

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FOURTH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Riccardo Muti Zell Music Director
Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus
Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, September 18, 2014, at 8:00

Riccardo Muti Conductor
Camilla Nylund Soprano
Ekaterina Gubanova Mezzo-soprano
Matthew Polenzani Tenor
Eric Owens Bass-baritone
Chicago Symphony Chorus
Duain Wolfe Chorus Director

Beethoven

Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125
Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso
Molto vivace
Adagio molto e cantabile—Andante moderato
Finale: Ode to Joy

CAMILLA NYLUND
EKATERINA GUBANOVA
CHRISTOPHER VENTRIS
ERIC OWENS
CHICAGO SYMPHONY CHORUS

There will be no intermission.

These concerts are generously sponsored by the Zell Family Foundation.

CSO Tuesday series concerts are sponsored by United Airlines.

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Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany.

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125



There's something astonishing about a deaf composer choosing to open a symphony with music that reveals, like no other music before it, the very essence of sound emerging from silence. It is a masterstroke, to be sure, but for Beethoven it must also have been both painful and cathartic. The famous pianissimo opening—sixteen measures with no secure sense of key or rhythm—does not so much depict the journey from darkness to light, or from chaos to order, as the birth of sound itself or the creation of a musical idea. It is as if the challenges of Beethoven's daily existence—the struggle to compose music, his difficulty in communicating, the frustration of remembering what it was like to hear—have been made real in a single page of music.

This symphony shows Beethoven using all the subtlety and mastery of his craft to reach an even wider audience and to touch the common man as never before. He meant for it to be a breakthrough work—music's first crossover composition. It's also likely that in the text he picked for the symphony's finale—Schiller's hymn to universal brotherhood—Beethoven found the sense of community he craved as a comfort against personal loss, loneliness, and the terrifying sense of always feeling somehow apart, even though he was at the peak of his career. The struggle to communicate is the narrative that runs throughout this symphony, as Beethoven finally makes clear in his choral finale, when sound is literally given voice. The Ninth Symphony pushes the boundaries of art as Beethoven understood them. His own search for new compositional procedures—and there are many wildly original ideas in this symphony—underlies the whole work: the striving toward what Goethe called “the fulfillment of beautiful possibilities.”

COMPOSED

1822–February 1824

FIRST PERFORMANCE

May 7, 1824; Vienna, Austria

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

December 16 & 17, 1892, Auditorium Theatre. Minnie Fish, Minna Brentano, Charles A. Knorr, and George Ellsworth Holmes as soloists; Apollo Musical Club (William L. Tomlins, director); Theodore Thomas conducting

July 29, 1952, Ravinia Festival.

Eileen Farrell, Jane Hobson, Andrew McKinley, and Mack Harrell as soloists; Northwestern University Summer Chorus (George Howerton, director); Otto Klemperer conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

July 18, 2009, Ravinia Festival. Erin Wall, Kelley O'Connor, Anthony Dean Griffey, and Morris D. Robinson as soloists; Chicago Symphony Chorus (Duain Wolfe, director); James Conlon conducting

June 18, 19 & 20, 2010, Orchestra Hall. Jessica Rivera, Kelley O'Connor, Clifton Forbis, and Eric Owens as soloists; Chicago Symphony Chorus (Duain Wolfe, director); Bernard Haitink conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

soprano, alto, tenor, and bass soloists and mixed chorus (in the finale only); two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

72 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1961. Phyllis Curtin, Florence Kopleff, John McCollum, and Donald Gramm as soloists; Chicago Symphony Chorus (Margaret Hillis, director); Fritz Reiner conducting. RCA

1972. Pilar Lorengar, Yvonne Minton, Stuart Burrows, and Martti Talvela as soloists; Chicago Symphony Chorus (Margaret Hillis, director); Sir Georg Solti conducting. London

1986. Jessye Norman, Reinhild Runkel, Robert Schunk, and Hans Sotin as soloists; Chicago Symphony Chorus (Margaret Hillis, director); Sir Georg Solti conducting. London

Beethoven's grandest symphony and most influential composition was not recognized at first as a landmark—as a genuinely pivotal work in the history of music. The night of the premiere, Beethoven went home in a funk over the meager profits, and he was keenly disappointed because the entire evening had been staged to prove that he still had box office appeal in Vienna. Thirty of Vienna's leading music lovers had recently written to him—"Need we tell you with what regret your retirement from public life has filled us?"—as a way of goading him into playing his new works, and the concert of May 7, 1824, at which the Ninth Symphony was first performed, was his response.

