



LADPIRAN

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Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, "Choral"

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Genre: *symphony*; Country: *Germany/Austria*; Period: Classical/Romantic

Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso

Molto vivace — Presto — Molto vivace

Adagio molto e cantabile

Finale, with soloists and chorus: Presto — Allegro ma non troppo —
Vivace —

Adagio cantabile — Allegro — Allegro assai

Composed in 1822-1824.

Premiered on May 7, 1824 in Vienna, conducted by Michael Umlauf under the composer's supervision.

"I have it! I have it! Let us sing the song of the immortal Schiller!" shouted Beethoven to Anton Schindler, his companion and eventual biographer, as he burst from his workroom one afternoon in October 1823. The joyful news meant that the path to the completion of the Ninth Symphony — after a gestation of more than three decades — was finally clear.

Friedrich Schiller published his poem *An die Freude* ("Ode to Joy") in 1785 as a tribute to his friend Christian Gottfried Körner. By 1790, when he was twenty, Beethoven knew the poem, though it is uncertain how it came to his attention. The poem's philosophy of love and brotherhood was relevant enough to the composer as a young man in revolutionary Europe that he became a Freemason, a lodge dedicated to those ideals, and he remained a member until the organization was banned in Austria in 1795 for its alleged subversive activities. He considered a musical setting of *An die Freude* as early as 1793, as evidenced by a letter from Ludwig Fischenich to Charlotte Schiller, the poet's sister. "He proposes to compose Schiller's *Freude*," wrote Fischenich on January 26th. "I expect something perfect, for as far as I know him he is devoted to the great and the sublime." Beethoven had already given evidence of his grand artistic vision in a setting of a similarly idealistic text as a cantata for the coronation of Joseph II in 1790. Schiller's poem first appeared in his notes and sketchbooks in 1798.

Beethoven produced his first eight symphonies in the dozen years between 1800 and 1812. Those compositions are, of course, the stylistic base on which the last Symphony rests, but there was also an occasional work written during those years that looks directly forward to it — the *Choral Fantasia* of 1808. In trying to describe the recently completed Ninth Symphony to the publisher Probst in a letter of March 10, 1824, Beethoven noted that it was "in the style of my *Choral Fantasia*, but very much more extended." He indicated several qualities shared by the two works: both were for chorus and orchestra; both were grand settings of an uplifting, idealistic text; both were in

variations form; and both were based on a folk-like theme.

It is among the sketches for the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, composed simultaneously in 1811-1812, that the first musical ideas for Schiller's poem appear. Though these sketches are unrelated to the finished *Ode to Joy* theme — that went through more than 200 revisions (!) before Beethoven was satisfied with it — they do show the composer's continuing interest in the text and the gestating idea of setting it for chorus and orchestra. Curiously, he envisioned the piece at that time in the single-movement form of the *Choral Fantasia*, rather like a grand overture. The Seventh and Eighth Symphonies were finished by 1812, and Beethoven immediately started making plans for his next composition in the genre, settling on the key of D minor, but getting no further. It was to be another dozen years before he could bring this vague vision to fulfillment.

The first evidence of the musical material which was to appear in the finished Ninth Symphony appeared in 1815, when a sketch for the theme of the Scherzo emerged among Beethoven's notes. It was marked "Fugue," and proves that the rich, contrapuntal texture of the Symphony had been decided even before the notes existed to inform it. He took up his draft again in 1817, and by the following year much of the Scherzo was sketched. It was also in 1818 that he considered including a choral movement, but not as the finale. His tentative plan called for voices in the slow movement — "a pious song in the ancient modes," something Greek rather than Christian, he thought. With much still unsettled, Beethoven was forced to lay aside this vague symphonic scheme in 1818 because of ill health, the distressing court battle to secure custody of his nephew, and other composing projects, especially the monumental *Missa Solemnis*.

The awesome *Missa* dominated Beethoven's life for over four years, during which nothing could be done on the Ninth Symphony. By the end of 1822, the *Missa* was finished except for the scoring and some minor revisions, so Beethoven was again able to take up the symphony sketches and resume work. The chronology of these compositions — the great Mass preceding the Symphony — was vital to the creation of the Symphony, and is indispensable to understanding the last years of Beethoven's life. Irving Kolodin wrote, "The Ninth owes to the *Missa Solemnis* the philosophical framework, the ideological atmosphere, the psychological climate in which it breathes and has its existence. . . . Unlike the *Missa*, however, it is a celebration of life, of man's earthly possibilities rather than his heavenly speculations." The 1822 sketches show considerable progress on the Symphony's first movement, little on the Scherzo, and, for the first time, some tentative ideas for a choral finale based on Schiller's poem.

