

THE SCIENCE OF MUSIC



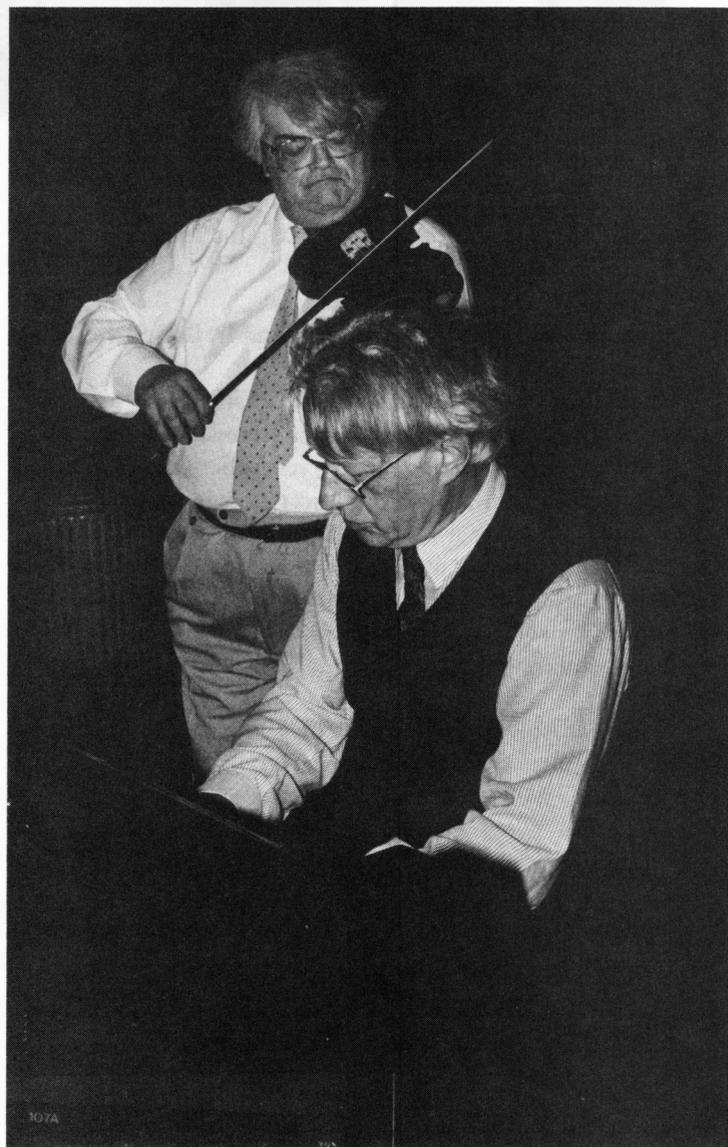
INTERVIEW / Norbert Brainin

‘LaRouche drew my attention to the scientific side of music’

Fidelio: Professor Brainin, in forty years with the Amadeus Quartet and now the Amadeus Trio, you did hundreds of recordings and concerts all over the world. Why have you come from Europe just for this special June 6 concert in Washington?

Brainin: I have come to draw attention to the imprison-

Norbert Brainin was the first violinist with the famed Amadeus Quartet until the 1987 death of violist Peter Schidlof. This interview was conducted by Kathy Wolfe and Hartmut Cramer in Washington, D.C. on June 6, 1990, the day that Brainin, together with pianist Günter Ludwig, performed a concert featuring Mozart's Sonata in E-flat major, K. 481; Brahms' Sonata in A major, Op. 100; and Beethoven's Sonata in G major, Op. 96. Brainin also demonstrated the Saraband and Double from J.S. Bach's unaccompanied violin Partita No. 1, both at today's prevailing higher tuning, and at the Classical pitch of C=256. The concert was recorded by National Public Radio.



Violinist Norbert Brainin and pianist Günter Ludwig.

EIRNS/Kathy Wolfe



Brainin with Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche.