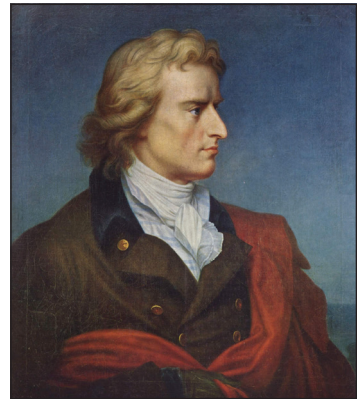
By 1824, Beethoven was almost completely deaf. He had long ago given up playing the piano in public, and, although he was billed as the conductor of the new symphony for the May 7 concert, and did indeed appear to beat time and turn the pages of his score (and, according to some accounts, even engage in some over-the-top theatrical gesturing), the players and the singers had been cautioned beforehand to pay no attention to him. Instead, they all followed the discreet, utterly reliable beat provided by Michael Umlauf, the concertmaster.

When, in one of the most famous accounts in all music, the audience burst into applause—some say it was at the end of the scherzo, others at the end of the symphony—Beethoven couldn't hear the ovation; he stood, his back to the crowd, leafing through his score. Only when the contralto soloist, Carolyn Unger, tapped him on the shoulder and turned him around did he see his public applauding wildly.

In truth, it must have been a miserable performance, hastily prepared under the composer's sadly compromised direction, for a public which can't reasonably have been expected to fully grasp what they were hearing. The reviews were mixed. "The necessary differentiation of light and dark, security of intonation, fine shading, and nuanced execution were all lacking," wrote one critic. "Weak players," another reported, "set down their bows and sat out so many measures." And, in the finale, when the sopranos couldn't reach the high notes, they simply didn't sing. It is surprising that the piece made an impression at all, but, for at least one critic, "the effect was indescribably great and magnificent."

But a second performance, given on a beautiful Sunday afternoon sixteen days later, was even less successful; the house was barely half full (possibly due to the lovely weather) and ticket sales did not begin to cover expenses. The work that Beethoven had written to surpass everything he already had accomplished in the field of the symphony—the work with which he was determined to move mankind as never before—had failed him. For several years after Beethoven's death, his Ninth Symphony was considered too difficult to perform (and too long to program easily). Although it won champions right from the start, it was not established in the repertoire until the middle of the nineteenth century. (Wagner was a particularly staunch advocate—he even conducted it at the dedicatory concert for his Wagner-only Bayreuth Festspielhaus in 1872.) From then on, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony has maintained its singular status as a cultural symbol of unsurpassed importance.

Since his early twenties, Beethoven had wanted to write music for Schiller's *An die Freude* (Ode to joy), a glorified drinking song with a strong humanistic message. He toyed with it several times, sketched a number of musical ideas, and even included two lines from Schiller in his opera *Fidelio*. When he finally settled down to work on a new symphony—his first in a decade—in 1822, he



A portrait of Friedrich Schiller by Gerhard von Kügelgen

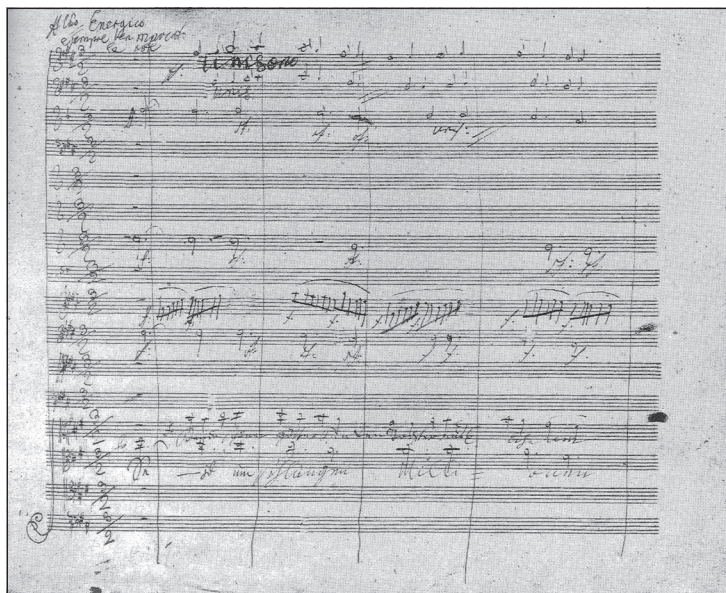
was impatient to pull together all the ideas that had been germinating in his imagination for thirty years. (And, according to Anton Schindler, only after he finished it nearly two years later "could he again be seen strolling through the streets, . . . greeting many acquaintances or friends after his long seclusion.")

