" by Lully, and they all would say "ahhhh," because they were responding. "Ahh, that's so nice." It was that sort of a thing. It was a tremendous experience.

And, of course, there were also the typical audiences—you know, European-trained—who waited after you finished to applaud. But it was just a tremendous experience, with an audience that had not previously been told what they should do, and how they should respond.

That's why, for instance, the State Department said, "Sing anything you want to sing. All we want to make sure is, that you have represented on the

I was sitting in a session with Pablo Casals, the great 'cellist, during the latter part of his life. We were working on the 'St. Matthew Passion,' singing and talking about various things, and all of a sudden he stopped, and he looked at us. And he said, 'Aren't we fortunate to be musicians?' I'll never forget the look on his face. That was international communication.



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program songs by American composers, as well as the European repertoire.” Well, there was no problem about that, because just one group of Spirituals would take care of that. But I did both. I used to do a group of American songs, like Copland, folksongs and things, and then Spirituals as well. And I must say, that I can’t think of any country I visited, in which Spirituals did not evoke the greatest response.

Fidelio: When you did your first concert at Town Hall in New York City, I understand that one of the things you did that was groundbreaking at the time, was to include a Spiritual at the top of the program, rather than putting them at the end.

I believe that you did a comparison between the spiritual “A City Called Heaven” and, I believe, a Twelfth-century—

William Warfield: Yes, Thirteenth-century, a *Conductus*, it is called.

Someone asked me about that last night, because they said, “Well, you know, Mr. Warfield, I was of the impression that Paul Robeson had done that with his program, and started off with Spirituals,” which was before me, and I said, “Yes.”

The difference was this. The Classical format is to start out with the Baroque period, in which you have Handel and Bach, and pre-Handel, and all of that. And then you have a group of *lieder*, in which you do the Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and all of that. And then, in the middle of the program, there’s usually an opera aria, which is usually in Italian. Then you come back and you do America, and you end up with Spirituals—if you were Black you ended with Spirituals, not necessarily everybody did that. But it was usually something that was native or belonged to the United States, or something like that.

Now, what I did was this. I decided that I wanted to make the first group a religious group, and I called it, “Songs of the Believer.” And in that group, I put Schütz’s “Eile mich Gott zu eretten,” which was German, pre-Bach; I went back and got a little *Conductus* of

Perotin, who was the organist at Notre Dame back in the Thirteenth century. I got a *Kol Nidre*, a Jewish arrangement of the *Kol Nidre*, I don’t remember who did it. I did a setting of the 150th Psalm by Monteverdi. And *in that group*, I put a traditional American Negro Spiritual. *That* was what was different, the fact that I programmed that in the first group, with all of these other things.

And the reason I did that, was this. We were speaking of the internationality of music, and back in the Thirteenth century, in Latin, Perotin said [*sings*]: “Homo vidi que pro te passior si es dolor sicut, sicut cor passior . . .” And then you have [*sings Spiritual*]: “I am a poor pilgrim of sorrow, I’ve roamed through this wide world alone. . . .” That’s the same thing, yet they’re centuries apart. And that was what Sylvia was mentioning last night, she still talks about it. It was the first time anybody included a Spiritual, and it *matched* something that was written back in the Thirteenth century.

Fidelio: We should just indicate that you’re speaking of Sylvia Olden Lee, who is one of the great masters of the playing and arrangement of Spirituals.

I want to ask another question, while we’re on the topic. You mentioned the spontaneous response you would get from people, and you’ve just shown us an example of the identity of the content of the music, despite the fact that the forms, or the languages, at least, may be somewhat different—the “clothing” may be a little bit different.

But could you say something also about what you think the work is that goes into this? For example, how one accurately delivers, declaims, a Spiritual, or another song? I know you’ve done a lot of work on different components of language, and how they directly contribute to doing a song well.

William Warfield: Let me say something about that, and then I would like to tell you about an experience I had once with Dr. Robert Nathaniel Dett, when I was a youngster. As you know, he got one of his degrees at the Eastman School of Music, and during that time, he formed a choir, and I was a teenager

in Dr. Dett’s choir. For instance, I learned “Listen to the Lambs” from him. I’ve done that so many times, and performed it with groups, I know exactly what he expected of it. And, the many times that I’ve conducted that with groups, I still do it just as Dr. Dett taught me.

But, basically, let me first say this. Number one, there is a *great deal* of learning and development one has to do with the voice as a technique, to know *how* to use the voice. Then, there’s a great deal of *learning* one has to do with languages, so that if you’re going to do *lieder* and opera and things like that, you know what you’re doing. These are mechanical things that have to precede your being able to even utter a sound, if you’re going to be in Classical music.

