

**JOYFUL DANCES**  
**SATURDAY, MAY 7, 2022 – 7:30 PM**

**Toshiyuki Shimada** Music Director & Conductor  
**Elissa Lee Koljonen** Violin  
**Sophie Shao** Cello  
**Eva Virsik** Piano

**BEETHOVEN** Triple Concerto in C major, Op. 56  
Allegro  
Largo  
Rondo alla Polacca  
ELISSA LEE KOLJONEN  
SOPHIE SHAO  
EVA VIRSIK

INTERMISSION (20')

**PRICE** Dances in the Canebrakes  
Nimble Feet  
Tropical Noon  
Silk Hat and Walking Cane

**BEETHOVEN** Symphony No. 9 in D Minor  
Finale  
SARAH YANOVITCH-VITALE, Soprano  
CATHERINE O'DWYER, Mezzo-Soprano  
BRIAN CHENEY, Tenor  
GREGORY FLOWER, Baritone  
*with*  
EASTERN CONNECTICUT  
SYMPHONY CHORUS

*With thanks to the Donald C. & Dolores M. Gordon Stage Extension donors*

# The Eastern Connecticut Symphony Chorus

## **Sopranos**

Abby Bruce  
Jane Falivene  
Jennifer Finlayson  
Alison Guinness  
Rebecca Harris  
Amy Holmberg  
Bethany Jensen  
Marty Minich  
Nancy Rigdon  
Sherry Stidfole  
Kathy Walburn

## **Altos**

Evelyn Bamford  
Joyce Daubar  
Betsy Farrugia  
Karen Greer  
Maureen Gressler  
Mary Harris  
Debbie Kimball  
Virginia Lewis  
Jana Noyes

Judy Spitz

Joyce Wallace  
Clare Wurm

## **Tenors**

Michele Delmhorst  
Deborah Eskra  
Alec Leshy  
Tom Meisenzahl  
David Rinzler  
Ed Savage

## **Basses**

Steve Bruce  
John Charland  
James Conover  
Gabriel Frommer  
Ray Gardy  
Ben Hayes  
Lee Howard  
Robert Keltner  
Karl Stofko  
Todd Tuomi

## **Accompanist**

Jeehyun Kim

## **Interim Director**

Nancy Rigdon

## Elissa Lee Koljonen

### Violin



Recognized as one of the most celebrated violinists of her generation, Elissa Lee Koljonen has thrilled audiences and critics in over one hundred cities throughout the world. Ms. Koljonen initially received international acclaim when she became the first recipient of the prestigious Henryk Szeryng Foundation Award and silver medalist of the Carl Flesch International Violin Competition. Her playing has been hailed by the Helsingin Sanomat (Helsinki) as “sparkling, sensual and personal.” Dan Tucker of the Chicago Tribune has written that “she displayed boundless technique and musicianship.”

Ms. Koljonen’s engagements have included a return to the Philadelphia Orchestra to perform the Shostakovich Violin Concerto #1, her debut in Spain with James Judd and the Bilbao Symphony Orchestra, performances with José-Luis Novo and the orchestras in Annapolis and Binghamton, the Delaware Symphony, Reading Symphony, the Kimmel Center’s Summer Solstice and the Philadelphia premiere of Behzad Ranjbaran’s Violin Concerto with JoAnn Falletta. She has also made appearances with the Boston Pops, Minnesota Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic and the symphonies of Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dallas, Detroit, Oregon, Pittsburgh, Helsinki and Seoul. Ms. Koljonen has collaborated with such noted conductors as Mattias Bamert, James DePriest, Lawrence Foster, Richard Hickox, Neeme Järvi, Louis Lane, Andrew Litton, Eiji Oue and the late Bryden Thompson.

She has performed in some of the world’s most important venues, including the Musikverein in Vienna, the Mozarteum in Salzburg, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Barbican Centre in London, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Seoul Arts Center, the Symphony Hall in Boston, and the Academy of Music and Kimmel Center in Philadelphia. Also an avid chamber musician, Ms. Koljonen appears regularly at festivals throughout North America, Europe and Asia. She garnered critical acclaim for her debut at the Queen Elisabeth Hall in London and her appearances with the London Mozart Players and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo in a special concert celebrating the 700th anniversary of the Grimaldi Dynasty.

Ms. Koljonen is a protégée of the great Aaron Rosand at the Curtis Institute of Music. Incorporating his influence, she carries on the legacy and tradition of Leopold Auer and his legendary school of violin playing.

