

Yes we can

In the current uncertain climate, a reminder of how music can provide a source of inspiration on the world stage

I hope that Barack Obama will forgive me for using the headline phrase of his first public address as US president elect – but in listening to his most moving and hopeful words a little over two weeks after returning from the World Orchestra for Peace's Jerusalem concert in October this year, it occurred to me that this is exactly the message I try to convey to those who doubt that this unique orchestra can convey such a message – let alone achieve anything which might lead to a more peaceful world in the future. It is perhaps a fitting coincidence that as I write this, it is the evening of Armistice Day.

The seed of the idea which became the World Orchestra for Peace three years later was first sown in the mind of the late Sir Georg Solti at a surprise concert that I had organised with Valerie, Lady Solti and which took place at the invitation of the Prince of Wales at Buckingham Palace to celebrate Solti's 80th birthday in 1992. As the centrepiece of that concert, I had asked one musician from 13 of the greatest orchestras in the world which Solti had conducted in his 80th year to come together for an unconduted performance of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*. As Solti thanked them, he explained what had most struck him as he listened: 'I could not escape one very essential idea. Isn't it amazing that we musicians can produce a united Europe or more... even a united world. Why can't the politicians?'

It was his instinctive recognition of what is increasingly being proven by scientists experimenting in so many different spheres of psychology and physiology – that music of all kinds has a power to trigger emotions and move the hearts and minds of those who listen – in a way that no single written or spoken language appears to be able to achieve to the same extent. It is this extraordinary ability for musicians of a like mind to completely transcend the barriers of language and join together with one common aim – to show, through making beautiful music together in complete peace and harmony, that it is possible for representatives of more than 40 countries to listen to each other and to try to set an example for those who listen to and experience their concerts.

People are often surprised to learn that all these musicians and their conductor, Valery Gergiev, perform without fee when they come together as the World Orchestra for Peace. The same people often question how it is possible that I have (more often than not) 12 or more leaders of their own orchestras playing peacefully together in the first violin section alone, without anyone trying to assert his or her authority. I am not a little proud that I have been able to keep alive Solti's original idea – which was to unite players from around the world with just one hope – let's make music in peace and for peace. The sole criterion governing an invitation to play with the orchestra is that the musician must be a performer of the highest quality. But he or she must also accept that positions will be rotated (or exchanged) after every work – and therefore there is no room for even one player who says 'but I am the first concertmaster of my orchestra at home – so I must sit first desk'. In this way we ensure that there is no 'hierarchy' among the players – and therefore nothing to get in the way of trying to achieve Solti's original idea and dream.

Arguably most importantly in terms of what this orchestra can achieve in getting across its message of hope for peace is the invitation itself: the players are asked to be ready to perform not for any fee (they receive an expense reimbursement) but rather to join their wonderful colleagues from around the world united by a single hope and spirit – that of giving a message for peace and understanding between nations through their music-making.

Ask any player and they will give voice to the positive energy that binds and inspires them to get the message across and try to touch the heart and soul of all those listening. As we give more concerts, this reaches an ever



Charles Kaye, director, World Orchestra for Peace

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broader constituency – and those who have attended either concerts or rehearsals attest to the palpable spirit which comes across from the platform. From Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Yasser Arafat (both present at the first concert in 1995) to Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands (at the opening concert of

last year's Solti Memorial Tour), we are doing all we can to get our message across to leaders as well as to the members of our public. That message uses orchestral music-making as the endeavour to reach peace through listening, dialogue, communication, harmony and understanding.

Of course none of us is so idealistic as to believe that the concerts alone can actually bring peace to one or more of the places where they happen – but we do hope firmly that if we continue our efforts to mount these musical 'demonstrations of peace' around the world, that someone, somewhere – be they politicians or others in positions of influence – will actually get the message and go away from the concert thinking (as Solti so thought) 'if the musicians of this world can do it, why can't we...'. A naïve hope and dream, perhaps – but then I believe that the hopes and dreams of a better future for our children is a currency at least of equal universality to that of money all across the troubled world in which we live today.

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World Orchestra for Peace



Valery Gergiev and the World Orchestra for Peace at its October concert in Jerusalem