At this point in the composition of the work, a commission from the London Philharmonic Society for a new symphony arrived in November 1822. Beethoven accepted it. For several months thereafter, he envisioned two completely separate works: one for London, entirely instrumental, to include the sketched first movement and the nearly completed Scherzo; the other to use the proposed choral movement with a German text, which he considered inappropriate for an English

audience. He took up the "English Symphony" first, and most of the opening movement was sketched during the early months of 1823. The Scherzo was finished in short score by August, eight years after Beethoven first conceived its thematic material, and the third movement sketched by October. A few months earlier he had jotted down a melody for possible use in the finale of the "English Symphony," but was displeased with its symphonic potential and later moved it into the A minor Quartet, Op. 132. With the first three movements nearing completion, Beethoven found himself without a finale. His thoughts turned to the choral setting of *An die Freude* lying unused among the sketches for the "German Symphony," and he retrieved it and decided to use it in the work for London, language notwithstanding. The "English Symphony" and the "German Symphony" had merged. The Philharmonic Society eventually received the symphony it had commissioned — but not until a year after it had been heard in Vienna.

Beethoven had one major obstacle to overcome before he could complete the Symphony: how to join together the instrumental and vocal movements. He pondered the matter during his summer stay in Baden in 1823, but had not resolved the problem when he returned to Vienna in October. It was only after more intense work that he finally hit upon the idea of a recitative as the connecting tissue. A recitative — the technique that had been used for generations to bridge from one operatic number to the next — that would be perfect, he decided. And the recitative could include fragments of themes from earlier movements — to unify the structure. "I have it! I have it!" he shouted with triumphant delight. Beethoven still had much work to do, as the sketches from the autumn of 1823 show, but he at last knew his goal. The composition was completed by the end of the year. When the final scoring was finished in February 1824, it had been nearly 35 years since Beethoven first considered setting Schiller's poem.

The premiere on May 7, 1824 was a splendid affair. Not only was the Ninth Symphony heard for the first time, but three movements from the *Missa Solemnis* were also given their Viennese premiere. The *Consecration of the House Overture* filled out the evening. Beethoven was, understandably, at fever pitch for the concert. Joseph Böhm, a violinist in the orchestra that night, recalled of the composer, "Beethoven himself conducted, that is, he stood in front of a conductor's stand (the actual direction was in Umlauf's hands; we musicians followed his baton only) and threw himself back and forth like a madman. At one moment, he stretched to his full height, at the next he crouched down to the floor. He flailed about with both his hands and feet as though he wanted to play all the instruments and sing all the chorus parts." The audience's reaction was overwhelming. Beethoven, completely deaf and enraptured by the sounds in his mind, did not realize that the music had ended and the applause begun. One of the soloists, the alto Karolina Unger, turned him toward the audience, and the house erupted. The police had to be called to ensure that order was maintained. Beethoven, totally exhausted, had to be helped home, where he slept through the night and most of the

next day in the clothes he had worn to the premiere.

Berlioz, an ardent champion of Beethoven, wrote, "To analyze such a composition as the Ninth Symphony is a difficult and dangerous task." Even such a perceptive study as that of Professor Donald Tovey, the longest of his published essays, demonstrates that such explanations are both too much and too little at the same time: too much, because the music does not need any feeble verbal explanations to convince listeners of its gargantuan emotional power; too little, because the work is inexhaustible in its musical and artistic ramifications. The conductor André Previn nicely summed up this second point when he noted, "You can chase a Beethoven symphony all your life and never catch up." The following comments are, therefore, offered with quivering trepidation before a supreme masterpiece.

The Symphony begins with the interval of a barren open fifth, suggesting some awe-inspiring cosmic void. Thematic fragments sparkle and whirl into place to form the riveting main theme. A group of lyrical subordinate ideas follows. After a great climax, the open fifth intervals return to begin the highly concentrated development section. A complete recapitulation and an ominous coda arising from the depths of the orchestra bring this eloquent movement to a close.

For the only time in Beethoven's symphonies, the Scherzo is placed as the second movement. The hammer-blow octaves of its theme were said to have occurred to the composer as he once stepped from darkness into a sudden light. The form of the movement is a heady combination of scherzo, fugue and sonata that exudes a lusty physical exuberance and a leaping energy. The Trio section shifts to duple meter and is more serene in character, but forfeits none of the contrapuntal richness of the Scherzo.