*Elissa Lee Koljonen appears by arrangement with the Curtis Institute of Music.*

## Sophie Shao

Cello



Celloist Sophie Shao, winner of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and top prizes at the Rostropovich and Tchaikovsky competitions, is a versatile and passionate artist whose performances the New York Times has noted as “eloquent, powerful” and the Washington Post called “deeply satisfying.”

Shao has appeared as soloist to critical acclaim throughout the United States: the Smith Center in Las Vegas, Lied Center in Lincoln, Segerstrom Hall in Costa Mesa, California, the Palladium in Carmel, Indiana, and the Bard Music Festival. She has premiered Howard Shore’s cello concerto “Mythic Gardens” with Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra, the UK premiere with Keith Lockhart and the BBC Concert Orchestra, and European premiere with Ludwig Wicki and the 21st Century Orchestra at the KKL in Lucerne. Other past concerto performances include Haydn and Elgar Concerti with Lockhart and the BBC Concert Orchestra, Beethoven’s Triple Concerto with Hans Graf and the Houston Symphony, and the premiere of Richard Wilson’s “The Cello Has Many Secrets” with the American Symphony Orchestra.

Ms. Shao has given recitals in Suntory Hall in Tokyo, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Middlebury College, Phillips Collection, Walter Reade Theater and Rose Studio in Lincoln Center, the complete Bach Suites at Union College and in New York City. Her dedication to chamber music has conceived her popular “Sophie Shao and Friends” groups which have toured from Brattleboro, VT to Sedona, AZ, while other exciting collaborations include Tan Dun’s Ghost Opera with Cho-Liang Lin, performances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Chamber Music Northwest, and Festival Mosaic, among many other presenters across the country. She has been a frequent guest at

## Sophie Shao (cont.)

many leading festivals around the country including Caramoor, Chamber Music Northwest, Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival, Music from Angel Fire, the Bard Festival, and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and was a member of Chamber Music Society Two/Bowers Program, a young artist residency of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

Ms. Shao's recordings include the Complete Bach Suites, Andre Previn's Reflections for Cello and English Horn and Orchestra on EMI Classics, Richard Wilson's Diablerie and Brash Attacks and Barbara White's My Barn Having Burned to the Ground, I Can Now See the Moon on Albany Records, Howard Shore's original score for the movie The Betrayal on Howe Records, Marlboro Music Festival's 50th Anniversary on Bridge Records, the music of George Tsontakis on Koch Records, and Howard Shore's "Mythic Gardens" on Sony Classical.

A native of Houston, Texas, Ms. Shao began playing the cello at age six, and was a student of Shirley Trepel, the former principal cellist of the Houston Symphony. At age thirteen she enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, studying cello with David Soyer and chamber music with Felix Galimir. After graduating from the Curtis Institute, she continued her cello studies with Aldo Parisot at Yale University, receiving a B.A. in Religious Studies from Yale College and an M.M. from the Yale School of Music, where she was enrolled as a Paul and Daisy Soros Fellow. She is on the faculty of University of Connecticut and plays on a cello made by Honore Derazey from 1855 once owned by Pablo Casals.

# Eva Virsik

Piano



**I**nternationally acclaimed pianist and Steinway Artist Eva Virsik has appeared as a recitalist and orchestra soloist throughout Europe, the United States, and Asia. In Europe she performed in major cities throughout Germany, France, Austria, Russia, Greece, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, with such orchestras as the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra in Germany, the National Orchestra of Lille in France, leading orchestras in the Czech Republic and all the major orchestras of Slovakia, including the Slovak Philharmonic, Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, the State Philharmonic Košice, the Slovak Sinfonietta, and the Slovak Chamber Orchestra. In the United States, she has toured along the East Coast, appearing in Portland, Boston, Washington, D.C. and New York City, where she debuted at Carnegie Hall (Weill). Her performances in Asia include a recital in Ankara, Turkey, and in 2018 she made her Far East debut in South Korea at the Shinyoung hall in Seoul, followed by the Tri-bowl Cultural Center recital in Incheon. Her appearances at international festivals include the "Russian Winter" - a tour that crossed the Arctic Circle, the Festival of Contemporary Music "Berolina Concerts" in Germany, the Bratislava Music Festival "BHS" in Slovakia, the summer festival in Karlsbad, Czech Republic, Arkady Music festival in Maine, among others. She was also heard in chamber series with the Portland String Quartet, DaPonte String Quartet and many other instrumental groups.

