

# BEETHOVEN 9

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2025 | 7:30 PM

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

**Daniel Hege**

*Music Director & Conductor*

**Wichita Symphony Chorus**

**Cristina Castaldi**

*Soprano*

**Hilary Taylor**

*Mezzo-Soprano*

**Cole McIlquham**

*Tenor*

**Alan Held**

*Bass-Baritone*

PROGRAM NOTES

# VALERIE COLEMAN

Born September 3, 1970 in Louisville, Kentucky

## Umoja: Anthem of Unity (10'30")

*This is the first performance of Umoja by the Wichita Symphony Orchestra. Previously, the WSO performed Valerie Coleman's Seven O'Clock Shout in January 2022.*

Twice nominated for a GRAMMY Award, Valerie Coleman is one of the leading voices in contemporary music composition. Named one of the "Top 35 Women Composers" by the *Washington Post* and the "2020 Classical Woman of the Year" by *Performance Today*, her awards include an ASCAP Honors Award, the Chamber Music America's Classical Commissioning Program, and the Herb Alpert Ragsdale Residency Award. In its original version for wind quintet, *Umoja* was named a "Top 101 Great American Ensemble Work" by Chamber Music America.

Coleman's symphonic works have been commissioned several times by the Philadelphia Orchestra and performed by orchestras across the United States, including the Baltimore Symphony, Boston Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Pittsburgh Symphony. Many chamber ensembles and collegiate bands have also performed her music.

Coleman created and founded the Imani Winds in 1997 and was the quintet's flutist until 2018. The group became renowned for its adventurous and diverse programming and can be heard on many CDs.

In February 2024, Coleman was appointed to the faculty of the Composition Department at The Juilliard School of Music.

A complete biography can be read on Valerie Coleman's website: <https://www.valeriecoleman.com/bio.html>

The following program notes for *Umoja* are taken from [Valerie Coleman's website](#) and appear as a preface to the full score.

*Listen my people,  
Children of ALL  
It's time for Unity  
Hear the Winds call.*

*Oh a-hum, a-hum Nkosi ah..  
Oh a-hum, a-hum Nkosi ah..*

*In its original form, Umoja, the Swahili word for Unity and the first principle of the African Diaspora holiday Kwanzaa, was composed as a simple song for a women's choir. It embodied a sense of 'tribal unity' through the feel of a drum circle, the sharing of history through the traditional 'call and response' form, and the repetition of a memorable, sing-song melody. It was rearranged into woodwind quintet form during the genesis of Coleman's chamber music ensemble, Imani Winds, to provide an anthem that celebrated the diverse heritages of the ensemble itself.*

# Umoja: Anthem of Unity

## *continued*

*Almost two decades after the original, the orchestral version brings an expansion and sophistication to the short and sweet melody, beginning with sustained ethereal passages that float and shift from a bowed vibraphone, supporting the introduction of the melody by solo violin. Here, the melody is sweet singing in its simplest form with an earnest reminiscent of Appalachian-style music. From there, the melody dances and weaves throughout the instrument families, interrupted by dissonant viewpoints led by the brass and percussion sections, which represent the clash of injustices, racism, and hate that threatens to gain a foothold in the world today. Spiky textures give way to an aggressive exchange between upper woodwinds and percussion before returning to the melody as a gentle reminder of kindness and humanity. Through the brass-led ensemble tutti, the journey culminates in a bold call for unity that echoes the original anthem.*

The orchestral version of *Umoja* was commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and premiered on September 19, 2019, with Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducting. The work is orchestrated for two flutes and a piccolo, two oboes and an English Horn, two clarinets and a Bass clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, a tenor trombone, a bass trombone, a tuba, timpani, plus three percussionists, harp, piano, and strings. The percussion battery includes a snare drum, bass drum, temple blocks, triangle, cymbals (large ride, suspended, and crash), tambourine, glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba, and vibraphone.

