

INTERVIEW



Courtesy of Dr. Charles Borowsky

Elizabeth Borowsky, Pianist

‘Music will help the children become whole’

A YOUNG ARTIST PERFORMS IN THE BALTIMORE SCHOOLS

The simple, but profound, presence of universal principles—of truth and justice—embodied in the concrete personality of Mrs. Robinson, gave these young children a glimpse of a higher ideal of human life—something that is

ventions “outside the curriculum,” that I interviewed Elizabeth Borowsky and her father, Dr. Charles Borowsky, on March 23, 1999, in Baltimore. What accounts for the similarity of excited responses by the students, to these two seemingly different interventions? My short answer is: The students respond to cultural optimism, whether it be produced by Classical music, or by living history.

—Lawrence Freeman

Music is *the* universal language. It’s like food—a nourishment for the intellectual body. Children have a natural curiosity about it. Could they do it too? How could they do it?

During February 1999, the Schiller Institute, with the help of teachers from the Baltimore schools, arranged for Amelia Robinson, Schiller Institute vice-chairman and an 87-year-old heroine of the Civil Rights movement, to address several locations as part of Black History Month events.* In four days, Mrs. Robinson spoke at six schools, reaching a combined audience of 1,100 students and teachers, primarily first through fifth graders. The effect on these students was electric. Hearing the Civil Rights leader, whose lifelong fight to end discrimination has spanned generations, produced an immediate and genuine excitement in the various audiences of children.

Listening to Mrs. Robinson recount some of her numerous experiences in fighting for Civil Rights in Alabama, the young children became momentarily changed—they were lifted out of the “here” and “now” of their immediate surroundings, to participate intellectually in a long span of real history.

* A full report of Mrs. Robinson’s tour appeared in the Spring 1999 issue of *Fidelio*.

sorely lacking in our culture today.

What would appear to be a totally different type of intervention into the Baltimore area schools has been the musical initiative of Dr. Charles Borowsky and his wife, Cecylia Barczyk, collaborators of the Schiller Institute, with the participation of their children, Elizabeth, Emmanuel, and Frances. Through various contacts and Classical music associations, they have arranged for Elizabeth, a pianist, and Emmanuel, a violinist, to perform at elementary schools in Baltimore City, Baltimore, and Hartford Counties, in front of small and large audiences. These performances, which last about twenty-five minutes, have also sparked excitement and inquisitiveness among the primarily inner-city audiences, who are rarely exposed to Classical music.

It was with a view of both these inter-

Fidelio: Elizabeth, you’ve been giving various concerts in the public school system around the Baltimore area—Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Hartford County. Could you tell us a little bit about how this came about?

Elizabeth Borowsky: This started when I was about seven years old, with me playing in concerts at the University, organized by the International Friends of the ‘Cello Association, for inner-city schools, and the students and teachers.

From there it escalated into eventually playing at public schools and private schools throughout these counties and cities.

Fidelio: And you’re how old now?

Elizabeth Borowsky: I’m fifteen.

Fidelio: So, you’ve been involved in giving these concerts for about eight years now. You were telling me earlier, that first you got involved in this through the International Friends of the ‘Cello Association, which your mother was involved in, and then from there, you and your mother came up with the idea that this would be a good

way of bringing this music to the city school system. And I understand that you and your brother have now played in about fifteen different schools in various city and county public schools.

What has been the reaction in these schools? You're performing before young children—I think you told me from the ages of second grade to fifth to sixth grade. And they're seeing you, who are also young, and your brother is eleven years old. So, how do they respond when they see two young children performing Classical music in their schools? And also, if you can remember, some of the pieces you played.

Elizabeth Borowsky: It's often a new feeling for them and something new to them. They might not have heard the music or seen musicians, and most likely haven't seen someone so young playing this music.

They are very responsive and very inquisitive, wanting to know more and more. Music is an international, *the* international, language, universal language. It's like food—a nourishment for the intellectual body. So they have a natural questioning and curiosity about this: how are we doing this? Could they do it too? How could they do it?

You asked some of the pieces we've played. We've played everything from Mozart piano sonatas, to Vivaldi and Bach violin concertos, to Gershwin preludes, to the "Bumblebee," and things like the "Happy Farmer," or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star"—things which are new, and things which are familiar.

Fidelio: When you perform these Classical pieces, this may be the first time that these children are hearing Classical music. Do they come forward and say "Gee, I'd like to play that instrument?"

Given the fact that this is new to them, in your opinion, is this something that they would want more of, if they had the opportunity?

Elizabeth Borowsky: Often, with adults and other people who are already

set in their ways, new is not good. And therefore, if you give them something new, they will try to ignore it, or they will find something wrong with it. But we find that with these children, when we go, they want new. They don't have any prejudice against new things, different things. And they look forward to having us come and they enjoy listening to us, at least from what I've heard.