Now, once that is accomplished, and you know languages, and you know how to use your voice and it’s strictly under your control, when it gets back to the projecting or the making of music, there’s no difference in doing a Spiritual or a German *lied*. You learn all of the technique of *doing* languages and using your voice, but when it comes down to so-called nitty-gritty in performing, the performance approach is the same.

I’ll tell you why I discovered this, how I became aware of this. I was a youngster, I was about eighteen years old, and I did a radio show, and Dr. Dett listened to it, and I came to his studio the next day, and I said, “Dr. Dett, how was it?” and he said, “Young man, it was very fine, very fine. But what did *you* think about it? How did you think you did?” I had done a German piece, a French piece; I ended up with a Spiritual, and I started with Handel. And I said, “Well, of course, the Handel and things, I think that went very well. Of course there’s nothing new to me with that, because we sing ‘The Messiah’ and all of that in church all the time. It was quite natural.” And then I said, “People told me that my German was excellent, that my pronunciation was fine and that they liked this, they liked that, and the French song, my French teacher told me that the pronunciation was beautiful and I did everything right.” And so on and so forth.



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I've had youngsters come to me, who were singing Gospel with the Black choir. Once I get them to sing in the Classical medium, I say, 'If you're going to have this feeling in Gospel, why can't you have it in Bach?' And they realize, 'There's something to that!'

William Warfield sings with soloists (right to left): Robert McFerrin, Kehembe (Valerie Eichelberger), Detra Battle, George Shirley, and the Rev. James Cokley of the Schiller Institute, "National Conservatory of Music Movement" conference, May 1994.

And he said, "What did you think about singing the Spirituals?" I said, "Oh, when I got to the Spirituals, I was at home." And he said, "Hhhmm. Young man, when you feel the same way about your German and your French, as you feel about that Spiritual, you'll be an artist."

I looked at him, and *boing!*, something went off in my head. And to this day, I can sing Schubert's "Wohin?," and tell all about the brook in German, and turn right around and sing a Spiritual, and there's basically *no* difference in making music, whether I do it in the Spiritual, or in the German *lied*.

And *that* is all a part of this thing I called the universality of music. That is when your spirit comes out, and your spirit shines. All right, I can sing in German, I can sing Italian. I can do this. But when it comes right down to it, if I am singing an aria, and want to sing

"Heavenly Aida"—[sings] "Celeste Aida . . .,"—as the tenors do in *Aida*, it's the same thing as singing, "Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?" *It's the same basic emotion.* You're expressing your emotion through music. And when you discover that, music is on such a plane that you can sit by yourself sometimes, and make yourself weak just singing—because it's coming out of you, it's part of you.

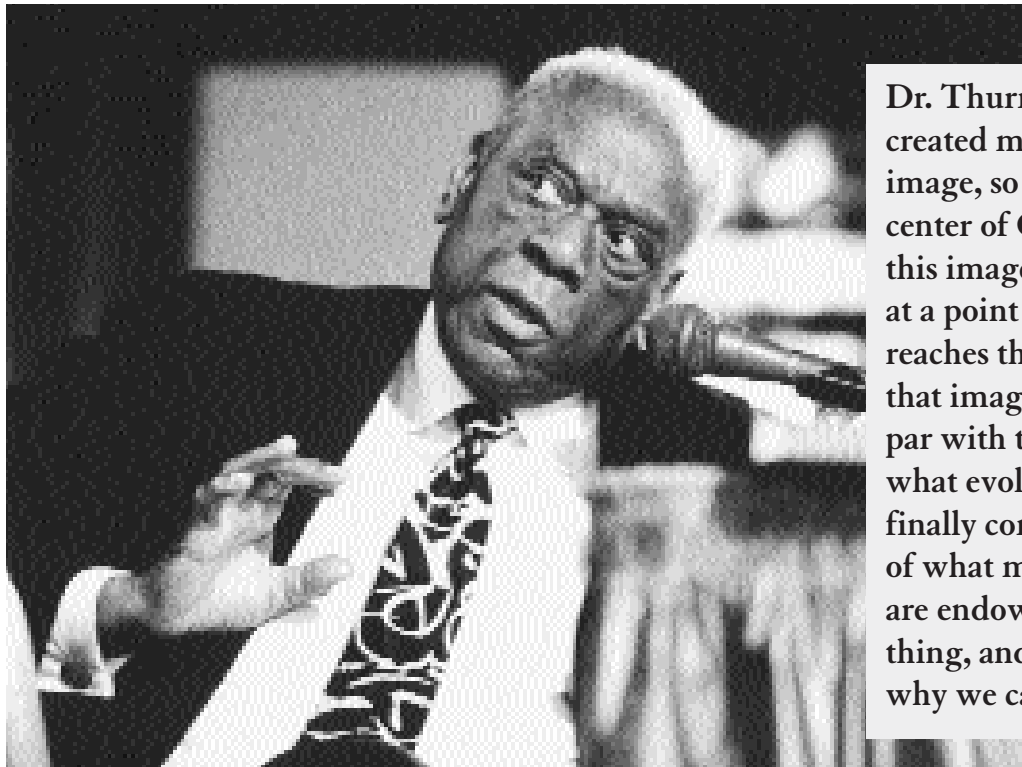
Fidelio: I've had the pleasure of seeing a few of your master classes with the youngsters who are learning to sing, and I know that you have emphasized to them a great deal, *what* they're saying, *what* they're communicating, getting across a point, and that they must utilize the prosody which is embedded in the language, be it English, or German, or French, to bring out the meaning, and make an artistic presentation. Perhaps

