



# **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

Symphony no. 9

Complete symphonies vol. 5

**THE NETHERLANDS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Jan Willem de Vriend

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Jan Willem de Vriend

**Annemarie Kremer** soprano

**Wilke te Brummelstroete** alt

**Marcel Reijans** tenor

**Geert Smits** baritone

**Choir:** Consensus Vocalis

**Choir conductor:** Klaas Stok

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

### Symphony no. 9 op. 125 in d minor (1824)

- [1] Allegro ma non troppo e un poco maestoso
- [2] Molto vivace
- [3] Adagio molto e cantabile
- [4] Finale: Presto

total time 63:14

**14:45**

**13:08**

**12:32**

**22:47**

"I am Isis. I am that is, and that was, and that shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from before my face." - famous inscription on the colonnade of the Temple of Isis in ancient Egypt. (Ich bin, was da ist / Ich bin alles was ist, was war, und was seyn wird, kein sterblicher Mensch hat meinen Schleyer aufgehoben)

Beethoven once wrote this down and the sentence had lain on his desk ever since, together with another one: "He is One, self-existent, and to that One, all things owe their existence." ("Er ist einzig von ihm selbst, diesem Einzigen sind alle Dinge ihr Daseyn schuldig")<sup>1</sup>. These were important words to Beethoven. Perhaps they inspired him to aim for the highest attainable in his work. And even if he could never gain a place as high as that One, or as the

goddess of motherhood (Isis), he felt it was his moral duty to give the world what it was that *he* could give: his musical legacy.

The developmental history of the ninth symphony goes back a long way. Beethoven worked on it from 1818 to 1824. But he had read Schiller's "Ode to Joy" ("An die Freude") before 1793, and from that time on he had fostered a wish to set the text to music. In the final decade of the eighteenth century, Beethoven could not yet suspect that the words would become so powerful in a symphony. Over the years, musical arrangements of several lines of Schiller's text appeared in his sketchbooks. Increasingly, Beethoven felt the need to approach this on a grandiose scale, and in 1818 he gradually began working out his ideas. On this, Lewis

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1. I.a. in Maynard Solomon "Beethoven Essays", p. 347

Lockwood says: "The Ninth in my view was written to revive a lost idealism. It was a strong political statement in a time when the practical possibilities of realizing Schiller's ideals of universal brotherhood had been virtually extinguished by the post-Napoleonic regimes. Beethoven's decision to complete the work was thus intended to right the balance, to send a message of hope to the future, and to proclaim that message to the world."<sup>2</sup>

Lockwood also stresses Beethoven's sense that a lot depended on comparing and contrasting the secular and the religious aspects in the "Ode to Joy", and then bringing them together in the final movement: "... the great synthesis in which humanity's ideal state can be found

only by reaching toward the heavens to find God."<sup>3</sup>

The fact that, for many, the melody of "Ode to Joy" represents Beethoven's ninth symphony is because the Ode to Joy theme has become so famous and is still hugely popular today. The melody has been played at all the Olympic Games, and it has been used by the European Union as the official European anthem since the 1980s. It has also been used numerous times in commercials and films – in short, it is heard everywhere.

You might see the slow step-by-step march of this diatonic, bristling, almost folksy melody as symbolic of humanity and universal brotherhood. This interpretation of the melody

dates back to the earliest reviews of the ninth. Of course, it is much more than this. Some also cite the religious connotation of the melody, perhaps referring to the Lutheran chorale "Rejoice greatly, o my soul" ("Freu' dich sehr, o meine Seele") or – recently proposed by Hans Werner Küthen – a link to Mozart's "Offertorium Misericordias Domini" (KV 222). This same Küthen reminds us that Schiller's text had profound connections with masonry, as a result of which certain critics saw Beethoven's arrangement as a genuine *Masonic hymn*.<sup>4</sup>