Eva Virsik recorded for permanent archives and was heard live on radio and television networks such as SWR - ARD radio in Germany, on the Berlin Radio both as a guest with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and solo from the Robert Schumann house in Zwickau, as well as on the Czech radio and frequently on RTVS, the largest radio and television network in Slovakia. Upon first coming to the United States she was invited to Boston for a live performance on WGBH radio "Morning Pro Musica" series lead by the iconic Robert J. Lurtsema, and her orchestra performances were televised via PBS and aired on the Maine Public Broadcasting and Connecticut Broadcasting networks. Her album Piano Encores received a rave review from the Washington Post critic Patrick Rucker in the classical magazine Fanfare.

The highlights of past seasons include Virsik's performances in Europe,

## Eva Virsik (cont.)

notably with the Slovak Sinfonietta and conductor Oliver von Dohnányi, recitals at the Mozarthaus in Vienna, and return engagements at the Mirbach Palace series in Bratislava, including also a piano duo performance with pianist and conductor Alexei Kornienko. She was the featured artist at the Robert Schumann Festival in Elmira, New York. At the events of the United Nations in New York, she performed for President Ivan Gašparovič, and President Andrej Kiska, the two previous heads of Slovak Republic. Virsik appeared several times also under the baton of her husband, conductor Toshiyuki Shimada - with the Orchestra of Southern Finger Lakes, Portland Symphony Orchestra, and Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra. In May 2021 she inaugurated the #60 Limited Edition Lang Lang Black Diamond Steinway piano with a gala recital at the new concert hall opening ceremony in Starý Klíž, Slovakia. Her concert dates in 2021/22 include solo and orchestra performances in Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and USA, including performance at the United Nations in New York and with the New Britain Symphony Orchestra in Connecticut.

Eva Virsik was born in Bratislava, now the capital of Slovakia, where she debuted on Slovak Television at the age of four and was winning local piano competitions from age six. At fourteen, she won the first prize at the all-state Czechoslovak youth competition and at the Virtuosi per Musica piano competition. Upon winning at age fifteen the first prize at the international Smetana Competition and a Prize of the Czech Music Critics, she played her orchestra debut with West Czech Symphony Orchestra conducted by Libor Pešek, and was featured at the Rudolfinum Hall in Prague and the Reduta Hall in Bratislava. She further studied with the distinguished pianists Yakov Zak and Stanislav Neuhaus at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, where she completed eight years of study and earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree. She is a silver medal laureate of the Maria Callas Piano Competition in Athens, Greece (1981). Eva Virsik has taught at German Music Universities in Frankfurt and Freiburg, the Academy of Music in Bratislava, at Bowdoin College, and the University of New Haven. She appeared in recitals at many major music institutions, including Yale University, and held master classes and piano courses in the United States, Asia, and Europe, most recently at the Marmara University in Istanbul. Eva Virsik was honored by the Slovak-American Cultural Center for her representation in performing arts (2010, New York), and by General Frank J. Grass with the Coin of Excellence (2012, Washington, D.C.).

## Sarah Yanovitch-Vitale

Soprano



Consistently recognized for her rich sound and musical sensitivity, Boston-based soprano Sarah Yanovitch-Vitale is in demand as a concert soloist and ensemble musician. She has been a frequent soloist with Boston's Handel and Haydn Society under the artistic direction of Harry Christophers, singing the role of Belinda in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and soprano solos in Bach's B minor and G major masses, as well as in cantatas 10, 36, 61, 140, and 179. She made her

solo debut at Tanglewood in the summer of 2017 with H+H in Purcell's *Fairy Queen*.

Other notable solo credits include the roles of Cupid and Venus in *King Arthur* with the Henry Purcell Society of Boston, Mozart's *Mass in C minor* and Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Dixit Dominus* at Boston University Marsh Chapel, Handel's *Messiah* and the Mozart Requiem with Arcadia Players, Bach's *Mass in B Minor* with Masaaki Suzuki and Juilliard 415, the Fauré Requiem and Beethoven Symphony No. 9 with the Eastern Connecticut Symphony, and the Brahms Requiem, *Carmina Burana*, and Vaughan Williams' *Dona nobis pacem* with Yale Glee Club. Outside of Boston, Sarah has sung with such leading choral ensembles as Bach Collegium San Diego, The Thirteen, Yale Choral Artists, and GRAMMY® nominated Seraphic Fire.

