

A Night with Beethoven:  
Celebrating Symphony No. 9 at Orchestra Hall

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Ludwig van Beethoven's most glorious and jubilant masterpiece, Symphony No. 9 in D Minor Op. 125, was celebrated and performed on September 18, 2014 in Orchestra Hall at Symphony Center, Chicago, Illinois. The year 2014 marked the 191<sup>st</sup> anniversary Beethoven shared his 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony with the world as his hearing gradually faded. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's conductor and music director was Riccardo Muti. The Chicago Symphony Chorus was directed by Duain Wolfe. The complex included two thousand five hundred twenty-two seats. It is also an institution for learning and training purposes. Daniel Burnham was the architect of the Orchestra Hall. The venue consisted of sub-optimal acoustic walls and have had ongoing modifications since 1960 until today. The Hall had hosted an incredible variety of performances and presentations since its dedication in 1904, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra holds a premier place in American music (Orchestra Hall). Since 1940s, the Hall remained among the first rank of symphonies in the United States of America (Orchestra Hall).

There were some non-musical elements to this performance. All the men, including the conductor, Riccardo Muti, wore white dress shirts with bow ties, black suit jackets and pants along with dress shoes. All the women, except for Camilla and Ekaterina, wore black dresses and shoes. Camilla, who sang soprano, wore a pink dress. Ekaterina, who sang mezzo-soprano, wore a red dress. The appearances of the choir and orchestra were fabulous. Everyone had a great attitude throughout the performance as evidenced by the smiles on their faces. This was indeed a formal concert. As the conductor came in, everyone stood up to their feet and clapped their hands. Muti shook hands with two of the violists near him. He proceeded to the rostrum, turned to the crowd, waved, and bowed. Turning back, he faced the choir and orchestra, and waited until everyone was seated and ready, before he conducted the orchestra to play "Allegro ma non troppo unpoo, un poco maestoso." They did not use PA system. Everything was acoustic. Even

the singers did not have a microphone. They just sung loudly and clearly, which was quite impressive with the room being so large.

My favorite piece from the performance was “Ode to Joy”. This was Beethoven’s last symphony. The lyrics to “Ode to Joy” was written by a German poet, Friedrich Schiller, in 1785. Beethoven crafted the lyrics to the perfect melody (Wright, 226). “Ode to Joy” from Symphony No. 9 was written within in a theme and variations form. Beethoven’s message in this piece is quite astonishing. He wanted humanity to be victorious as they strived together (Wright, 226). He displayed this union as he combined the choir with the orchestra. Wright described it like this, “Beethoven now bids the chorus to join in, singing Schiller’s liberating text. From here to the end of the movement, chorus and orchestra speak with one exalted voice, pressing the tempo, volume, and the range of the pitches to the limits of the performers’ abilities. Their message is Beethoven’s message...” (Wright, 226). Since 1956, all the Olympic Games had sung Ode to Joy and is currently serving as the official anthem of the European Union (Wright, 226). This is what made this piece so appealing to me. In a nation where there are so much division among ethnicity, we need to work together to better the people around us and our country. The music was a masterpiece, consisting four voices (soprano, alto, tenor and bass), a choir, instruments such as the bass drums, double basses, clarinets, cellos, cymbals, flutes, horns, trumpets, trombones, tubas, timpanists, triangle, violas, and violins. But the message behind the music made it even more powerful. The message that “Humanity will be victorious if it strives together” in “Ode to Joy” is what made this piece my favorite (Wright, 226).

Beethoven's “Adagio molto e cantabile” from the Symphony No. 9 is my second favorite piece. “Adagio molto e cantabile” is a slower piece. It was written in a double variation form. There were no voices that accompanied the orchestra. The instruments included were double

basses, clarinets, cellos, flutes, horns, trumpets, trombones, tubas, timpanists, violas, and violins. The bass drums, cymbals, timpanists, and triangle were not used during this piece. Although “Adagio molto e cantabile” was a very slow song, the music was very soothing and peaceful. As I watched the video, some of the individuals from the audience closed their eyes and just listened. It was as though they were taken to another world. The same happened to me as I closed my eyes and listened. There was so much peace crafted into “Adagio molto e cantabile”. Perhaps that was what Beethoven wanted to communicate to all listeners. This is what made Beethoven's “Adagio molto e cantabile” from the Symphony No. 9 my second favorite piece.

In conclusion, I was very impressed with all the arrangements and creativity done by Riccardo Muti. He conducted the orchestra and recreated what Beethoven had given to the world nearly two hundred years ago. The music was beautiful, peaceful, and in numerous occasions, exciting and energetic. The performers were all those who played with an instrument and sung in the choir. Together, the performers made astounding music and a world-class performance was displayed. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I did not hear any mistakes during the performance. Everyone was very professional. I would love to attend a concert like this in the future and would highly recommend these types of concerts to families and friends.

### Works Cited

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