EIRNS

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Brainin: It was on my part a kind of rejoicing about the events that happened in the German Democratic Republic and other parts of Eastern Europe. It was an inspiration how the people of the G.D.R. conducted themselves in this revolution. It was like a breath of fresh air! I wanted to show my appreciation, and the Schiller Institute very kindly arranged this concert.

ment of Mr. Lyndon LaRouche, to the injustice of it all, to help in this way, and to cheer up his friends in their fight for his release.

Fidelio: How long have you known Mr. LaRouche, and how did you come to know him?

Brainin: I came to know Mr. LaRouche actually through the music. We used to talk music together, and he drew my attention to the scientific side of music, namely, the tuning, which most people just take for granted, the way it is, or use it in an arbitrary manner. He pointed out that there is a *science* to this tuning, which is based on the human voice, and this puts an entirely new concept into our contemporary musical understanding.

Fidelio: And what do you think about the fact that he’s in jail under such circumstances?

Brainin: Well, he’s obviously innocent, and it is very obvious to people like me that the reason for his imprisonment is political.

Fidelio: Isn’t this ironic in light of the freedom revolt in Eastern Europe?

Brainin: Yes it is rather, it is as though the shoe were on the other foot!

Fidelio: You also gave a concert in Berlin, for the people of Berlin, in December 1989. Can you tell us why, and more about it?

Fidelio: You left Austria in 1938. Why?

Brainin: Because of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, of which I was one. I came to England. I was very lucky to come to England, because I was supposed to go to England to study with Carl Flesch in that year; but the fact that I managed to get to London under the circumstances of the Anschluss was a miracle, really, to come to a strange country where there were teachers such as Flesch and later Max Rostal to teach me. Imagine if I had not had this great luck, to be able to go where I did. I would probably not have become a musician.

Fidelio: The Amadeus Quartet you later founded has become known for interpreting especially the German masters such as Beethoven. What was your view about German music during this crucial time?

Brainin: This was *the* Classical music, German or not German, that’s not the point! When we speak of Beethoven—you say German composers like Beethoven—there are no German composers like Beethoven really, because Beethoven is so far above—I have the greatest difficulty when thinking of Beethoven’s music, to think of him as a German composer! Because he’s so far above—so universal!

The fact is that even the English, who were fighting against Germany in the last war, adopted the well-known motif of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony as their time signal on the radio, which was ta-ta-ta tá! ta-ta-ta tá!

And those who worked in the underground armies

of Europe, their motto was also this ta-ta-ta tá! It was all Beethoven!

You don't have to be German to be for Beethoven, or for Schiller! Actually, when I come to think of what is really German, I don't think of Mozart, I don't think of Beethoven, I don't think of Haydn, not even of Brahms—but, of Mendelssohn! Mendelssohn is for me real German music, which is of a period which was looking forward, a period of German revolution, really, looking forward—*Zuversicht* [self-confidence]. It's only in Mendelssohn real German, established German! But Beethoven is a different thing altogether.

Fidelio: You said there is something universal in Bee-

'When we played quartets, I was always the one who wanted to play higher and higher! But it is only when you get down to 432Hz that it really hits the nail on the head, and you suddenly realize, *this is correct!*'



Examining instruments in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution.

thoven's music, which speaks to all mankind? Can you elaborate on that?

Brainin: Yes, it is the love and propagation of freedom, really, of which there was none, when Beethoven lived, when Mozart lived. It is in everything which Beethoven did—it was *always* freedom! The Eroica [Beethoven's Third Symphony] was supposed to be about freedom. You know he dedicated this to Napoleon, then changed his mind and tore up the dedication [when Napoleon crowned himself emperor], but it was still revolutionary, and forward-looking, and freedom-loving. So was the Ninth Symphony. This is exactly it!

Fidelio: What was the image of man of a composer such as Beethoven?

