

PERSPECTIVE
'ODE TO JOY': EXALTING THE HUMAN SPIRIT
BY ROBERTA RIGNEY AND BARBARA CEDARBLADE
MARIN COUNTY, CALIF.

SGI-USA choruses across America will perform the 'Ode to Joy' this summer at festivals in every zone. Roberta Rigney and Barbara Cedarblade will sing the artistic masterpiece SGI President Ikeda describes as 'a sublime, eternal hymn that links all humanity as brothers and sisters.'

To herald in the new millennium, SGI-USA has resolved to have a grand performance of the "Ode to Joy" sung by 100,000 voices. SGI President Ikeda has spoken many times about the connection between this great musical work—penned by Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller and set to music by Ludwig Von Beethoven—and our Buddhist practice, our triumph over darkness as we enter the new millennium.

SGI-USA choruses across America will perform the "Ode to Joy" this summer at festivals in every zone. Audiences, as well as chorus members, will sing the artistic masterpiece President Ikeda describes as "a sublime, eternal hymn that links all humanity as brothers and sisters, a rousing paean of the people" (Feb. 5, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Schiller is thought by many to be one of the greatest Western European literary figures. He was preoccupied with the idea of freedom. In his youth, it was physical freedom that found its way into his works. Later in his life, it was spiritual freedom.

To understand Schiller is to understand the history of the French Revolution, which broke out in 1789. It was the culmination of a movement of people reacting against the authorities of the Catholic Church, who sought to dominate every phase of life, public and private. This Enlightenment movement was humanitarian, and skeptical of religious authority and dogma. Its leaders believed in the dignity of man and sought the betterment of humanity through education, with an emphasis on reason and knowledge gained through experience and science. This sounds strikingly like the creed of Soka Education.

While Schiller's early writings were tragedies, his later plays dealt with freedom of the soul, enabling a person to rise above the pressures of the material world. They show the hero struggling between the material world and an eternal ideal, striving to maintain spiritual integrity. This, in fact, has much in common with our practice of Buddhism. By challenging our struggles in daily life with our practice, we forge our faith. Through this internal human revolution within each of our lives, we find spiritual freedom based on a deep, indestructible and unshakable peace and confidence.

Schiller also had great hopes for the humanizing force of art. His writings and poetry were concerned with how art can help humanity attain inner peace, and how, through the "aesthetic education" of each individual, a more humane and compassionate society may develop.

Again, this parallels the values of the SGI and President Ikeda's emphasis on all-inclusive culture festivals and performing arts activity groups. He continually stresses that cultural exchanges help people to appreciate the dignity of their lives and achieve harmony between themselves and their environment.

Schiller wrote several important treatises on aesthetics. In 1785, just four years before the outbreak of the French Revolution, he wrote "An die Freude" ("To Joy"). The piece is a joyous exaltation of the bond shared by all humanity, which has its basis in eternal,

unlimited love. It is about world peace through individual happiness.

Through our Buddhist practice and study, we realize that all human beings have the world of Buddhahood within and are equal. We are able to transcend the barriers of discrimination and kowtowing to authority, not judging people through a system of vertical assessments. Rather, we can feel great joy in the glorious potential existing in every human being.