After the concerts, we often hear a lot of "Neat!" and "I'd like to play that, too," and "Do you teach piano?" Or "I hope my mom can get me some piano lessons or violin lessons."



ERNS/Stuart Lewis

This was the largest Classical music concert in Washington, D.C., attended by the highest percentage of people under twenty. It was the concert with probably the greatest number of Black Americans attending. It shows that there is a need.

So, it's quite easy to see that they are enjoying it.

Fidelio: In the approximately one hour you are sometimes given—with audiences that range from 20 to 400, in libraries, in auditoriums, in classrooms—you say that you play music for about twenty-five minutes, which includes a couple of Classical pieces. What takes place in the rest of the time between you and the students?

Elizabeth Borowsky: Okay. I'd say

about two-fifths of the time is music, then another two-fifths would be about the music, about the composers, about the history of music, about our instruments. And the last fifth would be questions and answers. They want to know about us, and we want to know about them.

Fidelio: One thing you mentioned to me, was that you're planning to do a concert and seminar next year for high school students, which is an older group than the ones you've been playing for. And, in addition to the concert, you want to have a seminar, where you discuss the music,

Emmanuel Borowsky performs Vivaldi Violin Concerto in A minor, St. Thomas Boys Choir of Leipzig (Thomanerchor) concert, Washington, D.C., February 1998. Emmanuel's mother, cellist Cecylia Barczyk, is seated to his left.

and that you've been using somewhat as a model, the "Excellence in Education" seminar that was organized by the Schiller Institute and your father's agency Internurse in February 1998.

Could you tell me how you are using the ideas of that seminar, and this whole "Excellence in Education" concept? How that's affected your own thinking.

Elizabeth Borowsky: We've used a lot of the material which was provided, or which came out after, the "Excellence in Education Through Music" seminar and symposium held last year, February 1998, in our concerts and in our travels all around the world, in particular the

statement which my father made, "Everybody is Born a Genius." People respond very well to that, as well as to the report of how mice are influenced by music. And therefore, they can draw the conclusion that people are influenced by music as well.

Fidelio: Are you talking about material in *New Federalist* and *Fidelio*?

Elizabeth Borowsky: Right. In the *Fidelio* articles.

Fidelio: Now, I'd like to ask Dr. Charles Borowsky: In the beginning, this effort was designed to try to bring

schools. And we are now planning something more to raise the awareness among those decision-makers on the Board of Education, politicians, as well as other people responsible for the well-being of the Greater Baltimore society. And, therefore, we would like to have a festi-

and by yourself as a growing, accomplished pianist.

Could you tell us about some of your travels, some of the cities you've played in, and what some of your experiences have been around the world?

Elizabeth Borowsky: First of all, I've mainly traveled in North America, Europe, and Asia. The countries have included China, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Turkey, Germany, Poland, Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Great Britain, Canada, and

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here in the United States.

When we go to other countries, not only do we play music, but we try to find out more about the culture and about the people, to interact with them. And so, although we interact through our concerts and through the music, we often spend time doing other things—visiting places, visiting the people, going horseback riding, climbing mountains, to see a much larger view of everything—the whole picture, the whole idea of the country and the people.

Fidelio: You were telling me earlier that you think there's a real—I don't know if this is the right word or not—revival, or emphasis being placed on Classical music in the Asian countries, especially South Korea. Could you tell us about your experiences there, or what indications you have about the concern of these nations to promote Classical music, especially among children? What steps are they taking that you don't see going on, for example, in the United States, or elsewhere in the West?

Elizabeth Borowsky: First of all, we see a large involvement of the music with parents and teachers, and other people who can influence the children. The Koreans have a special term for the mothers—"fever mothers," because they are always bringing their children back and forth to music activities. "Fever," like when you're sick.

It seems as if their only purpose is to help their children to succeed, by pushing them to do well and excel in school



After concert, Elizabeth, Emmanuel, and their mother Cecylia Barczyk, pose with members of the Poole Gakuin Strings Club, Osaka, Japan, December 1998.

Classical music to the students, to the children, to the families of the Greater Baltimore Area. Have you succeeded in doing that? What steps are you taking and will you take to continue to bring these ideas and music to the students in the city?

Dr. Borowsky: Basically, what we have been doing, both through the Friends of the 'Cello as well through our association with the Baltimore Music Club and the Baltimore Music Teachers Association, was to respond to the growing needs among youngsters in this area. We have seen that upon listening to performances by Elizabeth and other musicians, the children desired more. And they were dissatisfied because they only got a little.

And therefore, we reach out to

val which will bring out Classical music, and prove and show how music has contributed to excellence in education.

Observing these children, and being a sort of scientist looking at the larger picture, I can see that creative people must have an environment and stimuli. And the stimuli will not come from blind watching of television, or games, or daily low-key consumption, but it must be stimulated by values which have made the society effective for centuries. And I do believe that music is one of them.