Brainin: Obviously he thought of man as made in the image of God, as is traditional in the Bible, from the Jewish and Christian idea of God and man. He was absolutely imbued with this concept, and he regarded himself as working in this direction, he regarded himself as working for God.

Fidelio: Please tell us a little about how you founded the Amadeus Quartet. Where were your colleagues; this was war!

Brainin: Yes, it was war. It started in internment, actually; we were interned. The British government in their wisdom decided to intern all German refugees, of which I was one.

Fidelio: Most of them were Jews?

Brainin: Most, but not all. I know quite a number who were not. But Jewish or not Jewish, there was not one spy amongst them, not one Nazi. Not one! Or traitor, not one of the German-speaking ones.

I met Peter in internment, and we made friends, and then later on we were parted and came to different camps. And Peter met Siegmund Nissel there.

I was released first, because the government put out a White Paper in which certain categories of people were delineated to be released, and one of them was if you were under eighteen, which I was at the time, so I was released without any further ado. But nevertheless I spent two and a half months in internment, and my colleagues were there just over a year. They wanted to get rid of them. The category under which Peter and Siggie [Nissel] were released was "eminent artists" or something, which they clearly were not—they were hardly out of school—but it sufficed, and they were released under this heading.

Fidelio: How did you meet the 'cellist of the quartet?

Brainin: The 'cellist's wife, Susan Rosza, is Hungarian; she also studied with Flesch and then with Max Rostal. She wasn't his wife then; they were engaged, and it was through her that we met Martin.

Fidelio: You said you wanted to come to support Mr. LaRouche and protest the fact that he's in jail. Wasn't there also some special musical reason for this Washington concert?

Brainin: Yes, the specific reason was to play this concert in the scientific tuning which was really brought into being again, resuscitated if you like, by Mr. LaRouche, and which is scientific because it is based on the *Beschaffenheit* [constitution] of the human voice.

At first I was not convinced of this at all! What convinced me really was, in the summer of 1988,

Mr. LaRouche came to visit me at my house in Italy, and after lunch I asked him to come to the music room, and I played Bach for him. Then Mr. LaRouche asked me to try and tune down my violin to the level of 432Hz [the tuning of A when C is tuned to 256Hz], and play some of it again.

Fidelio: What was it that you played?

Brainin: It was the *Adagio* from Bach's G minor Sonata (No. 1) and I also played some of the Saraband of the D minor Suite.

Fidelio: Why did you choose these pieces?

Brainin: They are very good to hear and to play, and they show up the polyphony. I played at the lower tuning, and I realized suddenly, "This violin sounds much better! It resonates, and the tone blooms, and the bow takes the strings better, and the notes ring. Indeed, everything about playing is facilitated in some way, which makes for better expression and interpretation."

Fidelio: So, you discussed it.

Brainin: Yes, we discussed it, and the Schiller Institute took this up and organized a few concerts for me, together with a pianist, in this lower tuning, which is not very easy to do, because it's very difficult to find a piano, and indeed a piano tuner who will do this, because from the standpoint of a professional musician, it's not pragmatic to do.

But we did it, nevertheless, and it's been very successful, always, people like it, although they may not notice the difference. And indeed after I play for a while, I forget about the tuning, I don't think about the tuning, I just think about how to play.

But if you compare, you will see that there are certain advantages to playing Classical music particularly at this lower level of tuning, which was stipulated by Giuseppe Verdi for the performance of his operas, and which is *exactly* right for the human voice.

I admit that when we played quartets, I was always the one who wanted to play higher and higher and higher! It was Peter who wanted to play lower, never as low as 432—his ideal was 440, which is about as low as anybody goes these days, and which is better, yes, but it is only when you get down to 432 that it really hits the nail on the head, and you suddenly realize, "Aha! This is right! *This* is correct! It feels right!"

Fidelio: Do you think it is just a matter of taste or convenience, what pitch we use for Classical music? Or is there some science necessary for the pitch of Classical music?

