



Gustav Meier  
Music Director  
64th Season  
1st Subscription Concert  
Klein Memorial Auditorium  
Saturday, October 17, 2009  
8:00 p.m.

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Gustav Meier, Conductor  
Mary Elizabeth Williams, Soprano  
Korby Myrick, Contralto  
Michael Wade Lee, Tenor  
Kristopher Irmiter, Bass  
The Mendelssohn Choir and  
The Fairfield University Chamber Singers  
Carole Ann Maxwell, Artistic Director

WAGNER                      Siegfried Idyll

BEETHOVEN                Symphony no. 9 (Choral), op. 125  
Allegro ma non troppo  
Molto vivace  
Adagio molto e cantabile  
Presto - Allegro assai

*The Greater Bridgeport Symphony mourns the passing of Barbara W. Hiendlmayr, a former Board and generous supporter. Tonight's performance is dedicated in her memory.*

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*Tonight's concert is made possible in part by a generous grant from Rotair Industries, Inc.*

# PROGRAM NOTES

Beethoven stands at the crossroads between the Baroque/Classic 18th century and the Romantic 19th: hence his current designation as the Classic-Romantic who helped music transition from one style to another. None of his contemporaries or immediate followers could escape coming to terms with him, just as composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries had largely to choose either to follow in or sidestep the footsteps of Wagner, tonight's other composer.

The *Ninth Symphony* has been Beethoven's most frequently cited work as justification for a variety of musical and ideological progeny. Wagner saw its last-movement chorale as an admission that instruments alone had reached their expressive limit and would need words to be added to them to reach further levels. He also saw the words to the *Ode to Joy* as polemical - millions could become active in throwing off their poor and hungering yokes. Himself an active participant in the Dresden uprisings of 1848, he had had to go into exile when its opera house was burned down a month after he had conducted the *Ninth Symphony* there. In modern times, Chinese writers have seen the *Ode to Joy* text as support for the struggle of the "victory of the Proletariat" advocated by Karl Marx. Performances in Japan by huge choirs and orchestras have become symbols of social togetherness in search of "joy through struggle."

The two works played this evening hold very different positions in their respective composer's canons: Beethoven's is a typically monumental symphony with an innovative choral movement whose message is relatively idealistic and universal while Wagner's is an untypical, instrumental-only chamber work, ironically without voices, whose ideas are personal and rather introspective. The juxtaposition is valid. Both composers were a colossus in their time and their presence remains an active and still-influential historical fact in ours.

## SIEGFRIED IDYLL

**Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883)**

When it came to following acceptable social mores, Wagner was far from the most admirable of men, but when unconventional behavior meant logistical and artistic support, he pursued it honestly enough. Cosima, daughter

of Franz Liszt's liaison (not marriage) to Marie d'Agoult, was the wife of the scholarly Hans von Bulow, an important German pianist. Both he and Liszt had championed Wagner's music. Richard and Cosima started living together before any divorce proceedings were started. In 1870, when they were finally free to marry, Wagner wrote the *Siegfried Idyll* as a birthday present for her. Based on themes from the third opera of *The Ring*, *Siegfried* - which was the name she and Wagner had given their first son, the piece was rehearsed secretly and performed for her on the staircase of their first real home by an ensemble of fifteen musicians. When the *Idyll* was published out of financial necessity, Cosima wrote in her diary "the secret treasure is to become public property."

A lovely, lyric work, it proceeds with skill and warmth. Gentle in the main, it shows Wagner still interested in writing for instruments alone: he called it "a symphonic birthday greeting."