Since *Umoja* will likely be new to everyone, listening to it beforehand will increase your enjoyment. I recommend the following YouTube recording by a pick-up orchestra called the All-Star Orchestra. It comprises musicians from major American orchestras, led by conductor Gerard Schwarz. They have come together periodically since 2013 for extensive studio (no audience) concert recordings for PBS Television, broadcast on over 200 PBS stations nationally, but alas, not in Wichita. This recording of *Umoja* is from Season 5, recorded in 2023. With multiple camera angles and Emmy Award-winning production values, the video offers excellent close-up views not visible from your seats in the Century II Concert Hall.

<https://youtu.be/1m6ll3pqTsl?si=y2-Z5gNlvBSTke->

*Don is the retired CEO (2012 - 2024) of the Wichita Symphony. He holds piano and music history degrees from Bucknell University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also studied piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the University of Maryland College Park, where he founded the National Orchestral Institute, an advanced training program for aspiring orchestral musicians, in 1988.*

# LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna, Austria

## Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125

1. Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso (15')
2. Molto vivace (13')
3. Adagio molto e cantabile (13')
4. Finale: "Ode to Joy" (24')

*In its eighty-year history, the Wichita Symphony has performed Beethoven's Ninth Symphony seven times, most recently on April 13 and 14, 2019, under the direction of Daniel Hege. The soloists on that occasion were Cristina Castaldi, Krystin Skidmore, Michael Hanawalt, and Alan Held.*

It was a celebratory and highly anticipated evening on May 7, 1824, and the cultural elite of Vienna were seated in the sold-out Kärntnertor Theater, awaiting Ludwig van Beethoven's concert of new music.

It had been over a decade since Beethoven premiered a symphony, with the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies appearing in 1812. The intervening years, compared to his productivity during the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were relatively quiet for Beethoven. The final version of the opera *Fidelio* (1814), three piano sonatas (op. 90, 101, and 106), *The Diabelli Variations* for piano (1822), and what he regarded as his magnum opus, the *Missa Solemnis* (1822), were among the important works completed during the decade. These are essential masterpieces in Beethoven's canon.

The relative inactivity has been ascribed to the pain of rejection by his "Immortal Beloved," the extended legal battles after his brother's death to gain custody of his nephew Karl, and perhaps the general feeling of being unappreciated and falling out of favor with Viennese audiences who gravitated towards the new Italian operas of Rossini. Of course, Beethoven's increasing deafness, which ultimately resulted in total loss of hearing by 1816 or 1817, significantly impacted his work and contributed to his withdrawal from society.

The incentive to return to symphonic writing probably came from the invitation to compose two symphonies for London in 1817, the year the earliest sketches for the Ninth appeared in Beethoven's notebooks. Never one to be hurried in meeting deadlines, Beethoven mostly composed the Ninth in 1822 and 1823, and the work was completed by February 1824. The London commitment was displaced by consideration of Berlin for the premiere, but local Viennese aficionados of Beethoven persuaded him to keep the premiere in his adopted city. However, Beethoven dedicated the Symphony to the Prussian leader in Berlin, Frederick William III, the son of the man rumored to be the father of Beethoven, a rumor and falsehood that Beethoven did nothing to deny.

### Beethoven and Schiller's "Ode to Joy"

In choosing *Ode to Joy* for the text of his Ninth Symphony's finale, Beethoven turned to an ode he had known since his teenage years. Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), regarded as one of Germany's leading playwrights and poets, wrote his *Ode* in 1785 and published it the following year. It appears that Beethoven considered setting it to music as early as 1793 and remained enamored of the text, even after Schiller downplayed or excised references to liberty, equality, and fraternity in an 1803 revision.

While Schiller's original text has been described as a "convivial drinking song," Beethoven selected and

# Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125

## *continued*

reordered the lines, maintaining a quality of exuberance while emphasizing the more spiritual and universal elements of joy and brotherhood contained in the poem.

