

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn; died March 26, 1827 in Vienna

### Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Opus 125, "Choral" (1822-1824)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, May 7, 1824

Kärntnertor Theater

Ludwig van Beethoven, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 67 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings

"I've got it! I've got 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. This joyful announcement 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, and as early as 1793 he considered making a musical setting of it. Schiller's poem appears in his notes in 1798, but the earliest musical ideas for its setting are found among the sketches for the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, composed simultaneously in 1811-1812. 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. 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 that was to figure in the finished Ninth Symphony appeared in 1815, when a sketch for the theme of the Scherzo emerged among Beethoven's notes. He took up his draft again in 1817, and by the following year much of the Scherzo had been 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. With much still unsettled, Beethoven was forced to lay aside this rough symphonic scheme in 1818 because of ill health, the distressing court battle to secure custody of his nephew, and other composing projects, notably the monumental *Missa Solemnis*.

The awesome *Missa* dominated Beethoven's life for over four years. 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 creative life. The critic 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 creation of the work, in November 1822, a commission from the London Philharmonic Society for a new symphony arrived. 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 drafted during the early months of 1823. The Scherzo was finished in short score by August, eight years after Beethoven first conceived its thematic material; the third movement was sketched by October. 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 decided to incorporate it into 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’ve got it! I’ve got it!” he shouted triumphantly. 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 Ninth 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. The form of the second movement is a combination of scherzo, fugue and sonata that exudes a lusty physical exuberance and a leaping energy; the central trio 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, and its solemn profundity is enhanced by being placed between two such extroverted movements as the Scherzo and the finale. Formally, this movement is a variation on two themes, almost like two separate kinds of music that alternate with each other.

The majestic closing movement is divided into two large parts: the first instrumental, the second with chorus and soloists. Beethoven chose to set about two-thirds of the original 96 lines of Schiller’s poem, and added two lines of his own 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 *Ode* follow, some martial, some fugal, all radiant with the glory of Beethoven’s vision.

#### BASS

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.

#### BASS AND CHORUS

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.

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,  
eines Freundes Freund zu sein,  
wer ein holdes Weib errungen,  
mische seine Jubel ein!  
Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele

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!  
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 ihre Rosenspur.  
Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,  
einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;  
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben,  
und der Cherub steht vor Gott!

he can call his own on the whole earth!  
And he who never accomplished this,  
let him steal away weeping from this company!  
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 worm,  
and the cherub stands before God!

#### TENOR AND CHORUS

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

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

#### CHORUS

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.

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.

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.

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

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,  
Tochter aus Elysium,  
wir betreten feuertrunken,  
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum.

Joy, brilliant spark of the gods,  
daughter of Elysium,  
drunk with fire, we enter,  
Divinity, your sacred shrine.

Seid umschlungen, Millionen!  
Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!

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Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?  
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?  
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!  
Brüder! Brüder!  
Über'm Sternenzelt  
muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.

Do you bow down, ye millions?  
Do you sense the Creator, World?  
Seek Him above the canopy of stars!  
Brothers! Brothers!  
Above the canopy of stars  
surely a loving Father dwells.

#### QUARTET AND CHORUS

Freude, Tochter aus Elysium,  
deine Zauber binden wieder  
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alle Menschen werden Brüder  
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Seid umschlungen, Millionen!  
Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!  
Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt  
muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,  
Tochter aus Elysium!

Joy, daughter of Elysium,  
Your magic again unites  
all that custom harshly tore apart;  
all men become brothers  
beneath your gentle hovering wing.

Be embraced, ye millions!  
This kiss is for the entire world!  
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