NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
NJSO
XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

BY LAURIE SHULMAN, ©2018

Zhang Conducts Beethoven 9

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

WALKER *Lyric for Strings*

We perform this celebrated work in memory of the late Pulitzer Prize-winning composer George Walker—a Montclair resident and friend of the NJSO.

Kate Whitley: *Speak Out*

Britain's Kate Whitley chose a speech by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai as the text. Children's chorus is the focus for Malala's inspirational message about the importance of education for all.

Beethoven: Ninth Symphony

This is the composer's most grandiose work. The stormy movements get a lot of attention, but the sublime slow movement has its own heavenly power. Beethoven was an idealist; he selected Schiller's "Ode to Joy" because of its message of universal brotherhood. Its inclusion in the finale adds emotional and spiritual depth to the music.

KATE WHITLEY: *Speak Out*

KATE WHITLEY

Born: April 23, 1989, in Oxford, United Kingdom (Currently residing in London)

Composed: 2016

World Premiere: International Women's Day concert on March 8, 2017, in Cardiff, Wales. Xian Zhang

conducted the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales with Côr y Cwm.

NJSO Premiere: These are the US and NJSO premiere performances.

Duration: 9 minutes

"My music has definitely been influenced by having to write for unusual contexts, rather than the traditional ones," Kate Whitley has said. After graduating from university, she co-founded the Multi-Storey Orchestra, whose first performance—of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, no less!—took place in an abandoned parking garage in Peckham. The audience of 1,500 was thrilled. Whitley's concept has grown into a full-scale community outreach project. Her focus is broadening access to classical music. Her choral music has been widely performed in the UK.

Whitley drew her text for *Speak Out* from Nobel Laureate Malala Youssefzai's speech to the United Nations Youth Assembly in 2013. Malala's mission is to promote education for every child. Here are excerpts from Whitley's composer's note:

> The words for *Speak out* are taken from Malala Yousafzai's 2013 speech given at the United Nations Youth Assembly as part of her campaign to promote education for every child.
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> Malala grew up in the Swat Valley in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan where she first came to public attention aged 11 as an activist for girls' education. She survived being shot by Taliban gunmen on her way from school in 2012, an assassination attempt that was covered worldwide. Protests against the shooting were held across Pakistani the day after the attack, over 2 million people signed the Right to Education campaign's petition and Pakistan's first Right To Free and Compulsory Education Bill was passed the following month. Her advocacy has grown into an international movement and in 2014 she was the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize winner for her struggle for young people's rights.
>
> Her 2013 speech was a call for the importance of education. I have taken four of her statements and turned them into a verse about the power of words in the struggle against oppression. This

is first sung by children's choir alone: *Let us pick up our books and pens / Let us wage a glorious struggle / We can never all succeed when half of us are held back / One child, one pen, one teacher, one book can change our world*. There is then a middle section, starting with adult choir alone before the children join them, where Malala speaks in the first person: *Here I stand, one among many / I speak not for myself, but for those without voices / We realise the importance of our voice when we are silenced / And out of that silence comes thousands of voices.*

The leads back into the second verse – a repeat of the first but with all singers, before going into the final coda with the repeated phrase '*Today is the day of every woman, every man, every boy and every girl*', and '*Today is the day we speak out'.*

The children's chorus is enormously effective, using upward gestures to assert hope and determination. Words like "struggle" elicit agitated descending swoops in the orchestra. Whitley's shimmering textures place the voices—and Malala's inspiring message—firmly in the foreground.

Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, suspended cymbal, glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone, strings, children's chorus and mixed chorus.

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, "Choral," Op. 125

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1822–24. Some sketches date as early as 1817.

World Premiere: May 7, 1824, at the Kärtnerthor Theater in Vienna. Michael Umlauf conducted.

NJSO Premiere: 1952–53 season. Heidi Krall, Jane Hobson, Ernest McChesney, Manfred Hecht and the Oratorio Society of New Jersey were the soloists; Samuel Antek conducted.

