

# Classical Music as Revolutionary Ideas, Not Entertainment

*The following is an edited transcript of a report given by John Sigerson, the Schiller Institute Music Director, on a class given by him in Manhattan on March 11, 2017. A video of the full class, titled “Motivführung 101: Introduction to the Haydn-Mozart Revolution” is available [here](#).*

**John Sigerson:** This is the first of two classes. In terms of the content, I wanted to find a way of introducing to many people who really have no musical background whatsoever the three major breakthroughs, conceptual breakthroughs, scientific breakthroughs, in the musical domain:

One, the Florentine *bel canto* discovery around the period of Nicholas of Cusa.

Second, Bach’s earthshaking discovery of the well-tempered domain of musical development, and

Third, the Haydn-Mozart revolution of *Motivführung*, with great attribution to Norbert Brainin, pointing that out and working with Lyn on that.

I started out with a presentation of a way of getting into that. I used the *cupola* of the *Santa Maria del Fiore* cathedral in Florence, and pointed out that, first of all, the incredible optimism that occurred even before Brunelleschi began to work on that, namely the de-



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*The dome of Florence’s Santa Maria del Fiore.*



Ricardo André Frantz

*Filippo Brunelleschi’s design for the dome used the principle of the catenary, to surmount the challenge of spanning the vast interior space of the cathedral.*

cision in 1367 by the Florentines, especially the main architect there, whose name is Neri di Fioravante, who also rebuilt the *Ponte Vecchio*, and he lived through the black death of that period. In 1367 he, along with the rest of the Florentines who were working on the cathedral, which had been begun in 1294, decided that they wanted to create something which *does not use flying buttresses*, because they considered the flying buttresses as being outdated and ugly, because it was something that was external to the idea of a perfectly balanced, beautiful church. And it was that idea of rejecting the idea of flying buttresses—and I showed a picture of those—that was the leap that allowed them to build this huge octagonal space, which they had no idea how they were going to bridge, but they knew that it had to be done according to *new physical principles*, exactly the same idea that Lyn developed in the SDI effort.

Then I pointed out the incredible breakthrough of Brunelleschi in using the non-mathematical curve in the construction of the Cathedral, not just one curve, but the entire structure is based on this idea of this non-mathematical curvature, and that this is the way that the entire building is harmonically organized, but not

according to whole number ratios, but according to a curvature which could not possibly even be described by whole number ratios. At that point I presented the *Nuper rosarum flores* motet that was composed by Guillaume Dufay for the March 25, 1436 consecration of the Cathedral. And I played that for people, and I pointed out that, really, Dufay's work was nowhere near being able to grasp the full implications of what Brunelleschi had accomplished, because of the fact that he was still stuck in the idea of the *cantus firmus*, which was very similar to the flying buttresses idea, an external support for musical development which was not actually integrated with the entire musical development.

I used that as a way of getting into the period of struggle to actually have a way of composing which is fully in harmony with Brunelleschi's breakthroughs. I won't go through everything here, but I presented an experiment which was done by Orlando di Lasso, which was published in 1600, called the *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, which is an experimental piece, where he is trying to develop the musical system by attempting to work on a system of modulation. But it's not really completely successful. And then I jumped; I mentioned John Bull and his work on fugues, and then skipped to J.S. Bach, very quickly, and I played for people the air from his *Orchestral Suite No. 3* performed by Wilhelm Furtwängler, where I showed that especially the bass line of that—I don't know if you're familiar with that one, but it's this beautiful air, which has this beautiful walking bass in the bottom, and I pointed out that even the bass line could not have been composed without the development of the well-tempered system.

I was throwing a lot of things at a lot of people: I'm sure a lot of it went above people's heads, but I wanted to play for people a lot of different examples to show this, and I think some people did get it.

Let me run through the other examples, and I think you can figure out what I'm doing. I played a very short bit of Norbert Brainin's presentation on *Motivführung* at Dolna Krupa, at the famous Dolna Krupa seminars, where he points out that the only person who ever un-



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Norbert Brainin (left), former primarius of the legendary Amadeus Quartet, gives a master class with young musicians in Dolna Krupa, Slovakia, Sept. 20-22, 1995.

derstood and resonated with this idea of *Motivführung* was you, Lyn. And then I played the two different Haydn pieces, one the String Quartet Opus 20, No. 2, which is before Haydn's breakthrough on *Motivführung*, and then a little bit of the Opus 33, No. 3, which shows this idea. And that made really quite clear, even with small amounts, the nature of Haydn's breakthrough with *Motivführung* that way. Then I followed that up playing a little bit of Mozart's "Dissonant" string quartet, and then moved to Mozart's motet *Ave verum corpus*, a little bit of discussion of that, and then counterposed that with *Heiliger Dankgesang* in Beethoven's Opus 132 string quartet, again playing little bits and then at the end a little bit of the Schubert Ninth Symphony, just pointing out the opening and counterposing Furtwängler's incredible performance of that with a not very incredible performance of that by John Eliot Gardiner.

That's the summary of it. Because we were doing this in the hotel room, I couldn't have any live music—the acoustics are terrible, there's no piano, so I relied solely on these examples, but next week we are going to hold it in a place where we can have some live examples, live demonstrations, and also go further into Florentine *bel canto* and to the questions of the well-tempered tuning. So we'll get into the C=256 question, which I broached, but didn't get into in much detail.

**LaRouche:** That is good!