Working out the famous melody took Beethoven some effort. The earliest sketches for the melody date back to around 1811, coinciding with sketches for the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. As a financial side gig, creating arrangements of folk songs from various nationalities led Beethoven to seek a melody of similar simplicity. Michael Steinberg describes what Beethoven achieved with the *Ode to Joy* as “the quintessential popular song.” Even if one has never heard the entire Ninth Symphony, there is a good chance that the *Ode to Joy* tune sounds familiar.

### **The Premiere of the Ninth Symphony**

The all-Beethoven program for the evening of May 7, 1824, included the *Consecration of the House Overture*, the Viennese premiere of three movements from the *Missa Solemnis*, and the Ninth Symphony.<sup>1</sup> It would be difficult to imagine a more challenging program for the musicians. The orchestra included many of Vienna’s leading musicians, as well as some talented amateurs. Everyone participated without payment out of respect for Beethoven’s standing in Vienna’s cultural circle. While the musicians and chorus had several sectional rehearsals, the entire orchestra and chorus had just two rehearsals together. Since none of the music had been published, Beethoven hired copyists to prepare the handwritten parts for the musicians to perform. With Beethoven’s notoriously messy manuscripts, it’s impossible to know how many errors crept into the music for the performance. The sopranos complained about the high notes in their range, but Beethoven refused to compromise; as a result, those who couldn’t reach the top notes probably simply left them out. One Viennese critic noted that the “singers did what they could.”

Beethoven served as the “honorary conductor” for the performance, standing onstage next to the conductor’s podium. With his total deafness, he was unable to lead the performance. Michael Umlauf conducted and instructed the musicians to watch him and not Beethoven. The famous story goes that Beethoven, unable to hear the audience’s applause, continued conducting and turning pages until the mezzo-soprano soloist gently tugged his arm and motioned him to turn toward the audience. It is difficult to determine how much of the tumultuous applause was due to respect for Beethoven rather than the quality of the performance. The audience was undoubtedly aware that they had just heard something unprecedented. One critic wrote, “Beethoven has outdone everything we have previously heard from him.”

What they heard was the longest symphony ever composed up to that time. Running approximately sixty-five minutes, give or take, it was nearly fifteen minutes longer than Beethoven’s Third Symphony, the *Eroica*. The fourth movement alone was almost as long as the First and Eighth Symphonies. The Ninth reordered the traditional sequence of movements, reversing the order of the slow movement and scherzo. For the first time, singers—soloists and chorus—were used in a symphony.<sup>2</sup>

[1] The *Missa Solemnis* premiered in St. Petersburg the previous month. Beethoven was not present and never heard a complete performance of the work. For this Viennese performance, he had three movements translated into German and programmed as “Hymns,” since censors forbade the use of Latin religious texts at secular concerts.

[2] Beethoven’s Choral Fantasy (1808) for solo piano, six vocal soloists, chorus, and orchestra was a single movement work that was a precursor to the Ninth Symphony.

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Even though the musicians were unpaid, the costs of renting the theater, copying the music, promoting the concert, and being unable to charge what he wanted for tickets because the authorities prohibited a higher price, Beethoven was left with a disappointing financial return, provoking one of his many tantrums about being cheated at the box office.

Subsequent performances of the Ninth followed quickly. Beethoven arranged a second Viennese concert, with another promoter taking financial risks, a few weeks after the premiere. This concert was less financially successful because many people had already left the city for summer destinations. The Ninth premiered in London in 1825, as per Beethoven's original agreement with concert promoters, and in Berlin in 1826. The latter included the seventeen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn, who played violin in the orchestra and created a piano reduction of the score. [Mendelssohn's "Resurrection" Symphony, which we heard last month in Wichita, was composed partly under the influence of Beethoven's Ninth.] The New York Philharmonic Society, founded in 1842, presented the American premiere in 1846.

### **The Ninth Symphony – the Music**

With the Ninth, Beethoven grapples with the structural and conceptual demands of a large-scale work. Whereas Beethoven's earlier works can be seen as extensions and developments of the classical style he inherited from Haydn and Mozart, his late works, such as the Ninth, reflect his study of Johann Sebastian Bach, his mastery of fugal textures and variation forms, and their absorption into the late classical language of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The late works of Beethoven, including the Ninth, anticipate the future.