Duration: 65 minutes

What makes Beethoven's Ninth Symphony so memorable? Entire books have been written to answer that question, and many more will doubtless follow. But the immediacy of a live performance enhances the symphony's impact. The Ninth always provides a revelation, whether to a first-time listener or the veteran concertgoer.

Friedrich von Schiller wrote his poem "An die Freude" ("To Joy") in 1785. Beethoven read it as a youth and felt a strong affinity with Schiller's philosophy of the joy that unites all humankind in brotherhood. As early as 1793, he considered setting the text. By 1818, he had come up with the revolutionary idea of incorporating voices into a symphony. Finally, in 1822, his thoughts germinated in the finale to the Ninth Symphony. Selecting about half ofSchiller's 18 sections, Beethoven rearranged and repeated stanzas to suit his musical needs. The result is a very personal interpretation of the poem, emphasizing the call to universal brotherhood.

The Ninth is inextricably identified with its choral finale. But to overlook the massive impact of the first three movements is impossible. Each segment of this enormous symphony broke musical ground in a striking way.

At the outset, the strings outline a groundswell of open fifths, stark and rumbling, before the main theme erupts in a decisive D-minor downward unison swoop. The battle has begun in this longest of all Beethoven's opening movements. He takes time for sweeping, majestic music, culminating in the spine-chilling coda. At the very point of emotional exhaustion, when we are certain that the power and drama of this movement is played out, Beethoven hammers home the darkness of D minor with thunderous finality.

Only in this symphony did Beethoven place his scherzo second rather than third. Listeners of a certain age still associate this movement with NBC-TV's "Huntley/Brinkley Report" (1956–70). The Molto vivace concentrates the storm of the first movement into sheer nervous energy. A virtuoso showpiece, it is both a brilliant five-voice fugato and a fully developed sonata form. Timpani tuned in octaves

underline its principal rhythmic motive, with electrifying effect. Some relief from the rhythmic and harmonic tension occurs in the D-major trio section.

All volcanic rumblings and dark clouds dissipate in the slow movement. Beethoven's architecture starts to become clear. He transcends the earthly struggle of the symphony's first half in an Adagio of ineffable, heavenly beauty. After the thunderclaps of the scherzo, the tranquil woodwind chord that opens the Adagio is an oasis of beauty and calm. The music that follows is deeply tender and emotionally intense: this is Beethoven at his most human and loving.

A cacophonous shriek opens the finale, shattering the celestial calm. The music leaves no doubt that what will follow is of major importance. Beethoven briefly alludes to the three previous movements before presenting the "Ode" melody. This bold gesture makes his Ninth one of the first cyclic symphonies and heightens the dramatic effect of the "Ode." By the time the orchestra delivers the simple, step-wise melody, it has the effect of a rainbow. From there, Beethoven declaims several orchestral variations on the theme before introducing the bass recitative and the chorus.

After the buildup to a climactic pause, Beethoven's sense of humor surfaces in a march for German military band. The double fugue that ensues is the last section for orchestra alone. Fiendishly difficult, it serves as a brilliant transition. When the chorus re-enters, it sings forth with the most exuberant declamation yet of praise and thanksgiving. Through his four heroic movements, Beethoven wages a struggle between minor and major, with an ultimate victory by major mode. The emergence of triumph out of tragedy—the triumph of universal brotherhood—is the essential message of this miraculous symphony.

Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, cymbals, bass drum and strings. The finale adds soprano, alto, tenor and bass soloists and mixed chorus.

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER: A GIANT OF LITERATURE

You may not *think* you know anything about Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), but his writings are probably more familiar than you realize. If you're an opera buff, you probably know Verdi's *Don Carlo* and *Luisa Miller*—well, the libretti to both operas are based on Schiller plays. Then there's *William Tell*, whose popular orchestral overture came from a major French grand opera by, of all people, the Italian expatriate Gioachino Rossini? Guess what: *William Tell* is another Schiller play. How about Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*? Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orleans*? You guessed it—Schiller again. Even the ever-popular *Turandot* has links to Schiller.