The *Adagio* is one of the most sublime pieces that Beethoven, or anyone else, ever wrote. Its impression of solemn profundity is enhanced by being placed between two such extroverted movements as the Scherzo and the Finale. Formally, this movement is a variations on two themes, almost like two separate kinds of music that alternate with each other. One interesting detail of scoring here concerns the elaborate part for the fourth horn. It seems that the player of this part at the Viennese premiere was the sole local possessor of a primitive valve horn, still in its experimental stages in 1824, and Beethoven eagerly included the expanded expression offered by this new instrumental development in this great movement.

The English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, though not usually happily disposed toward Beethoven's music, once wrote, "To my mind, two composers and two only, have been able to write music which is at the same time serious, profound and cheerful — Bach in the 'Cum Sancto' of the *B minor Mass* and Beethoven in the finale of the 'Choral' Symphony." This majestic closing movement is divided into two large parts: the first instrumental, the second with chorus. Beethoven chose to set about one-third of the original 96 lines of Schiller's poem. To these, the composer added two lines for the baritone soloist as a transition to the choral section. A shrieking dissonance introduces the

instrumental recitative for cellos and basses that joins together brief thematic reminiscences from the three preceding movements. The wondrous *Ode to Joy* theme appears unadorned in the low strings, and is the subject of a set of increasingly powerful variations. The shrieking dissonance is again hurled forth, but this time the ensuing recitative is given voice and words by the baritone soloist. "Oh, friends," he sings, "no more of these sad tones! Rather let us raise our voices together, and joyful be our song." The song is the *Ode to Joy*, presented with transcendent jubilation by the chorus. Many sections based on the theme of the *Ode* follow, some martial, some fugal, all radiant with the glory of Beethoven's vision.

The Ninth Symphony is "one of the greatest achievements of the human spirit," according to Edward Downes. "It stands taller, strides longer, reaches higher toward the Infinite than any work remotely like it," wrote Irving Kolodin. And it was Chopin, probably the Romantic composer least influenced by Beethoven but one who certainly knew well the possibilities of musical expression, who told a friend, "Beethoven embraced the universe with the power of his spirit."

Baritone

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

O friends, not these sounds!
Rather let us
sing more pleasing songs,
full of joy.

Baritone and Chorus

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

Joy, brilliant spark of the gods,
daughter of Elysium,
drunk with fire, we enter,
Divinity, your sacred shrine.
Your magic again unites
all that custom harshly tore
apart;
all men become brothers
beneath your gentle hovering
wing.

Quartet and Chorus

Wem der grosse Wurf gelungen,
gamble
eines Freundes Freund zu sein,
wer ein holdes Weib errungen,
wife,
mische seine Jubel ein!
Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
other soul

Whoever has won in that great
gamble
of being friend to a friend,
whoever has won a gracious
wife,
let him join in our rejoicing!
Yes, even if there is only one
other soul

sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!
earth!
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
accomplished this,
weinend sich aus diesem Bund!
this company!
Freude trinken alle Wesen
an den Brüsten der Natur,
alle Guten, alle Bösen
folgen ihre Rosenspur.
Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,
einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben,
worm,
und der Cherub steht vor Gott!
God!

he can call his own on the whole
And he who never
let him steal away weeping from
All creatures drink of joy
at Nature's breast,
All men, good and evil,
follow her rose-strewn path.
Kisses she gave us and vines,
a friend, faithful to death;
desire was even given to the
and the cherub stands before

Tenor and Chorus

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

Joyously, just as His suns fly
through the splendid arena of
run, brothers, your course
gladly, like a hero to victory.

Chorus

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

Joy, brilliant spark of the gods,
daughter of Elysium,
drunk with fire, we enter,
Divinity, your sacred shrine.
Your magic again unites
all that custom harshly tore
all men become brothers
beneath your gentle hovering

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

Be embraced, ye millions!
This kiss is for the entire world!
Brothers, above the canopy of
surely a loving Father dwells.
Do you bow down, ye millions?
Do you sense the Creator,
Seek Him above the canopy of
Above the stars must He dwell.

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Tochter aus Elysium,
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Himmlische, dein Heiligtum.

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muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.

Brothers! Brothers!
Above the canopy of stars
surely a loving Father dwells.

Quartet and Chorus

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