It was probably inevitable that this would be his grandest symphony, and, in fact, it is the last in a series of scores that are Beethoven's most monumental achievements in several forms: the *Hammerklavier* Piano Sonata, the *Diabelli* Variations, and the *Missa solemnis*. They are all crowning works, summarizing everything Beethoven knew (although he did begin to sketch a tenth symphony). The Ninth Symphony stands apart from Beethoven's other symphonies—and from nearly all that follow it, as well—by virtue of its humanistic message, enormous scale, and organic unity of design.

At first glance, the Ninth appears to be a conventional, if unusually large, symphony in four movements, with the slow movement placed not second, but third, just before the finale (as in the *Hammerklavier* Sonata). But the finale is like nothing else in symphonic music: scored for four soloists, full chorus, and orchestra, it is extremely long (longer than any of the other movements) and highly complex—almost a symphony in miniature, with its own introduction, scherzo-like section, slow music, and grand wrap-up. Mozart had shifted the weight of the classical symphony to the finale with his *Jupiter* Symphony, but Beethoven has now pushed it to the limit.

The symphony begins audaciously with those celebrated first measures, which struggle mightily, as the composer himself so often did, to arrive at a perfect symphonic theme. (And then listen, at the outset of the scherzo that follows, to how Beethoven seems to mimic the falling fourths and fifths that define the symphony's opening, as if he were making light of his own troubles.) The entire movement—rooted in D minor, but ranging widely—is conceived on the greatest scale (even though it is the only first movement in a Beethoven symphony which does not include a repeat of the exposition). The beginning of the recapitulation—the moment that's supposed to reprise the symphony's

opening—is, almost by necessity here, startlingly new—a complete reinterpretation of the



The autograph score of the choral finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, showing the combination of the "Joy" theme with "Seid umschlungen Millionen" in a double fugue for chorus and orchestra. (Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin)

first measures, now defiant, fortissimo, and in D major.

Both the scherzo and the Adagio are sparsely designed, although Beethoven ultimately decided not to repeat the entire scherzo (and its trio) as was customary, but instead to tease us into thinking that he was going to. (The result, with its midsentence change of heart, is hair-raising.) The Adagio, placed before the finale for maximum dramatic effect, is a magnificent set of variations, a form Beethoven often used to express his deepest emotions (particularly in his late works, such as the opp. 109 and 110 piano sonatas, or the Adagio of the op. 127 string quartet). During this serene and noble music, Beethoven sets the stage for the finale, first with the hymnlike, stepwise melody of the main theme, which bears an uncanny resemblance to the big "Ode to Joy" tune, and then, in the final measures of the movement, with two disruptive fanfares for trumpets and drums, which warn of something momentous just over the horizon. The music dies quietly, but somehow inconclusively, even expectantly.

Peace is shattered with what Wagner admirably called the *Schreckensfanfare*—a fanfare of terror: a wrenching eruption that is actually the dissonant combination of two triads—B-flat major (the key of the preceding slow movement) and D minor (the key of the symphony as a whole). And with that noise, Beethoven opens a new chapter in the history of music. What follows is a carefully staged drama in which cellos and basses imitate operatic recitative; the music of the three previous movements is quickly reviewed and dismissed; and a new theme is suggested, which, when it finally takes shape, is a song so perfect and so simple it sounds like a hymn or a folk song. (Beethoven, in fact, labored painstakingly over this theme.)

And then—in a move that must have stunned his first audience and has left virtually every composer since dumbfounded, wondering how he or she might top it—Beethoven welcomes the sound of the human voice into the symphony. The earlier recitative returns and now is actually sung (Beethoven wrote the text, as a kind of preface to Schiller's ode, himself); Beethoven's wonderful melody is finally given words. (In the end, Beethoven used only half of Schiller's poem, deleting in the process any obvious drinking-song references.) And from there Beethoven creates, before our eyes and ears, a new kind of movement, combining elements of symphony and concerto (there's a big, virtuosic cadenza for the four soloists), classical variations, Turkish marches (complete with cymbals, triangle, and bass drum), majestic slow meditations, and, finally, a gigantic double fugue.