## SYMPHONY NO 9 (CHORAL), OP. 125

**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)**

The 18th century Enlightenment maintained a basic optimism in man's ability to regulate his society through reason. Following natural laws would allow virtue, freedom, progress and universal brotherhood to flourish. The philosopher Kant's categorical imperative, "act so that the maxim of thy action may be a principle of universal legislation," was the ethical foundation of this system. These ideas became a philosophic grounding for Beethoven in his youth, one of which he never lost sight. As late as 1820 in one of his conversation books he wrote, "the moral law within us and the starry sky above us - Kant!!!" The battlecry of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was another talisman of the times which opened a brief window in the 1780's when the practical realization of brotherhood seemed possible. Schiller's 1785 *An die Freude (Ode to Joy)* was the poetic equivalent of the activist barricades in Paris, one which Beethoven in his teens resolved someday to set to music. Napoleon to many people, including the composer, seemed like the *Bon Prince*, a ruler which the Enlightenment had thought necessary, if the social order was to be reorganized. When Napoleon had himself crowned Emperor, however, many hopes

were dashed. Even Schiller rewrote his *Ode* in 1803, toning down some of his more political statements. The text for the Ninth Symphony came from this later version. When Beethoven started sketching it in 1816 the post-Napoleonic Congress of Vienna in which Europe was returned to largely pre-Napoleonic boundaries had just completed its work. A repressive/secret police atmosphere took over in Austria.

The temper of the times was then very different than that of Beethoven's youth. Biographer Maynard Solomon pointed out in 1977 that "if we lose our awareness of the transcendent realms of play, beauty and brotherhood which are portrayed in the great affirmative works of our culture, if we lose the dream of the *Ninth Symphony*, there remains no counterpoint against the engulfing terrors of civilization."

The prevailing key of the first two movements is the traditionally stormy tonality of D minor. Beethoven lets this emerge in a tentative, mystical passage at the beginning of the first movement from which his doubts, hostility and sense of struggle can leap into focus and to which they can return. The critic Kanne noted this general tone at the first performance by writing "like a volcano Beethoven's power of imagination here tears the earth asunder." The second movement scherzo is dominated by raw, driving energy rather than the earthy, playful or lighthearted mood more typical of the genre. The third movement adagio is expressive, thoughtful and assuaging, one of Beethoven's finest lyric moments. Again Kanne seems to have been very perceptive at the first performance calling this adagio "a most profound song, full of warmth and flowing in heavenly melancholy."

With the choral last movement, Beethoven switches to D major, one of music's brightest and most upbeat keys. Opening with a wild fanfare, it then recalls and rejects themes from the first three movements. The baritone enters with words Beethoven himself wrote, "O friends not these sounds, let us sing something more pleasant," as the orchestra is quietly introducing the *Ode To Joy* theme. The verses of Schiller's *Ode* and the order in which the composer uses them created "a continuous line of development from the terrestrial to the divine," as Nicholas Cook wrote in his 1993 monograph on the symphony. They reflect a God-in-Nature, Deist point of view with pagan references, rather than the Christian orthodoxy

with which they have been often translated;

*Joy, beautiful spark of the Gods, daughter of Elysium,*

*Intoxicated with your fire... we enter your shrine...*

*All creature's partake of joy at Nature's breast:*

*Nature nourishes all that is good or evil...*

*Brothers, go on your way,...as joyful as a hero on his way to triumph,*

*Be embraced, you millions! Here's a kiss for all the world!...*

*Do you fall to your knees, you millions?*

*Worlds do you sense your maker?*

*Seek him beyond the stars! Beyond the stars he must dwell!*

Cook also notes in his monograph that many scholars have pointed out that the quiet, mystic setting these last words receive before the final exultant peroration may represent questioning on Beethoven's part that any triumph of the Enlightenment ideals that Schiller was celebrating was actually going to happen on any permanent basis. The composer had possibly tackled a subject too vast even for him to present unequivocally.

Finished in 1824 as a commission for the London Philharmonic, but first performed in Vienna in May of that year, the *Ninth Symphony* was 6 years in the writing. It is a matter of record that at that initial performance, the strings dropped out when their parts were too difficult and so did the singers when the writing got too high. There were two conductors and Beethoven himself stood in the midst of the orchestra and had to be turned around at the end to recognize the applause because with his deafness he had not heard a note - a scene to which there were eye-witnesses that still remains one of music's most poignant. Of all great composers he perhaps most successfully holds the attention both of professional musicians and the general public. Like the four-note motive that opens the *Fifth Symphony* which became a symbol for victory in the second World War, many know the *Ode to Joy* melody who have never heard a complete performance of the *Ninth*. Such was the composer's synchronicity with human aspiration as well as human limitations.

- Burton Hatheway