### **First movement**

From Beethoven's sketchbooks dating back almost twenty years, we learn that he had contemplated a symphony in D minor. Keys have meaning to composers. For Beethoven, E-flat Major, the key of the *Eroica Symphony* and *Emperor Concerto* had heroic connotations. C minor, the key of the Fifth Symphony and several piano sonatas, most notably the *Pathétique* and the final sonata Opus 111, seemed to be his choice for pieces of intense dramatic struggles. Coming to his Ninth Symphony, Beethoven settled on D minor, the key used by Mozart in his Requiem, and a key that Beethoven associated with urgency and despair, which would ultimately resolve in the light and triumph of D major.

The opening of the Ninth is a state of becoming in which the identity of the thematic material is slowly revealed. The music begins quietly, a murmur of open fifths on A and E in the second violins and cellos. Alone, they don't confirm a key or tonality. They are a wash of sound, much like a background of color a painter sets on a canvas. Against this background, Beethoven introduces the same pitches in a rhythmic motive that slowly gathers steam. Finally, after about twenty-five seconds, the orchestra erupts with the first theme firmly established in D minor as the tonic, or home, key.

As if to confirm his intent, Beethoven repeats the introductory measures, now using the pitches of D and A, identified with the D minor tonality. When the orchestra erupts for the second time, it's on a B-flat major chord, which anticipates the key of the serene third movement and a significant moment in the fourth. Admittedly, this is a technical aspect, but these structural elements are what hold a lengthy piece of music together, creating an architectural framework of sound. The motivic aspects of the theme will serve as the basis for melodic

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## *continued*

development throughout the first movement. This opening is also easily identifiable to listeners and serves as a structural anchor.

The exposition of the movement is concentrated with several motives introduced. Dotted rhythms serve as a crucial element that propels short, fragmented motives forward.

When we next hear the return of the opening introductory passage, we expect Beethoven to repeat his exposition. It's what he's done in every symphony before the Ninth. Except this time, he doesn't repeat. He sidesteps the resolution to D minor, instead going to G minor and the beginning of the development section.

Listen for the overlapping of melodic lines as Beethoven utilizes counterpoint in the development. As he focuses on rhythmic motives, you might even hear the "ta-ta-ta-dum" rhythm of the Fifth Symphony. It's not a literal quote, but the rhythmic element is present.

Reaching the recapitulation, the mysterious opening is gone. We've already come a long way. Instead, the orchestra plays a D major harmony with fortissimo dynamics. It's not a solid D major, but a first inversion of the chord with an F-sharp in the base. Again, it's a technical detail, but one that creates what has been described as "a catastrophic return" and an "apocalyptic moment." An extended timpani roll on the tonic D reaffirms the home key as the music returns to D minor.

As with most recapitulations in Beethoven, this is not a literal repetition of the exposition but a section of continuing development as Beethoven revisits the main elements. Listen to the powerful crescendos that build slowly to dramatic climaxes, the contrasts between loud and soft dynamics, and the forceful accents that Beethoven employs to intensify the music.

Where does this end up? We hear a groaning chromatic passage in the strings. Against that, the winds and brass play a funeral march. Finally, one last fortissimo expression of the D minor motive that opened the movement violently concludes the movement. The struggle posed by Beethoven in this movement remains unresolved. That resolution awaits us.

### **Second movement**

After the despairing conclusion of the first movement, the **second movement** offers relief in a display of rough-hewn Bacchic gaiety, described by Jan Swafford as "a drunken frenzy in manic counterpoint." Although Beethoven does not label the movement as such, it is technically a scherzo, albeit much longer and more complex than any of Beethoven's previous symphonic scherzos. Its placement as the second movement instead of in its usual third movement position allows the music to act as a foil to the first movement.

