

Beethoven's Ninth, Two Hundred Years On

Wednesday, January 27, 2027 · 19:30 · Großes Festspielhaus

Christian Thielemann, conductor · Camilla Nylund, soprano · Patricia Nolz, mezzo-soprano · Klaus Florian Vogt, tenor · Georg Zeppenfeld, bass · Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, chorus

approximately 68 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

68 minutes

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 ('Choral')

THE COMPOSER

Beethoven needs little introduction, but the period in which he wrote his Second Symphony does. Born in Bonn in 1770 and trained in Vienna under Haydn, by 1800 he was already one of the most talked-about pianist-composers in Vienna. Around the same time, Beethoven had to face an alarming truth: his hearing was deteriorating, and would never recover. By 1802 he had retreated to the village of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna, where, in a state of suicidal despair, he wrote the famous letter to his brothers known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he confessed his condition and his agony. The letter, never sent in his lifetime, was found among his papers after his death.

ABOUT THE WORK

Ludwig van Beethoven's last symphony had two starting points, years apart. The first was a poem. Friedrich Schiller's ode *An die Freude* (To Joy), written in 1785, had been in Beethoven's mind since his youth, and he had tried more than once to set it to music. The second was an invitation. In 1817 the Philharmonic Society of London asked him to come to England with two new symphonies. He never made the journey, but the correspondence went on, and in 1822 it turned into a firm commission for one.

He did the main work on the score between the autumn of 1822 and February 1824. The decision to end with Schiller's poem, sung by four soloists and a chorus, was without precedent in a symphony by a major composer, and Beethoven took care over how to get there. He chose and reordered the verses he wanted and wrote the few words that introduce them himself.

The first performance was given in Vienna on 7 May 1824 at the Kärntnertor theatre. The soloists were Henriette Sontag, Caroline Unger, Anton Haitzinger and Joseph Seipelt. Michael Umlauf conducted. Beethoven, by then almost totally deaf, stood on stage beside him to give the tempos. When the music ended he could not hear the applause behind him and had to be turned round to see it; by one account it was Unger, the alto soloist, who did so.

The Ninth soon became something larger than a concert piece. The melody of the finale was adopted as an anthem by the Council of Europe in 1972 and by what is now the European Union in 1985, and the symphony has been played to mark public occasions of every kind. In 2027 it has an occasion of its own: the bicentenary of Beethoven's death in March 1827.

The orchestra is a large one. To the usual woodwind, trumpets, timpani and strings Beethoven added a piccolo, a contrabassoon, four horns, three trombones and, for the finale, triangle, cymbals and bass drum. A performance lasts a little over an hour.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso. The symphony begins almost inaudibly, with bare fifths in the strings, like an orchestra tuning or a world not yet formed. Fragments of a theme fall through this haze until the whole orchestra hurls it out in D minor. When the opening returns later in the movement it comes back at full force and in the major, and the effect is more frightening than consoling. The coda is built over a slow, grinding chromatic bass, like a funeral march.

II. Molto vivace. Beethoven puts the scherzo second, where a slow movement was expected. The strings start a fugue on a hammering three-note rhythm, and the timpani keep bursting in on their own. The trio turns to D major for a plain, folk-like tune that grows by repetition.

III. Adagio molto e cantabile. The still centre of the work, in B-flat major. Two long-breathed melodies alternate, and each time the first returns it is more richly decorated than before.

IV. Finale. A violent discord shatters the calm. Cellos and basses answer it alone, in the manner of a singer's recitative but without words. The orchestra offers the opening of each earlier movement in turn, and each is cut off. Then the low strings, unaccompanied and very quietly, play the Joy tune. It passes up-

ward through the orchestra, gathering instruments, until the discord returns and a human voice takes over: 'O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!' (Friends, not these sounds).

From here the movement is a chain of variations on the Joy theme. Listen for the 'Turkish' march, where the tune is turned into a jaunty quickstep with piccolo, triangle, cymbals and bass drum and the tenor sings above it; for the slow, awed section at 'Seid umschlungen, Millionen', which sounds like church chant; and for the double fugue in which the chorus sings that theme and the Joy tune at the same moment. The last pages are a headlong race.