But Beethoven's Ninth is not only the *Ode to Joy*, which serves as an apotheosis in the finale. The symphony also has three other

movements. The choice of D minor was an essential aspect in this symphony: it was the key of turbulence, of desperation. It was a very important key for Mozart, for example. Suffice it to say "Don Giovanni": D minor is the main key of this fantastic opera, the demonic force of which, according to Lewis Lockwood, anticipates on the first part of the ninth symphony.<sup>5</sup>

When I spoke with him about the symphonies, conductor Jan Willem de Vriend added that around the time of the first sketches for the Ninth, the Welsh steam engine came into use in Vienna. And the first steam locomotive was built in England at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, people were frightened by it: suddenly your

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2. From "Beethoven - The Music and the Life" by Lewis Lockwood, p. 422

3. *Idem.*, p. 423

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4. From "Beethoven Forum, vol. 7" - Michael C. Tusa, p. 118.

5. From "Beethoven - The Music and the Life" by Lewis Lockwood, p. 427

body could be transported at tremendous speeds! It was viewed as something of a wonder: “Your body arrives, but your spirit does not.” Characteristic of the Welsh steam engine was the fact that it consisted of two boilers instead of one, and the pressure from the boilers could be used to operate machines. Because the pressure could vary greatly, the steam engine had many valves to indicate its temperature. One such valve sounded just like a fifth. If you then listen to the beginning of the *Ninth*, you first hear those semiquavers very gently percolating, as if a fire is starting, and then you ‘hear’ the valves whistling in fifths and everything picks up speed, going faster and faster, as if the machine is shaking, and then ... in the following measures, everything ‘collapses’. So the first movement sounds like a ma-

chine being tested. And then there is the second movement, starting out with short rhythmic notes and then speeding up, until it seems to mimic a machine. Where is the machine taking us, where will it lead? This seems to be the question behind it. The third movement is a sort of prayer and a hope articulated by Beethoven – the eternity of the human soul, the triumph of good, the peace and calm this will bring. These machines will make us equal; no-one will have to grovel. As we know, the opposite happened, but Beethoven did not know this at the time. To cap it all off, in the final movement Beethoven cites Schiller’s *Ode to Joy*, clearly coloured by a time that stood for freedom, for independence. Hope and optimism speak from the music and the only result can be that everyone picks up on it.<sup>6</sup>

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6. Interview with Jan Willem de Vriend

Jan Willem de Vriend used to have a friend with whom he spoke endlessly about the Beethoven symphonies. In their talks, they tried to include as many things as they could from the time when they were written. Beethoven was in fact very ambivalent: although he felt that people were equal, he did not conduct himself accordingly. The people who worked for him he treated like drudges, preferring to associate with those of the nobility; not just because of the money but also because of the status. He is known to have dressed very well, certainly at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then you had the “junge Werther” craze, after the figure in Goethe’s novel, a book with the same status as a Harry Potter today. Beethoven devoured the book and indeed dressed just like the young Werther. There was an entire

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7. Interview with Jan Willem de Vriend

clothing line. As we now might speak of Prada or Dolce&Gabbana, people then spoke of the ‘Werther line’.<sup>7</sup>

Although his behaviour did not always show it, Beethoven’s ideal was definitely that all people would be equal. (This is why Schiller’s text appealed to him at such a young age.) After all, it is often the case that people who have an ideal to which they devote themselves, with which they feel great affinity, are absolutely unable to attain it in their daily lives. There is something appealingly human about the fact that Beethoven had big ideals for himself – and for humanity – and that he could not integrate them in his personal life. But he could use the ideals in his work, he could unleash a musical revolution. Is it not moving that in the work of this man, who was

such an earthy person, the divine spark can be observed so clearly?

Beethoven will always continue to fascinate people. Whether you adore him, admire him, criticise him or find him abominable, friend and foe must agree that he played a major role in the history of music. Even today, when we hear his symphonies – and surely the *Ninth* – we can do nothing but agree that it is masterly music.