It begins with an introductory sequence of descending octaves in a crisp dactylic rhythm, which will be an essential rhythmic motive throughout the movement. Then, the strings introduce a theme in a fleet fugato style, marking five successive entrances for each string section. Beethoven spends more time than usual for a scherzo in developing this theme. Note the humorous interruptions by the timpani, which feature the dactylic rhythmic motive. The heavily accented music is brusque and even a little violent.

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## *continued*

The Trio section introduces a lighter texture, but again, one with layered entrances of the tune among different instruments. The tune is rather droll and repetitive. At times, it's harmonized by a drone resembling the sound of a hurdy-gurdy.

The scherzo section repeats. Humorously, Beethoven appears at the end to give us another repeat of the trio section. But as if to say, "Enough of this nonsense," he quickly dismisses it and brings the movement to an abrupt end.

### **Third movement**

Beethoven composed music using the variation style throughout his life. Many of the early examples, often for the piano, are typically virtuosic in nature. Like Mozart before him, he frequently chose themes for their entertainment value. In the music of his final period, variations become a more profound vehicle striving for spiritual qualities. In the Ninth Symphony, we encounter one of his greatest adagios, illustrating what Berlioz described as an "extra-human meditation."

After the D minor focus of the first two movements, Beethoven begins this movement in B-flat major, offering repose for the first time. The tempo is very slow and, in a singing (*cantabile*), style. A brief two-measure introduction rises in an uplifting manner from the bassoons through the clarinets before the violins introduce the first theme. A second theme is introduced, also by the violins. We can sense its arrival by a slight quickening of the tempo and a harmonic shift that takes us into D major. What follows is a sequence of variations on both themes, creating a structure of double variations.

The beauty of the music is sublime and even otherworldly. As the variations progress with different degrees of embellishment, the music modulates through several major keys,<sup>3</sup> never minor keys, achieving transcendent peace. Listen for the extended solo for the fourth horn (a required audition excerpt for low-horn players). Twice, an orchestral fanfare attempts to interrupt the mood in a militaristic manner. Both times, the music rejects this direction with a quiet beginning of a new variation. The movement concludes peacefully with a glimmer of hope.

### **Fourth movement – Ode to Joy**

Whatever repose we acquired in the third movement is interrupted by a fortissimo shriek in the brass and winds in what Richard Wagner described as "the terror fanfare." The cellos and doublebasses protest in unison and attempt to regain control in a passage of recitative that Beethoven draws from the vocal world of opera and oratorio. The fortissimo shriek repeats, and again, the cellos and basses protest.

What follows is a creative stroke of genius on Beethoven's part, where he recalls the music of the first three movements with very brief quotations. After each, the cellos and basses interrupt as if to say, "That's enough! We don't need that here!" There seems to be a gentler and reluctant rejection of the third movement.

Interestingly, in Beethoven's time, the cello and bass recitatives would have been considered innovative. A contemporary who attended the first performance wrote afterward, "The doublebass players had no idea what

[3] The sequence of major keys takes us from B-flat major through D major, G major, E-flat major, and even the unusual key of C-flat major before returning us to B-flat major.



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## *continued*

they were supposed to do with the recitatives. One heard nothing but a gruff rumbling in the basses."

Finally, the woodwinds suggest a new idea, which we recognize as a foreshadowing of the *Ode to Joy* theme. The basses and cellos in their recitative respond positively, and the orchestra injects affirmative cadential chords.

Now, the **Ode to Joy** tune is heard in its entirety as the cellos and basses introduce it softly in unison. The theme rises through the string section, with each repetition adding more instruments in a sequence of variations until the entire orchestra joyfully joins in the theme.

The "terror fanfare" interrupts for the last time, and this time, the response comes from the solo bass, who proclaims in Beethoven's own words, "No more of these sounds. Let us have more cheerful songs filled with joy." The basses in the chorus agree, and the solo bass sings the *Ode to Joy* with Schiller's text. The chorus joins in by repeating the second half of the stanza.

The quartet of soloists introduces each of the following two stanzas, becoming more florid with each one as Beethoven continues the variation technique. The chorus repeats the second half, arriving at a cadential climax in F major as they emphasize the words "before God."

