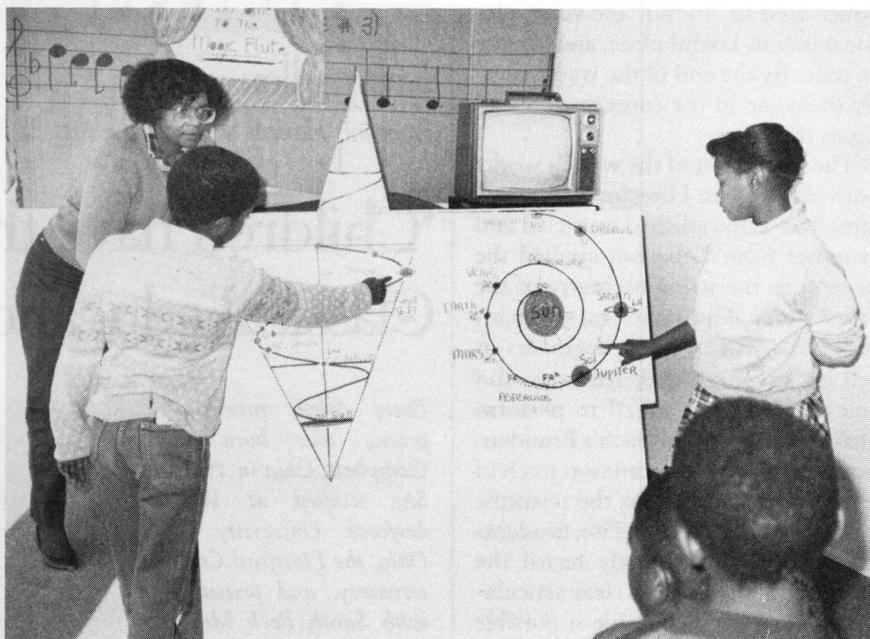


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Schiller Institute Midwest coordinator Sheila Jones teaches scientific principles of musical composition to Chicago schoolchildren. Jones toured Jordan in February.

Scientific Musical Tuning Comes to the Arab World

During the first week of February, Sheila Jones, regional coordinator of the Schiller Institute in the American Midwest, travelled to Amman, Jordan, on the invitation of the National Music Conservatory, where she presented the basic outlines of the Schiller Institute's *Manual on the Rudiments of Tuning and Registration*.

The visit could not have occurred at a more opportune moment, as Jordan is embarking on a pioneering project, launched by Her Majesty Queen Noor, to teach children music, not only in the conservatory, which was founded for that purpose in 1986, but in the school system as a whole. As a brochure of the National Music Conservatory/Noor Al Hussein Foundation details, the Conservatory has a special task to help fulfill Jordan's commitment "to develop a literate and skilled music community capable of responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century." The Conservatory has rapidly grown from a

string program with three Jordanian teachers and forty-five students (between six and twelve years old), to an institution with six programs, 300 students, and thirty-seven members of the faculty.

Bel Canto Method

Mrs. Jones presented the basic concepts of the *bel canto* method, demonstrating the scientific basis for tuning at $C = 256 \text{ Hz}$, and illustrated, through well-known Classical pieces, the way in which higher tuning distorts the musical significance of the composer's ideas. Most importantly, Mrs. Jones established the primacy of the singing voice in all music, not only theoretically, but in practice, by leading the students, teachers, and parents to discover their own singing voices.

Three public presentations during the week were devoted to this aspect of the work, in which Mrs. Jones used video tapes and other audio-visual aides to show how higher tuning violates the natural laws of the human

singing voice, as well as the laws of Classical composition.

Music for All Children

In sessions with schoolteachers, the focus was on pedagogy for the very young. Jordan's national music program foresees the introduction of music from kindergarten on, in all schools, which means that kindergarten teachers who have not heretofore had to teach music, must be trained very rapidly. Drawing on the experience of the Schiller Institute in building children's choruses in Mexico and in the United States, Mrs. Jones emphasized the fact that, since all music is based on the singing voice of the young boy soprano (as the famous Florentine *bas reliefs* of Luca della Robbia document), it should be most natural for children to learn to sing.

When the teachers present pointed out that those children who do sing in Jordan generally sing with a "white" voice, closer to a shout than to music, Mrs. Jones introduced the basic tech-

INTERVIEW

Betty Allen

President, Harlem School of the Arts

'Children have the right to Classical education'

Betty Allen, mezzo-soprano, was born in Campbell, Ohio in 1930. She studied at Wilberforce University of Ohio, the Hartford Conservatory, and privately with Sarah Peck More, Zinka Milanov, and Carolina Segre. Her opera debut took place in 1964 at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, in 1973 at the New York City Opera, and in 1974 at the Metropolitan Opera. Since 1979 she has been Executive Director and now President of the Harlem School of the Arts (H.S.A.) in New York, and teaches at the Manhattan School of Music and Curtis Institute. This interview was conducted by Kathy Wolfe on March 15, 1993.



niques used to “round” the voice, elevate it into its lawful place, and vibrate the tone. By the end of the week, literally everyone in the conservatory had begun to sing.

The high point of the week’s workshops came when Director Fakhoury, himself an accomplished musician and composer from Lebanon, applied the concepts to the string orchestra of the conservatory. The orchestra, which includes tots who are just beginners as well as accomplished students and their teachers, was asked to perform the first movement of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto at the common pitch of A = 440 Hz and then at the scientific tuning of A = 432 (C = 256). Students and teachers immediately heard the musical difference in the clear articulation of voices, which made it possible for each instrument to be heard.

To translate the point Mrs. Jones had been stressing all week with individual string students, Fakhoury had the orchestra “sing” its music. First, he asked the players to put down their instruments and sing their parts for the first movement. Then, he had them sing and play their parts at the same time. Finally, he had them play only, but continuing to “sing in the head.” The qualitative leap made by the orchestra through this exercise, performed at the lower tuning, was astounding. Students were thrilled, as the piece suddenly came alive. Most important was the fact that each orchestra member could fully hear, as a sovereign musical voice in dialogue with other musical voices, his or her own voice. This revolutionized the self-conception of each component.

Fakhoury seized on this feature, and commented, “At the higher tuning, every musician feels overshadowed by the first violin, which is dominant, whereas at C = 256, every voice is heard.” Transposing the musical fact into social terms, he added, “It is as if the lower tuning allowed everyone in the orchestra to play a crucial role, and to hear that this crucial role is grasped. Society,” he said, “is like an orchestra, in which each individual has a very important part to play.”

Fidelio: What’s your view of the Schiller Institute campaign to return musical tuning to C = 256 Hz, the lower “Verdi A”?

Allen: I’m very curious about it, my mind is open, I’m interested to know more about what the project will entail. I would never say “I don’t want to know.”

For example, one pianist, an accompanist at H.S.A. said, when I posed the idea of returning to the old lower pitch, “Do you know how much trouble this is going to cause? I don’t even want to hear this! I don’t want to read

‘All children have the right to a Classical education. It amazes me that African-Americans feel that if you have this kind of education, you are perverting your rights as a Black. No African fails to go to Oxford because he thinks it’s going to subvert his rights.’