Fidelio: I'd like to ask Elizabeth some questions about your international travels, because you don't just play in Baltimore and Maryland, but, in fact, you've been in many cities all over the world, performing as part of various concerts,

and in anything else which they do. So the parents, especially the mothers in this case, are really trying to help their children, while here you often see—too often—see the parents letting their kids watch TV, and sending them off to let someone else do the job of bringing them up.

Fidelio: Are they, for example, teaching—is Classical music part of the curriculum in some of these Asian countries? Do you see more children playing Classical music? What has been the response to some of your concerts as a young American pianist playing over there?

Elizabeth Borowsky: Well, first of all, I know that they have many, many art schools, in which they teach the fine arts of dance, music, and art. And these are not just like the magnet schools here, but they are really pushing the students to do well.

You have, for instance, 300 piano teachers at one school.

Dr. Borowsky: The students sign up, and then if the teacher is effective, they will stay with it. If the teacher is not effective, they switch. And they are naturally eliminated.

Moreover, I think it's like a catalyst, Classical music—to awaken self-discipline for pursuing education, systematic education, because this is exactly what Classical music does. If a child doesn't practice, there's no progress, and so on and so forth. And so, one can see that the social planners, the educators, and most of the families, have somehow modelled themselves after the great achievement of Western cultures, particularly Germany and the United States.

However, nowadays, when we promote some kind of wrongly perceived multiculturalism, we eliminate—we distance ourselves from the achievements of Western Europe, or even of our own country, and we are going back to somewhere where we will end up on a dead-end street. And I think Asia, particularly Korea, and possibly also in Singapore or Thailand, even, are opening their minds through music.

Fidelio: Do you find that there's more interest in, let's say, for example, South Korea, or Thailand, or Indonesia, for

Classical music, than you find in the United States?

Elizabeth Borowsky: I think that the people there realize that music—though they don't have to become musicians—that the music will help the children and the people become whole.

Fidelio: And you find a great interest in the concerts you've given? I mean, do people have any reaction to the fact that you're a young American in Asia performing Classical music?

Elizabeth Borowsky: I think that the fact that we're young, is always something which attracts people, in Asia and all around the world. In Asia, because there are so many young artists, the fact that we're Americans probably makes a difference to them, because I don't think there are many Americans going there to play music.

Dr. Borowsky: Briefly, I think it's the perception of the function of Classical music. Again, nowadays, there's a trend to picture Classical music as elite, or as a music of the past, while in Asia, they see it as a tool for achievements, and not only in the past, but in the present. And they could see that well-educated people have a better understanding of different cultures because they are more open-minded, and as I spoke in Singapore at a meeting, they said that Classical music seems to open the people's minds to others—to different people, as languages do. If somebody knows more languages, he's more tolerant and more inclined to understand and look benevolently on other people.

So, it's probably also a tool which should be promoted in our society. And I think the Schiller Institute, or the committee which was created last year on the occasion of the Thomanerchor's visit to the United States, was an excellent example. People of various backgrounds were able to join together and to create an atmosphere which didn't last for only one day or night of the concert. By the way, this was the largest Classical music concert in Washington, D.C., attended by the highest percentage of people under twenty, and attended by people of various ethnic and racial backgrounds. It was the concert with probably the greatest number

of Black Americans attending.

So, it shows that there is a need. And it should not be portrayed as an elite, or as a racial matter, or as looking backwards, as European, but it should be something which is *human*; it's universal—it's a universal value. And since everybody in development needs a catalyst, we can not look for catalysts which kill people, but we should use something that is provable to be beneficial—and that is Classical music.

Fidelio: So you have found that, among young people, Classical music is a universal language, and that all people can understand it, and that there are no limitations or prejudices when it comes to who performs the Classical music, and that you have seen—

Elizabeth Borowsky: Well, as you can imagine, when we go to Korea and to Japan, we don't speak Korean and Japanese. So, the only way for us to communicate with these people, is through music. And somehow, it always works out. We see that these people are enthusiastic, and that they enjoyed the concert. And it doesn't even take words—just the feeling in the room can be really incredible. You can feel the atmosphere when the audience is interested, and is receiving the signals, and your intentions, which you are trying to send out.

Fidelio: What about your future plans? Do you plan on becoming a concert pianist?

Elizabeth Borowsky: I plan on becoming a professional concert pianist, and to continue what I've already started—bringing music to people of various backgrounds, of various musical abilities—to everyone, not just musicians. I'd like to continue to bring music to the school systems, to the retirement homes, and not just to the concert halls.

Fidelio: So, you think that Classical music belongs to everyone?

Elizabeth Borowsky: Yes. It's not something which only privileged people or higher-income people can have and enjoy.

Fidelio: Thank you, Elizabeth. And thank you, Dr. Borowsky.