

Longwood University

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

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Today is Friday, May 7th. I am a resident of Austria, more specifically, in Vienna. I am on my way to the Kärntnertor Theater to see the first performance of Herr Ludwig van Beethoven's newest academy. This work is the ninth symphony that Beethoven has composed, and I have heard that this concert will be sold out. I plan to arrive to the Kärntnertor early (as I usually do) and secure my seat. Most of the seats in the theater, or any theater in Vienna for the matter, are not very comfortable. However, this is the best I can do, considering the much more comfortable and safe box seats are usually bought out by the wealthy bourgeoisie and aristocrats. I will most likely be in the open standing area behind the *gesperrte Sitze*. This way, I can save a little bit of money, and move about freely during the performance.

I am expecting the music to be the same format as other traditional, classical symphonies that I have seen. If I am remembering correctly, the symphony should have four movements, each of which having a unique form. The first movement is usually a sonata, in Sonata-Allegro form. The second movement is usually a scherzo, or another faster form. The third movement is usually a slow minuet/trio that is meant to be danced to. The fourth and final movement is usually the finale, which is lighter, and features some of the same musical ideas from previous movements.

I have hailed a horse and buggy to go to the concert. Looking out the side of the carriage, I can see the passing streets of Vienna, and I see quite a few people walking towards the Kärntnertor. It appears that the theater has completely sold out for this performance. I believe that the Kärntnertor can hold close to one thousand people in it. I am personally not surprised, people have been talking about this grand symphony since the performance was first announced, and I am sure that tickets sold out very quickly. I am sure that most of the attendees are here to see and honor Herr Beethoven, but the performers are some of the very best that Vienna has to offer.

Perhaps the singer I am most excited to see is Henriette Sontag. She is only 18 years old, but she is one of the more technically sound, and well-renowned sopranos right now. Sontag has only been singing for about two opera seasons, but she has already been singing lead roles in

various operas. I am very fond of her light, brilliant voice, and Sontag is one of, if not my favorite soprano right now.

I arrived at the Kärntnertor, and it is about 6:00pm. The theater is, as I expected, packed. I am a little surprised to not see the Imperial family in attendance. I guess it is too late in the season for them to attend, despite Beethoven's best attempts. I believe that the Imperial family has already departed Vienna for the summer. I believe that the concert is about to begin, I can hear the intro to the first movement starting now. The orchestra and chorus for this performance is massive. The soloists and the choir are positioned in front of the orchestra, and the orchestra has arranged the violins and violas to be on the far left, the basses and cellos are in the center, and the winds are on the far right.

Beethoven is positioned next to another conductor, who I believe is Michael Umlauf. I believe that Beethoven is just setting the tempo for the performance. This is impressive nonetheless, especially considering Beethoven's lack of hearing. Beethoven is dressed in a black dress coat, white neckerchief, a waistcoat, black satin pants, and shoes with shiny buckles. It is dark in here, so I can't say for certain, but it looks like Beethoven's coat is more of a dark green than it is black.

The first movement of this symphony is quite different to those that I have seen in the past. The music is solemn, almost tragic sounding. I am having a hard time discerning what key this piece of music is in. The movement opens with a slow, building intro, where the strings introduce the main melody. Then, the flutes and horns work together and play a different, but similar melody. This is very clearly in *Sonata-allegro* form. The *exposition* is where the main melody is introduced to us, in this case, it is the strings and flutes that are playing the melodies mostly. Later in the movement, this idea is taken to new and interesting places in the *development*. This is where we can hear some of the main theme coming through, but it is taken to different keys and there is some ornamentation with some of the notes, giving a sense of uniqueness to the movement. Finally, the first movement ends with a *recapitulation*. During the recapitulation, the main melody was played for us again, this time it was played in the tonic key (which to my ear sounds like D minor).

The second movement of the symphony has exceeded my expectations. This seems to me to be a *scherzo*. This movement is definitely in trio, almost like a minuet, but it is way too fast to dance to. The movement largely uses the strings/flutes to play a very fast, catchy melody. The tempo varies in some parts of the song, but overall the piece has a very bouncy rhythm. This piece seems largely homophonic to me. There are different melodies present, but there are none/very few that are being played simultaneously.

I personally don't have a lot to say about the third movement. It was a classic minuet. The piece was obviously in 3/4 time, and the tempo is quite slow. I felt quite relaxed during the majority of the piece, and I think it would be very comfortable to dance to.

I am honestly a little confused at the fourth and final movement. In a traditional symphony, the first movement is usually the most substantial, but it is clear to me that this is not the case with Herr Beethoven's ninth symphony. The fourth movement is the most substantial, but I cannot place my finger on what the form or structure of the movement is. Personally, I believe that the fourth movement is in Theme and Variation form. There is a clear theme that is introduced early in the work, and then that theme is changed slightly and played in different ways as the piece develops. I have heard some debate from the people around me regarding this however. I have heard people make good cases for the fourth movement being in *Sonata-allegro* form, and I have even heard people say that the final movement is an entire symphony on its own!

I have finally returned to my quarters after the performance. I can safely say that this entire symphony is a masterpiece. I believe that this work has taken the traditional symphony, and elevated it and twisted its meaning in a new way. Traditionally, the weight of a symphony is focused on the first, *Sonata-allegro*, movement, but Beethoven has put most of the weight of this work towards the back, which I feel adds a lot to the progression and evolution of the symphony as a whole. The orchestra was fantastic, and (at least to my ears) this piece seemed quite complex to play. The success and masterful creation of this work is even more impressive when you consider that Beethoven is almost completely deaf. This work is, without a doubt in my mind,

going to cement Beethoven as one of the greatest composers of this era, and maybe even of all time.

Works Cited

Copland, Aaron. *What to Listen for in Music*. New American Library, 2009.

Kelly, Thomas Forrest. *First Nights: Five Musical Premieres*. Yale University Press, 2001.