Jan Willem de Vriend does not think that he is 'finished' with Beethoven now that he has recorded all the symphonies. He will continue to philosophise about them, analyse scores and try to get the character of the era in focus – an ongoing and in-depth process.

No, we are never finished with Beethoven!

Valentine Laoût- van Leeuwenstein

Translation: Carol Stennes/Muse Translations

### **Jan Willem de Vriend**

Jan Willem de Vriend is the chief conductor and artistic director of The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra since 2006 and the artistic director of Combattimento Consort Amsterdam.

Since De Vriend was named chief conductor, The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra has become a notable phenomenon on the Netherlands' musical scene. It has presented semi-scenic performances of works by Mozart, Beethoven, Strauss and Mendelssohn. There were premieres of works by Offenbach, Say and Mahler. And by substituting period instruments in the brass section, it has developed its own distinctive sound in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century repertoire. Recently, the orchestra caused quite a stir by performing music by Schumann at festivals in Spain. It is currently recording Beethoven's complete symphonies conducted by De Vriend. Its long

Mahler tradition is being continued in recordings and tours.

In addition to being the chief conductor of The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra, De Vriend is the regular guest conductor of the Brabant Orchestra. He has conducted many distinguished Dutch orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and The Hague Philharmonic Orchestra. De Vriend is also a welcome guest internationally and has conducted orchestras in China, Germany, Austria, Italy and France.

### **The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra**

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra (Orkest van het Oosten, based in Enschede) is the symphony orchestra of and for the province of Overijssel, bringing passion, commitment and

virtuosity to its audience. Performing at an international level, the orchestra is firmly rooted in society. Its balanced programming offers inspiring elements while the use of period instruments in the performance of its classical repertoire gives the orchestra its unique and highly individual character.

Performing concert series in towns across Overijssel, in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and other major cities, and concert tours abroad, The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra acts as a cultural representative for the Province of Overijssel. The orchestra works with the Nationale Reisopera (Dutch National Touring Opera Company) and regional choirs, and has undertaken successful tours to the United States, Canary Islands, Spain and the UK.

Directed by chief conductor Jan Willem de Vriend and permanent

guest conductor Mark Shanahan, the orchestra's unique reputation continues to grow, in both the Netherlands and abroad. CD recordings of music by Ludwig van Beethoven and Dutch composers including Jan van Gilse and Julius Röntgen are acclaimed and in great demand, and have established the orchestra's national and international reputation. The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra was recently awarded the Edison Audience Award 2010 for its recording of Paganini's violin concertos 1 and 2 with violinist Rudolf Koelman.

Concerts by The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra are enjoyed by a wide audience. The orchestra has played in many famous halls including Birmingham Symphony Hall and Carnegie Hall in New York, and has had the privilege of working with many renowned conductors including former chief conductor Jaap van

Zweden, Edo de Waart, Hans Vonk, Gerd Albrecht, Marc Soustrot, Vasily Petrenko, Eri Klas and Ed Spanjaard. It has accompanied numerous famous soloists, such as Ronald Brautigam, Kristian Bezuidenhout, Natalia Gutman, Charlotte Margiono, Antje Weithaas, Marie-Luise Neunecker, Sharon Bezaly, Robert Holl, Fazil Say, Rudolf Koelman and Thomas Zehetmair.

The orchestra's commitment to expanding its social relevance is reflected in its involvement in a number of extraordinary projects in which education forms a key element. In addition to its extensive symphonic programming, The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra has also inspired the creation of a number of ensembles, such as chamber orchestra Sinfonietta Aurora, the Baroque Academy of The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra and various chamber music ensembles. Many of the orchestra's musicians play

a key role in the region's music activities and society, either as teachers at schools and academies of music, or as musicians in ensembles and other projects.

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra is financially supported by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Province of Overijssel and the Municipality of Enschede as well as annual contributions from sponsors.



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This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS Converters.



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