you could give us an example of that. I know one wonderful thing you have done, is in some of the Spirituals that have a repeated phrase, where you need to really bring this out in certain ways. **William Warfield:** Yes. This is also true with *anything*. In German, for instance, where you have phrase after phrase after phrase repeated, and verse after verse, as in Schubert sometimes—you know, in "Ungeduld," and things like that.

The idea is, to see, that when you do something each time, it has a different emphasis, or a different accent, or expanding the thought. For instance, I have a lot of fun doing Margaret Bond's Spiritual, "Didn't It Rain?":

"Children, didn't it rain?
Oh my Lord, didn't it, didn't it, didn't it?
Oh my Lord, didn't it rain?"

And she does that all the way



Dr. Thurman once said, ‘God created man in His own image, 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.’ So that’s what evolution is about! Man finally coming into the image of what man is to be. All of us are endowed with that basic thing, and music is it. That’s why we can communicate.

through. And I get a big kick out of seeing how many times I can say “Didn’t it?” differently than the time before. There are so many possible ways you can say “didn’t it, didn’t it, didn’t it”; and if every time you say “didn’t it, didn’t it, didn’t it” in a monotonous way—well, I mean, get off that box! Do something with it! Get involved with “didn’t it.” See how many different ways you can say “didn’t it?” It’s that kind of thing.

And this is true with a little thing like, for instance, the “Wohin?” of Schubert, where he says,

“Wohl aus dem Felsenquell . . .
Ich hört’ ein Bächlein rauschen,
Wohl aus dem Felsenquell.”

And then sometimes it’s,

“Hinunter und immer weiter,
Und immer dem Bache nach,
Und immer frischer rauschte,
[sings forte:]
Und immer frischer rauschte,
Und immer heller der Bach.”

It’s the same thing. He’s repeating “und immer . . .” and always it’s fresh, and you hear the brook speaking louder,

then you repeat that, and you say it differently. And this is to me the essence of your projecting and your making something of music. It’s just not reading off something.

Yesterday, we had a wonderful session having to do with the Spiritual, and Sylvia came out after the students had done it, and then we got them to loosen up. And we said, “Let it all hang out.” All right. This was “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” [sings, piano:] “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, comin’ for to carry me home, Swing low, sweet chariot, comin’ for to carry me home.” Now the next time, [changes accent on words] “Oh, Swing low, sweet chariot [forte:] comin’ for to carry me home, Oh, swing low, sweet chariot—.”

All of that is possible, when you let yourself go, just let it come out as your expression of what you’re saying, and not simply what’s on the paper. “Now I’m going to do what *I* feel like I want to express in singing this.” [sings] “I looked over Jordan and what did I see? [piano:] Comin’ for to carry home. Ohhhh, a band of angels comin’ after me, [forte:] comin’ for to carry me home.” All of that, is my expression of

what I feel about what I’m singing, and you’re not going to find it on the paper.

This is what we were doing yesterday, and the audience just responded like crazy, because they recognized what was happening. Music was *expressing* itself, not just being sung.

Fidelio: I wanted to say about that experience yesterday, that what you hit on in your description, is what I’d call the essence of real education.

William Warfield: That’s right. That’s the whole thing.

Fidelio: Because it’s re-creation. You have to re-create the idea inside the person’s mind. And certainly, in your experience, from what you’re telling us, when you heard someone like Roland Hayes, or Marian Anderson, this was what they were doing.

Could you tell us, if you had any one criticism or one suggestion to make about today’s singers and the state of music today, what would it be? The one or two major things you would wish to see different today.

William Warfield: Not so much different, as I would like youngsters nowadays to expand their interest beyond just

what they like, and become interested in other forms.