The resolution to B-flat major introduces a new variation section, in which the percussion section, featuring a triangle, cymbals, and bass drum, makes its first entrance. Listeners in Beethoven's time would recognize this as Janissary music, a style associated with Turkish military bands. Their familiarity with the music stemmed from its roots in street music. It's Beethoven being a "crossover" composer before the term was invented in our time. This section is given to the tenor solo, the men of the chorus, and the winds, brass, and percussion of the orchestra.

An extended variation for orchestra only follows and serves as a development of the *Ode to Joy* theme. Listen for the contrapuntal and motivic interplay between the instruments. This energetic section resolves in a complete recapitulation by the chorus and orchestra of the first stanza of the *Ode to Joy*, emphasizing the words "joy" and "brotherhood."

Another climax, followed by a pause, introduces us to a new section that serves as a "slow movement" within the movement's larger structure. The tempo is marked *Andante maestoso* (slow and majestic). Now, Beethoven focuses on the final stanza he took from Schiller's Ode. Here, he proclaims that his Symphony is for the "millions" and that he embraces everyone with a kiss. (*Seid umschlungen, Millionen. Diese Kuss der ganzen Welt!*)

Having created what is by now a massive and lengthy movement, Beethoven needs to tie things together, and he does so with a stroke of genius. With a new tempo change marked *Allegro energico* (fast with energy), he alters the rhythm of the *Ode to Joy* theme. He combines it simultaneously with the "embrace and kiss to the world" melody in a magnificent double fugue in D major, our final home key. The words take a back seat to the glorious music in a *tour de force* that conveys a spirit of exhilaration and exuberance.

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## *continued*

From here on, Beethoven is essentially racing towards the finish. He pauses briefly to let the four vocal soloists have a cadenza. The music quickens until it reaches *prestissimo* (very fast), and with his “kiss to the world” and celebration of joy, Beethoven brings this remarkable symphony to its brilliant conclusion.

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The Ninth Symphony orchestra consists of two flutes, a piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, and a contrabassoon; four horns, two trumpets, and three trombones. The percussion section includes timpani, bass drum, triangle, and cymbals. Beethoven demanded a string section of at least forty-six musicians, considered large for the time. A quartet of vocal soloists (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) and a mixed chorus complete the Ninth’s requirements.

### **The Ninth’s Legacy**

Two hundred and one years after the world was introduced to Beethoven’s final symphony, the Ninth is celebrated and firmly ensconced by many as the favorite classical masterpiece of all time. In the annual year-end countdown of the one hundred best-loved classical works on New York City’s WQXR radio station, listeners consistently vote for the Ninth Symphony as their Number One Choice. Arriving at that foregone conclusion on New Year’s Eve is as much a ritual as the ball dropping in Times Square.

Curiously, Beethoven had doubts about the choral finale. After the premiere, Beethoven confided in his student and fellow composer Carl Czerny that he intended to replace the fourth movement with an instrumental one. Fortunately, he never followed through on that idea and sent the Symphony to his publisher in 1825, content with the music as it was.

A wealth of literature exists about the Ninth, and there is no shortage of attempts to explain or understand it. One concludes that this is not just a historical and iconic work from the past but a living and evolving work of art that demands our ongoing and renewed engagement.

Musically, the Ninth was an inspiration and model for composers, but it also presented a challenge that took musicians time to comprehend fully. Brahms delayed his First Symphony until he was in his 40s, and when his symphony appeared, modeled in many ways on Beethoven’s Ninth, it was dubbed “Beethoven’s Tenth.” The Ninth was a forerunner to musical works that assumed extramusical meanings. It inspired Wagner’s music dramas and enabled Mahler to plan the structure of his large-scale works. The Ninth so influenced Bruckner that his symphonies begin similarly and trace progression from darkness to light.

The Ninth was composed during a period when autocratic regimes regained power following the end of the Napoleonic era. The Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) divided Europe among the major powers and brought Austria under the chancellor leadership of Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859), who managed Hapsburg affairs with censorship and the authority of a police state. Under these conditions, the Ninth was viewed as a beacon of hope and freedom almost from the beginning.

