BEETHOVEN’S 9TH
The USC Thornton Symphony and USC Thornton Choral Artists

Friday, March 30, 2018, at 7:30 p.m.
Bovard Auditorium
University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW
- Beethoven’s 9th is one of the most famous works in western musical history.
- It was first performed in Vienna in 1824.
- The symphony will be performed by student groups from the USC Thornton School of Music: the USC Thornton Symphony, USC Thornton Chamber Singers, and USC Thornton Concert Choir.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
German composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) is widely regarded as one of the greatest composers of all time. He was the towering musical figure in the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras. Some of his most important works were composed during the last 10 years of his life, as he struggled with deafness.

BEETHOVEN’S SYMPHONY NO. 9
Beethoven’s Symphony no. 9, or Beethoven’s 9th, is one of the masterworks of late Classical music. It was Beethoven’s last complete symphony, and it is widely considered his greatest work. Also known as The Choral, this was the first symphony by a major composer to involve singers. The vocal parts include the celebrated “Ode to Joy,” the lyrics of which are based on a poem by the German dramatist, poet, and philosopher Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805).

While there is overwhelming consensus about the greatness of the symphony, interpretation of it varies widely. Tom Service wrote in The Guardian that Beethoven’s 9th has “been held up as the central work of Western classical music both by those who imagine it as the ne plus ultra of symphonic, technical, and compositional imagination and mastery, and by those who want to say that... the piece is a sounding bell of social change, of emotional hope, and even of political reform.”

Musically, Beethoven’s 9th had a tremendous influence on composers including Berlioz, Brahms, Wagner, Bruckner, Mahler, and Schubert. Wagner remarked that the symphony pointed the way to the “music of the future,” which would unite words and music, as Wagner would do in his own monumental operas.

The progression of the first movement from subtle strings (like an orchestra tuning) to a strong, loud theme was a radical new experience for concertgoers. Beethoven also surprised audiences—and inspired later composers—by changing the conventional order of movements, placing the fast-paced scherzo before the slow movement. The fourth movement is the famous choral finale, which pianist and scholar Charles Rosen has described as “a symphony within a symphony.”

Beethoven’s 9th premiered in Vienna in 1824, performed by the largest orchestra Beethoven had ever assembled. The symphony has been widely and frequently performed ever since, including as an anthem and a symbol of unity at major world events such as the Olympic Games, the protests in Tiananmen Square, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the year in Japan.
The Classical period of western classical music was 1730 to 1820, the time of Mozart and Haydn. The Romantic period of 1780 to 1910 coincided with a literary and intellectual movement that arose in response to the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. Romantic music (from works by Schubert and Chopin, to Tchaikovsky and Verdi, to Mahler, Strauss, and Puccini, among many others) is generally more expressive and emotional than light, clean Classical music. Beethoven spanned the two periods and shaped the transition between them. Lowercase “classical music” is a broad term for western art music from the Middle Ages to the present.

Beethoven’s 9th, and especially its “Ode to Joy” section, has been performed at momentous occasions around the world, and embraced by political regimes from the democratic to the authoritarian. Stanley Kubrick used the symphony to sinister effect in A Clockwork Orange (1971), and the symphony creates an exultant, triumphant effect in Dead Poets Society (1989). Perhaps the most striking example of the symphony’s contradictory interpretation—or universal appeal—is this: Hitler celebrated his birthday with Beethoven’s 9th, which was also beloved and played by prisoners in Nazi concentration camps.

**USC THORNTON SYMPHONY**

Led by Carl St.Clair, the USC Thornton Symphony has worked with some of the world’s greatest composers, including Henryk Górecki, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Yo-Yo Ma, Michael Tilson Thomas, James Conlon, John Williams, and Joan Tower. The group regularly collaborates with the USC Thornton Opera program and each year presents its New Music for Orchestra concert featuring orchestral works by Thornton student composers.

**USC THORNTON CHAMBER SINGERS**

Initially called the Madrigal Singers, the USC Thornton Chamber Singers was formed in 1939. In 1956, the Chamber Singers adopted its current name in a move designed to better reflect the group’s repertoire. In 2016, the Chamber Singers performed Bach’s Wachet Auf with Jeffrey Kahane and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, an all-English program with Simon Carrington, and Gubaidulina’s Sonnengesang with cellist David Geringas for the Piatigorsky International Cello Festival. The group received the 2015 American Prize in Choral Music and in 2014 was one of only 25 choirs invited to the World Symposium on Choral Music in Seoul, Korea. The USC Chamber Singers is conducted by Jo-Michael Scheibe.

**USC THORNTON CONCERT CHOIR**

The USC Thornton Concert Choir, under the direction of Dr. Cristian Grases, is a large choir of approximately 60 voices. The group explores classical and global repertoire from the Renaissance through the 21st century and is noted for its support of student composers. In addition to on-campus performances, the concert choir periodically performs at Walt Disney Concert Hall and Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

**FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

- What emotions did Beethoven’s 9th evoke in you?
- How does one interpret a piece of music?
- Why do you think this symphony has been used in so many different contexts, for so many different purposes?

**IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MAY WANT TO CHECK OUT:**

- The USC Thornton Symphony
  music.usc.edu/uscth-thornton-symphony-orchestra
- The USC Thornton Chamber Singers
  music.usc.edu/uscth-thornton-chamber-singers
- The USC Thornton Concert Choir
  music.usc.edu/usctth-thornton-concert-choir
- Concerts at Walt Disney Concert Hall, home of the LA Philharmonic
  laphil.com
- Los Angeles Master Chorale
  lamasterchorale.org

The audio capacity of the CD was set at 74 minutes when the new technology was developed in the 1980s, reportedly to allow for a complete recording of Beethoven’s 9th.
ANDREW JUSTICE of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about tonight’s performance. Those with a call number (e.g., books and DVDs) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries; most of those such items below are in the Music Library, located on Doheny Memorial Library’s ground floor. Those without a call number (e.g., dissertations and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

**BOOKS**

**SCORE**

**ARTICLES**

**AUDIO-VISUAL**
- Bayreuth Festival Orchestra and Chorus, Wilhelm Furtwängler. EMI Classics, 1951. Classical Music Library (database)