In its Shakespearean juxtaposition of the comic and the solemn, its mixture of popular and esoteric elements, its union of symphonic and vocal styles, and its symphony-within-a-symphony conceit, Beethoven's finale pointed the way for the music of the future. Wagner's music dramas, Liszt's symphonic poems, Bruckner's grand finales, Mahler's sprawling symphonies, and countless other works are all unthinkable without these twenty-some minutes of music. Beethoven wrote nothing more influential in his whole life, even though, relatively late in the composition process, he was still uncomfortable with the idea of a choral finale, and began to sketch an alternate instrumental movement. But the idea

of instrumental music striving toward song was too deeply ingrained in his thoughts at this point, and the dream of a utopian existence too dear to him, and so he went ahead and turned Schiller's little drinking song into one of the towering achievements of nineteenth-century art. (Beethoven's finale is notoriously tough on singers. When Theodore Thomas first led the Chicago Orchestra in the work, in December 1892, he took the uncharacteristic step—after long deliberation—of transposing the finale down a whole step to C minor in order ease the burden, although not without provoking the wrath of Chicago's musical public.)

The humanistic message of Beethoven's Ninth has been welcomed far and wide—from Japan, where New Year's sing-along performances are as popular as our *Messiahs* (the German *Freude* is often learned phonetically, to sounds that mean roughly “getting out of the bathtub”), to Berlin, where, to celebrate the destruction of the Wall in 1989, Leonard Bernstein changed *Freude* (joy) to *Freiheit* (freedom), claiming that “Beethoven would have given us his blessing in this heaven-sent moment.” (He made no mention of Schiller.)

Beethoven's Ninth also has been raided for the disco and for television commercials, and it has survived its terrifying misappropriation during one of our darkest hours, when it became a staple of the Third Reich during the 1930s and '40s and was performed to honor Hitler's birthday. The Ninth has the power to transcend the here and now, as well as the remarkable potential to endure horrors we cannot yet imagine. For, as Maynard Solomon, our finest Beethoven biographer, has written: “If we lose the dream of the Ninth Symphony, there remains no counterpoise against the engulfing terrors of civilization, nothing to set against Auschwitz and Vietnam as a paradigm of humanity's potentialities.” ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

For a full account of Theodore Thomas's controversial first performance of the Ninth Symphony with the Chicago Orchestra, please visit our *From the Archives* blog at cso.org/fromthearchives/Beethoven9.

AN DIE FREUDE

O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!
Sondern laßt uns angenehmere anstimmen,
und freudenvollere.

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum.
Deine Zauber binden wieder,
was die Mode streng geteilt;
alle Menschen werden Brüder,
wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Wem der große Wurf gelungen,
eines Freundes Freund zu sein,
wer ein holdes Weib errungen,
mische seinen Jubel ein!
Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
weinend sich aus diesem Bund!

Freude trinken alle Wesen
an den Brüsten der Natur;
alle Guten, alle Bösen
folgen ihrer Rosenspur.
Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,
einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben,
und der Cherub steht vor Gott!

Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen
durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan,
laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn,
freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen!

Seid umschlungen, Millionen!
Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt
muß ein lieber Vater wohnen!
Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?
Such ihn über'm Sternenzelt,
über Sternen muß er wohnen!

ODE TO JOY

O friends, not these sounds!
Rather let us turn to sounds more pleasant
and more joyful.

Joy, brilliant spark of the gods,
daughter of Elysium,
heavenly being, we enter your sanctuary
intoxicated with fire.
Your spells reunite
that which was strictly divided by convention;
all men become brothers
where your gentle wing rests.

He who has had the good fortune
to find a true friend,
he who has won a loving wife,
let him join in our rejoicing!
Yes, if there is but one other soul
he can call his on the whole earth!
And he who could never accomplish this,
let him steal away weeping from this company!

All creatures drink joy
at Nature's breasts;
good and evil alike
follow in her trail of roses.
She gave us kisses, and the vine,
and a friend faithful to death;
even the worm was given desire,
and the Cherub stands before God!

Joyfully, as his suns speed
through the glorious expanse of heaven,
brothers, run your course,
joyously, like a hero towards victory!

Receive this embrace, you millions!
This kiss is for the whole world!
Brothers, above the starry vault
a loving father must surely dwell!
Do you fall prostrate, you millions?
World, do you sense your Creator?
Seek him above the starry vault,
he must surely dwell above the stars!

Friedrich von Schiller