Words that appear in discussions of Beethoven’s Ninth include universality, transcendence, and brotherhood. Kerry Candaele, in his 2013 documentary film *Following the Ninth*,<sup>4</sup> demonstrated how the Ninth celebrated

[4] The Wichita Symphony, in partnership with Tallgrass Film Festival, presented *Following the Ninth* at the Orpheum Theater in 2014 prior to a performance of the Ninth Symphony.

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freedom at the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. On that occasion, Leonard Bernstein led a performance of the Ninth Symphony in which he substituted the word “freedom” (Freiheit) for “joy” (Freude). Earlier that same year, the Ninth was played over loudspeakers at Tiananmen Square in China to give courage and hope to students calling for democracy. In Chile, during the tyrannical Pinochet regime (1973–1990), women singing the *Ode to Joy* outside of repressive political prisons conveyed hope to the men held captive within. And in Japan, the Ninth is a reason for communities to unify around annual December performances in which the choruses number in the thousands.

For Beethoven, joy and happiness were the goals of life. Upon further examination of those words, he believed in the concept of freedom and held a utopian view of it, which was at odds with the prevailing political realities of his time. Biographer Lewis Lockwood states that Beethoven maintained faith in humanity and the power of music to redeem the world. Unfortunately, history tends to repeat itself; thus, Beethoven’s message, as well as his kiss to the world, remains as relevant today as it has always been. Hope, joy, and the desire for freedom never die.

There are many YouTube recordings to choose from for experiencing the Ninth Symphony. Here are two: Riccardo Muti conducts the Chicago Symphony in a 2014 performance. The performance begins about one minute and forty-five seconds into the video: [https://youtu.be/rOjHhS5MtvA?si=JeyBguuNeXVYn\\_Lu&t=105](https://youtu.be/rOjHhS5MtvA?si=JeyBguuNeXVYn_Lu&t=105); Leonard Bernstein’s 1989 Berlin Celebration Concert commemorates German reunification in which the word “Freude” (Joy) is replaced with “Freiheit” (freedom): <https://youtu.be/Hn0IS-vlwCI?si=pEHSoJllpL2o4clD>

If you haven’t come across this before, [here](#) is a letter that Helen Keller wrote to the New York Symphony in 1924, describing her experience with a radio broadcast of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

There seems to be no end to the takes, some communal, some humorous, on Beethoven’s Ninth. It’s a frequent occurrence for flash mobs, and several can be seen on the internet: <https://youtu.be/kbJcQYvtZMo?si=Dw3Qz78Bjx8UyVY6>; Here’s another flash mob by a youth orchestra in Naperville, IL, which shows that the “Ode to Joy” is for all ages: <https://youtu.be/oMQrPjB7B9c?si=nLBQS1tIMxJZzpYh>

And then there are the examples from the department of “Composers Rolling Over in Their Graves.” In this example, British comedian Rowan Atkinson, otherwise known as Mr. Bean, attempts to sing “Ode to Joy” as the European Union's national anthem: <https://youtu.be/oWGZdYNpaSo?si=EMFiREIYCUaKv9fu>

One more listening example comes from *9 Beet Stretch* (2002), a work by the Norwegian conceptual artist Leif Inge. In this concept (or tribute?) to Beethoven’s Ninth, the entire symphony is stretched over a twenty-four-hour period, during which all the notes are preserved at Beethoven’s written pitch levels, but the timing and rhythms are drawn out, creating an ambient sound. The following link provides a 5 ½ hour sample: <https://youtu.be/JSJ9Bkhh1Q4?si=BmgkFumaLX9NFmWH>

*Don is the retired CEO (2012 - 2024) of the Wichita Symphony. He holds piano and music history degrees from Bucknell University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also studied piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the University of Maryland College Park, where he founded the National Orchestral Institute, an advanced training program for aspiring orchestral musicians, in 1988.*