In fact, in terms of his influence on music, Schiller is second only to Goethe among German authors. The two men were great friends from the mid 1790s, when they both lived and worked in Weimar, until Schiller's death in 1805; Goethe lived until 1832. A poet, aesthetician and historian as well as dramatist, Schiller studied both law and medicine before settling on literature. Although his style and philosophy shifted during his career, he remained an idealist, combining his lofty thoughts with a gift for compelling dramatic action.

Although Schiller professed no profound knowledge of music, he married an accomplished amateur pianist and he believed that empathy for music was essential to poetic expression. His articles and poetry on aesthetics in society and their relation to moral grace and human dignity inspired many lesser composers than Beethoven. It is Beethoven's immortal setting of Schiller's "An die Freude" ("Ode to Joy"), however, that is the German writer's greatest contribution to music.

A FAMOUS PREMIERE

The Ninth Symphony received its first performance at Vienna's Kärntnerthor Theatre on May 7, 1824. Beethoven's friends had arranged an all-Beethoven program that included the new *Consecration of the House* Overture, Op. 124, and three movements from the *Missa Solemnis*, plus the new symphony. Beethoven's biographer Maynard Solomon calls that concert "the greatest public event of this period of his career."

The orchestra for the occasion was expanded to include 24 violins, 10 violas and 12 cellos and basses; the woodwinds were doubled. Many music lovers know the story, at once painful and moving, of Beethoven conducting the premiere, which was a smashing success. Thunderous applause reverberated through the theater after the final chords. Immersed in the music, which still resonated in his mind's ear, and oblivious that the orchestra was following the Kapellmeister Michael Umlauf and not himself, Beethoven continued to beat time. Upon realizing that the composer *could not hear* the applause, the contralto soloist Caroline Unger gently turned him around, so that he could perceive and acknowledge the acclaim of his audience.

That poignant tale adds to the lore surrounding the Ninth Symphony. In our time, it has marked many important occasions. Notable among these was the late Leonard Bernstein's performance after the Berlin Wall was dismantled in 1989, with a subtle but significant change in the text: "Freude" ("joy") to "Freiheit" ("freedom").

BEETHOVEN AND JANISSARY MUSIC

Midway through the finale of the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven switches gears. After an exuberant series of variations on the "Ode to Joy" theme involving both chorus and soloists, he takes a left turn from the home key of D major and lands on an F-major chord, signaling a dramatic shift in an already dramatic movement.

What follows is quite remarkable. The passage, marked *Alla Marcia*—in march style—is in B-flat major, a key that Beethoven has already used eloquently in the slow movement. Now, however, his modus operandi is altogether different. With bassoons, contrabassoons and bass drum, Beethoven launches into a military march. He soon adds woodwinds, triangle, cymbals, horns and trumpets.

Beethoven was emulating the Turkish janissary band, a holdover from the Sultan's honor guard. The term comes from the Turkish words "yeni çeri," which mean "new troop." Originally, janissaries were military ensembles serving several functions. On the battlefield, they were in the thick of action, stirring the soldiers to victory. In the Ottoman court, they furnished ceremonial

music, playing at important occasions. The instruments were Turkish drums, cymbals, tambourines, triangles, winds and a “Turkish crescent,” a pole festooned with small bells and tinkling metallic discs. (The English called the latter a “jingling johnny.”)

Janissary ensembles were introduced to Europe in the early 17th century and soon spawned copycat groups substituting western cousins of the Anatolian and Turkish instruments. To European ears, janissary music represented exoticism and Eastern culture. The fashion for this style peaked in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Operas such as Mozart’s *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and Rossini’s *Il Turco in Italia* capitalized on the vogue.

Beethoven had previously used janissary sounds in his incidental music to *The Ruins of Athens*. In 1824, when he incorporated the *Alla marcia* segment into the Ninth Symphony, the most recent military conflict had been Napoleon’s invasion of Vienna in 1803. But the Habsburg monarchs had a centuries-old feud with the Ottomans that would also have resonated strongly with the Viennese. The tenor soloist joins Beethoven’s march, singing “Brothers, run with shining eyes, heroes, happy and victorious.” The irony would not have been lost on Beethoven’s Viennese audience.