Ms. Yanovitch-Vitale is a graduate of the Yale School of Music and holds a master's degree in Early Music Voice through the Institute of Sacred Music. During her time at Yale, Ms. Yanovitch-Vitale worked closely with esteemed conductors Masaaki Suzuki, David Hill, and Simon Carrington, touring as a soloist throughout the United States, Italy, France, The Baltics, India, and the UK.



## Caroline O'Dwyer

Mezzo-Soprano



Caroline O'Dwyer is a mezzo-soprano from Connecticut with a passion for both performance and pedagogy. As an active concert performer, Caroline has appeared as a guest soloist with numerous orchestras, including the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and Greater Middletown Chorale, the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, and the Waterbury Chorale, the Nutmeg Symphony Orchestra, the Eastman Philharmonia, the Cordancia Chamber Orchestra, the Warwick Symphony Orchestra, the Skidmore Orchestra, and the Park Church Chamber Orchestra.

In May of 2021, Caroline completed her doctoral studies at the University of Connecticut, where she performed numerous roles with their Opera Theater. In 2019, she debuted the role of Miriam "Ma" Ferguson in the world premiere of Douglas Buchanan's Sackler Award-winning opera, *Bessie and Ma*. Other roles include: Prince Charmant (*Cendrillon*), Catherine (*Le Mariage aux lanternes*), the Abbess (*Suor Angelica*), Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Cousin Hebe (*H.M.S. Pinafore*), Hansel (*Hansel and Gretel*), and Prince Orlofsky (*Die Fledermaus*). She has also performed with the Hartford Opera Theater, both in main stage and in their "New in November" productions, as well as with the Land of Enchantment Opera (New Mexico).

Caroline has been on the voice faculty at the University of Rhode Island since 2018. There, she has twice been a recipient of the University Artist Series grant, which supports faculty performances. In December 2021, Caroline and her colleague David Gilliland (piano) performed an all-contemporary voice recital, including the premiere of Gilliland's *Reimagined Italian Art Songs* (modern arrangements of eight of the most beloved classics from the Schirmer song collection). Caroline has won several other awards for her sensitive interpretation of art songs. In 2018, she was a national semi-finalist for the prestigious NATS Artist Award, having won the New England Division of the competition in 2017, and the Connecticut District Division in 2014.

She lives in Coventry, CT and maintains a private voice studio in addition to teaching at URI. Upcoming performances include a solo voice recital in Bowling Green, Ohio, with pianist Heather Goldman (July 2022). For more information, please visit [www.carolineodwyer.com](http://www.carolineodwyer.com).

## Brian Cheney

Tenor



Hailed by KUSC Los Angeles as the “next great tenor”, Brian Cheney, protégé of legendary tenor Jerry Hadley, has gained international acclaim for his portrayal of characters such as Don José in *Carmen*, Mario Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, Rodolfo in *La bohème*, the Duke in *Rigoletto*, Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and Canio in *Pagliacci*. “It is tenor Brian Cheney as the brave painter Cavaradossi who really blew me away. Cheney has that terrific tenor sound: the power, richness, and vocal color of a high baritone combined with ringing, awe-inspiring high notes” (Stage and Cinema.)

Of his performance as Don José in *Carmen*, critics hailed: “Tenor Brian Cheney’s portrayal of Don José was the most effective dramatic and vocal realization of character in the production...this excellent singer revealed a voice of amazing power and great beauty. Cheney’s booming tenor voice and effective dramatic realization of the passionate Don José soon made him the audience’s favorite character.” (Classical Voice of North Carolina)

This past year, Brian produced and performed in over 30 virtual concerts through the Stageit platform in split screen with pianist and conductor Cathy Venable. “Cheney and Venable have made an art of performing online.” (Broadway World) In that time, he has performed over 10 hours of content, with programming ranging from Italian, French, and English Art Song, performing the entire 24 Italian Art Songs and Arias anthology, to a historical look at a Century on Broadway concert series. “Cheney has been a champion of the online recital for many months, presenting weekly showcases throughout the COVID-19 lockdown across a wide range of repertoire.” (Operawire) A Century on Broadway consists of 11 Decades and over 5 hours of hits from Musical Theater. “When Broadway opens again, there will surely be a spotlight begging for Brian Cheney.” (Broadway World) He was also featured in Carnegie Hall’s tribute broadcast to Ruth Bader Ginsburg playing Justice Antonin Scalia in OperaDelaware’s production of Derrick Wang’s Opera, *Scalia/Ginsburg*.