Tonight's artists

Camilla Nylund *soprano*

Nylund sings the soprano part of the solo quartet in the finale.

Camilla Nylund is a Finnish soprano, born in Vaasa in 1968. She studied at the Mozarteum in Salzburg with Eva Illes and began her career in the ensembles of the Hanover State Opera and the Semperoper in Dresden. She is known above all for the soprano roles of Richard Strauss and Wagner, made her Bayreuth Festival debut in 2011 as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* and was named an Austrian Kammersängerin in 2019.

Patricia Nolz *mezzo-soprano*

Nolz takes the alto line of the solo quartet, the part sung at the first performance by Caroline Unger.

Patricia Nolz is an Austrian mezzo-soprano. She studied at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna with Claudia Visca and Florian Boesch and made her debut at the Theater an der Wien in 2020 as Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. After two years in the opera studio of the Vienna State Opera she joined the company's ensemble in 2022.

Klaus Florian Vogt *tenor*

Vogt has the tenor solo of the 'Turkish' march, 'Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen'.

Klaus Florian Vogt, born in Heide in northern Germany in 1970, began his musical life as a horn player in the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra before studying singing at the Lübeck Academy of Music. He joined the ensemble in Flensburg and then, in 1998, the Semperoper in Dresden. Wagner's Lohengrin, which he first sang in 2002, became his signature role, and he made his Bayreuth Festival debut in 2007 as Walther von Stolzing in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg.

Georg Zeppenfeld *bass*

Zeppenfeld sings the first words heard in the symphony, the recitative 'O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!'.

Georg Zeppenfeld is a German bass, born in Attendorn in Westphalia in 1970. He trained at the music academies in Detmold and Cologne, where his teachers included Hans Sotin, and since 2001 he has been a member of the ensemble of the Semperoper in Dresden, which named him a Kammersänger in 2015.

Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien *chorus*

The Wiener Singverein, the chorus of Vienna's Musikverein, sings Schiller's ode in the finale.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE The Ninth: Beethoven and the World in 1824

Harvey Sachs, Random House 2011

Sachs sets the first performance of the Ninth against the Europe of 1824 and then walks through the music movement by movement.

ACCESSIBLE Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph

Jan Swafford, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2014

A full modern life of Beethoven, including the making of the Ninth and his long attachment to Schiller's ode.

DEEPER Beethoven: Symphony No. 9

Nicholas Cook, Cambridge University Press 1993

A Cambridge Music Handbook on the Ninth: the sketches, the 1824 premiere, and the long argument over what the finale means.

SOURCES

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Ludwig van Beethoven · Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 ('Choral')

2. Mozart Week 2027: Mozart & 'Mozarts', Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum. https://mozarteum.at/en/press_release/mozart-week-2027-mozart-mozarts
3. Symphony No. 9 (Beethoven), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_\(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_(Beethoven))
4. Beethoven: Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/symphony-no-9-in-d-minor-op-125-cho>
5. Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/4068/symphony-no-9-in-d-minor-op-125>
6. The remarkable story of Beethoven's 'Choral' Symphony No. 9 and the 'Ode to Joy', Classic FM. <https://www.classicfm.com/composers/beethoven/music/symphony-no-9-d-minor/>
7. Camilla Nylund, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camilla_Nylund
8. Camilla Nylund, Verbier Festival. <https://verbierfestival.com/en/musician/nylund-camilla/>
9. Patricia Nolz, Salzburg Festival. <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/a/patricia-nolz>
10. Patricia Nolz, Machreich Artists Management. <https://www.machreich-artists.com/en/artist/patricia-nolz>
11. Klaus Florian Vogt, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klaus_Florian_Vogt
12. Klaus Florian Vogt, Lucerne Festival. <https://www.lucernefestival.ch/en/program/directory-of-artists/klaus-florian-vogt/943>
13. Georg Zeppenfeld, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Zeppenfeld
14. Georg Zeppenfeld, Dresdner Philharmonie. <https://www.dresdnerphilharmonie.de/en/dresdner-philharmonie/biographies/georg-zeppenfeld>
15. The Ninth: Beethoven and the World in 1824, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780812969078>
16. Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780544245587>
17. Beethoven: Symphony No. 9, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521399241>



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