Brainin: Well, the scientific principle is really the human voice, and also, these instruments. For instance, I helped to do a scientific experiment in Cremona, with the help of Dr. [Bruno] Barosi, which showed conclusively that the violin which I used, which was a Stradivarius, sounded undoubtedly better at the lower tuning than at the higher tuning. There were more overtones, more resonance, more of everything that you expect to hear when you make music, at the lower tuning, than at the higher tuning. Quite undoubtedly. This is real proof. This experiment can be checked up on. You have the diagrams and the graphs and everything. It is quite self-explanatory.

Fidelio: You usually use this same Bach piece when you play at the lower and higher tuning. So is it that you not only want to show that it's more beautiful, but also because you want to make some sort of a scientific experiment with your concerts?

Brainin: I would not call it scientific at all, because we never measure anything in that. But what I did at various public concerts was to try and show people the difference and let them judge for themselves, without showing the scientific background really. The scientific background is usually pointed out in the program. What I'm doing is merely to let people judge for themselves which they prefer.

Usually the judgment is overwhelmingly for the lower tuning, but it is by no means unanimous. I understand that it is advantageous for the recording purpose to play higher, because the sounds register better this way, and this is probably the real reason why the pitch has gone higher, and higher, and higher, and higher.

But the higher pitch affects the interpretation of Clas-

‘One has to know and see in one’s mind’s eye. I am not a scientist myself, but I can see how the science works, and I can see what has to be done in order to do justice to this scientific element in the music.’



EIRNS/Philip Ulanowsky

Brainin and Ludwig relax after a Boston concert.

sical music, particularly with the strings, because the higher tuning means that more pressure is exerted onto the instruments, and your bowing is different, you have to press more, in fact the bow, generally speaking, goes more quickly when you tune high; therefore, you tend to play faster than you would even like to! But when you tune lower, you are inspired to play slower, which is good for some things, of course, because your articulation is greater and the clarity is greater this way. It *does* affect the interpretation.

Fidelio: Kepler wrote that the musical system has some principles which are in harmony with the natural, physical laws of the solar system. What do you think of this idea?

Brainin: I would say that the idea is obviously correct. Music is made by the composers of the Classical period who certainly have this principle in their veins, but I’m not sure whether they have actually studied it in a scientific way, I would not know about that. But in general, I would say “yes” to your question.

Fidelio: There are distinctions between Classical music

and modern music. Is one distinction that these Classical principles cannot be found in modern music?

Brainin: Yes, that is definitely so. In some, maybe, but by and large, no, their principles, if they have principles, are different from the Classical ones, and may or may not be in keeping with the laws of the universe. Some people feel this. With me it is a feeling, I have a feeling, but I am not trained in a scientific manner to pronounce upon it or to tell what the difference is exactly.

Fidelio: But the way you play music, it shows!

Brainin: It certainly does! I hope it does!

Fidelio: Can you say, then, that music is not a matter of feeling or of sentiment, but a matter of principles?

Brainin: Yes, it’s a matter of principles and of know-how or awareness of these principles. Of course, you do have to feel it—that is how it manifests itself, in feeling. But when you do it, you have to do it according to certain principles; you have to know certain proportions, when you phrase a phrase, you have to know how this phrase is situated in the larger context of the whole work. All these things one has to know and see in one’s mind’s eye. My job as an interpreter is to see that.

I am not a scientist myself, but I can see the science, how it works, and I can see how, what should be done to bring it out, what has to be done in order to do justice to this scientific element in the music. I do know, yes. But I would not be able to talk about it in a scientific manner.

I know that some people *can* talk about it in a scientific manner, in particular, Lyndon LaRouche. He can certainly talk about it in a scientific manner, and I appreciate this greatly, but I myself cannot.

Fidelio: You prefer playing?

Brainin: Yes, I play, and I’m very happy to say that Mr. LaRouche seems to like my playing, so he must think that I do things correctly, according to his scientific mind.