Mr. Cheney has performed numerous times as a soloist at Carnegie Hall including a recent performance of a world premiere and US premiere of

Hungarian music with the American Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Leon Botstein. Mr. Cheney also made his LincolnCenter debut as tenor soloist for the 10th Anniversary of 9/11 at Avery Fisher Hall appearing with acclaimed soprano, Jessye Norman. Most recently, he gave a world premiere performance of a song cycle for Tenor and Orchestra, Daniel Steven Crafts' From a Distant Mesa with the New Mexico Philharmonic. He was praised for his "tone," "expression," and "lustrous radiance that illuminated the text at every point."

To watch his 6 part documentary and to purchase his critically acclaimed album please visit his website, for more details.

## Gregory Flower

### Baritone



**B**ass-Baritone Gregory Flower is a New England based singer whose "rich and powerful voice" (Cape Cod Times) has been heard by audiences across the region. He holds a Bachelors from The University of Hartford in Voice Performance and Music Education, and a Masters from UConn in Voice performance. He performs Opera, Operetta, Musical Theatre, Oratorio, Art Song, and choral masterworks. He has become a favorite of regional conductors for his versatile technique, musicianship, and deep commitment

to character and text.

His most recent opera engagements include Pa Ferguson in the world premier of Bessie and Ma, Aeneas in Dido and Aeneas, The Big Bad Wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, and Frank Maurant in Street Scene. Musical Theatre roles include Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof, Jamie in The Last 5 Years, Mr. Maraczeck in She Loves Me, and many more. Solo Oratorio highlights include Elijah, Messiah, Durufle Requiem, Mozart Requiem, Faure Requiem, and Jesus in The 7 Last Words of Christ. Greg is a scholar in Franz Schubert and has presented Schwanengesang in recital and written multiple papers on his total language. In 2014 he was a national finalist in the Collegiate Division of the Classical Singer Competition. Greg is active with several professional choirs including: Voce, Alchemy, Novi Cantori, and Schola Cantorum at the Cathedral of St. Joseph. He is currently the Director of the Music Ministry and Organist at St. Mark the Evangelist Church in West Hartford.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Triple Concerto in C major, Op. 56**

(~33')

*First ECSO Performance*

#### **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

Born December 16, 1770; Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827; Vienna, Austria

**B**eethoven's *Triple Concerto* is an unusual work for the time it was composed in because rather than featuring a single solo instrument it showcases three instruments that typically perform concertos solo. This makes the players collaborate in a manner not often seen in orchestral music. They must work together and create a unified sound while also accounting for the orchestral backing. What makes this task easier is that Beethoven arranged the concerto so the soloists introduce and play most of the thematic material in its music while the orchestra serves to back up their performance. Allegedly Beethoven was originally commissioned to write the concerto for the archduke Rudolf who he taught. The Archduke wanted to perform as a soloist, but in a less demanding setting because he would be backed by the two other soloists. However, as the concerto requires the three instrumentalists to collaborate together, it might be more challenging than many solo concertos. The concerto was only performed once in 1807 during Beethoven's life and it is unclear who the soloists were for that performance.

The concerto can be quite challenging even for seasoned performers. One of the most infamous recordings of this piece, a record from the 1960s featuring conductor Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic alongside three Soviet soloists was later named by critic Norman Lebrecht as one of "20 Recordings that Never Should Have Been Made." David Oistrakh, the violinist on the recording said "It's a dreadful recording and I disown it utterly...I demanded an extra take. 'No, no,' he [von Karajan] replied, 'we haven't got time, we've still got to do the photographs.' To him, this was more important than the recording. And what a nauseating photograph it is, with him posing artfully and the rest of us grinning like idiots."

The concerto begins with an orchestral introduction and then introduces the three soloists in the order cello (which introduces most of the

## PROGRAM NOTES

thematic material in each movement), violin, and piano. The first movement is one of the longest Beethoven had written at this point in his career giving ample time for him to introduce and cause all sorts of musical development on its themes. The second movement contains an extended passionate duet between violin and cello that the piano later joins, adding quiet arpeggios to the mix. Afterwards the cello immediately introduces the third movement, a lively polonaise in which the three instruments play various snippets from a theme introduced by the cello that contrast and mesh with each other.