For instance, in the churches now, the big thing is Gospel. Gospel, Gospel, Gospel. And you'll find youngsters have sometimes put blinders on. If it isn't Gospel, they're not interested.

I always admonish them to look further: "That's wonderful. Do what you are doing, but be aware that there are other things musically around, and don't just close your eyes or your ears to them. If you open up your ears and listen, you might find the same thing in this piece that Bach wrote, that you're relating to in the Gospel you're singing." And that's the one thing I try to convey. And most of the time it works.

A lot of times I've had youngsters come to me, who were singing Gospel with the Black choir, and so forth, but they were also interested in Classical music. They had come because they were interested in Classical music. And they would know *exactly* what I'm talking about, because, within the framework of what they were doing in the Classical medium, they could see a connection with what they're doing in the Gospel.

Once I get them to sing it, and look at it, I say, "If you're going to have this feeling in Gospel, why can't you have it in Bach?" And they look at me very strangely for a minute, and they realize: "You know, there's something to that." If you want to say, like the Roland Hayes thing [*sings*],

"Bist du bei mir,
geh' ich mit Freude,
zum Sterben und zu meiner Ruh,
zum Sterben und zu meiner Ruh"

—where Bach is singing, "If thou art with me, I will go to my death and my peace, if thou art with me"—I say to them, "isn't that the same expression that you're saying, when you sing, 'God stay by me'?" [*sings*] 'If the Lord goes with me, I will go" It's the same emotion. And they think about it for a while, and they say, "Dr. Warfield, that's very, very good." And their Bach is not going to be the same any more after that, once they discover that.

Fidelio: There is one other thing I want to ask, about the arts and the support of the arts, whether we're talking about the Federal government, or we're talking about private funding. I wanted you to make some comment, because, as you know, Antonin Dvořák came here in 1892, and tried to start a National Conservatory of Music at the time, but didn't get the necessary financial support to make that really go. And often, this question comes up, but it's bandied about in a lot of red tape.

What would you say would be the proper mission of a National Conservatory of Music, or of support in some national way for the promotion of the arts—particularly, Classical music forms as we've been discussing them?

William Warfield: In Europe, of course, this is a tradition. The national governments, like Germany, France, Italy, they think *first* of financing the arts, and then the other things come after it. It's just a foregone conclusion, it's so basic to them. But in this country—that's why we're in the shape we're in with education. The first thing we start cutting out, is things that have to do with art, language, music: "Oh, those are not necessary."

In some way or other, we have got to get our legislatures and our national Congress, our local legislatures, to come to recognize that, first, "Seek ye the kingdom of Heaven, and then all these things shall be added to you." Because they seek the other things, and let the kingdom of Heaven go, you see.

Music is the kingdom of Heaven. Education is the kingdom of Heaven. But on our priority list, they'll vote in thousands of dollars to make sure that the football team gets equipment, and then won't give you a thing to buy music for the music department. It's their thinking; and I don't know how that's going to change unless people like you and me, and the work you are doing at the Schiller Institute, just make people aware that these things that we're cutting out, are *basic*. The other stuff is not basic; these things are basic, you know. *This* comes first. Until we get that kind of thinking, we're not going to change it.

Several years ago, when the California state legislature was about to make some cuts in education, I was asked, as an artist, to appear before the legislature out there. And one of the things that I centered on when I spoke to them, was, *forget* that it's art. Just think financially. I said, "Supposing these kids don't have any music. How much money will you lose from that?" They never thought of it that way. *This is a booming industry*. And if you don't educate people to play music, and you don't educate people to know how to sing, what's going to happen to the record industry? What's going to happen to just any theater in which you have to have background music? Or the movies, where you have to have background music, and composers to write it? Where are they going to learn to do this? I said, "You are attacking a financial structure which won't exist if you don't train people to do it."

They understand that kind of thing; they see where I'm coming from. Put it on this basis: Look, this is money in the bank. What are you doin', cuttin' it off? Somebody's got to learn to do this. And then, maybe, that will make them say, "Oh, yeah, I see what you mean."

Fidelio: We only have a few more minutes, Dr. Warfield. Is there anything you'd like to say in summary, or anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to convey to people?

William Warfield: I didn't realize the time was passing so quickly. I'm always at a loss when someone asks me to sum up. How can we sum up what we've talked about this morning? It's just so many things.

But I think, basically: The one thing I would like to leave with the young people is, don't have blinders on your eyes. Open up your ears, listen, find out what's going on around you, and be aware. Choose then what you like to do, but also be aware of all the *boundless* possibilities of wonderful things that are going on out there, that you don't want to miss out on.

Fidelio: Dr. Warfield, thank you so very much for talking with us today.