—Saadya Chevan

### **Dances in the Canebrakes**

(~9')

*First ECSO Performance*

#### **FLORENCE PRICE**

Born April 9, 1887; Little Rock, AR

Died June 3, 1953; Chicago, IL

Florence Price is increasingly recognized for her role as a major American composer of the Twentieth Century. She was the first African American woman to have her compositions played by major American orchestras, most notably the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which premiered her *First Symphony* in 1933 and performed many of her musical works throughout the 1930s. Price's arrangement of the spiritual *My Soul is Anchored in the Lord* was the final song performed by Marian Anderson in her iconic 1939 concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to an integrated audience after she had been refused the opportunity to perform at the Daughters of the American Revolution's segregated Constitution Hall.

*Dances in the Canebrakes* was originally written as a suite for solo piano in 1953 just before Price's unexpected death from a stroke in 1953. William Grant Still, an African American composer who was her contemporary, who in his own career also broke significant racial barriers in music, arranged the piece for orchestra shortly after Price's death. *Dances in the Canebrakes* reflects Price's style as a musically conservative composer for the time period she lived in; her style is more in line with that of mid to late European Romantics than her white contemporaries who famously experimented with styles such as

## PROGRAM NOTES

serialism. The piece's three movements combine southern folk song with American ballroom dances of the late 19th Century, most notably the cakewalk.

The first movement, titled *Nimble Feet*, opens at a moderate pace focusing on the main theme played by the string instruments with regular interjections from the woodwinds. This theme is light and airy, perhaps giving the sense of dancers in a large room moving quickly through their steps. The second movement, *Tropical Noon*, is a little slower and more relaxed, the accompaniment while still moving the piece along at a tempo that elicits dance-like movement also gives off the more relaxed feeling that comes with the middle of a hot day. In the third movement, *Silk Hat and Walking Cane*, the opening theme, which is played in different variations by parts of the orchestra throughout the movement, descends down the musical scale in a slightly broken manner. It might be a musical reflection of the movement's title drawing the listener's ears from the top of the imagined silk hat that a ball attendee appears to be wearing steadily towards the bottom of the walking cane they hold.

—Saadya Chevan

### ***Finale from Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125 (~24')***

*First ECSO Performance: March 20, 1976; Victor Norman conducting;  
New London High School*

### **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

Born December 16, 1770; Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827; Vienna, Austria

As early as 1793, the 23-year-old Beethoven had intentions of setting to music the *An die Freude* (*Ode to Joy*) of Friedrich von Schiller, the German poet and dramatist. In 1812, he again considered using verses from the poem in a choral overture. Then in 1822, he finally found the vehicle to employ these significant verses – as a choral finale to his *Ninth Symphony*. Some have thought that this choral ending to an instrumental symphony was an inevitable outcome of the struggle in the three preceding movements, leading from D-minor to a paean of joy in D-major. However, Beethoven's sketches and notes prove that this was not the case.

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The famous theme to which the composer set Schiller's text can be traced back to a 1794 song, *Gegenliebe* (*Mutual Love*), and then used again in the *Choral Fantasia* of 1808. But even as late as 1823, a year after Beethoven had decided to link this theme with the *Ode to Joy* he had misgivings and wrote out a new subject as the main theme for his finale, labeling it *Finale Instrumentale*; a clear indication that a purely instrumental close to the symphony was still a possibility. This somber theme was eventually used in the finale of the *A-Minor String Quartet, Op. 132*, lending credence to the theory that the first three movements of the *Ninth* would have led to a concluding movement of tragic character had not Beethoven finally decided on his joyous choral ending.

Having decided to close the symphony with a choral finale, Beethoven was not content to create a sudden transition from the sublime *Adagio* to the ecstatic expression of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*. He needed a new and dramatic path to lead to the introduction of the human voice for the very first time in a symphony. His solution was a masterstroke of invention. The finale opens in a burst of anger followed by a restless recitative for low strings. Then the composer quotes the principal themes of the earlier movements, each one being rejected in turn; but from this rejection there gradually emerges the now famous theme which will dominate this last movement. The opening storm returns along with the recitatives, but this time sung by the human voice, as the baritone proclaims, not Schiller's, but Beethoven's own words – "Oh Friends, not these sounds! Rather let us sing notes that are more pleasant and more joyful." With this transition now accomplished, the composer allows Schiller's *Ode* to unfold with chorus and soloists in a series of continuous variations on the hymn of joy. The text of the *Ode* portrays joy almost as a sanctifying gift from God with the power to unify all of nature and mankind and inspiring Beethoven to some of his most exalted music. He has given wings to Schiller's text with a movement that builds in exultation and then culminates in a coda of sweeping power and excitement.

—Paul E. Shannon, DMD