

# SoNA

Symphony of Northwest Arkansas

## Ode to Joy: Beethoven's Ninth

April 6, 2024

Walton Arts Center

Paul Haas, *conductor*

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### **Fuga y Misterio** **(1968)**

Astor Piazzolla

*b* March 11, 1921 in Mar del Plata, Argentina

*d* July 4, 1992, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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It's called *Nuevo Tango*, a fusion of traditional tango rhythms with modern jazz and even symphonic music. It was the brainchild of Astor Piazzolla, an Argentine-born musician who grew up in sketchy parts of New York City but went on to become a citizen of the world.

In 1968 Piazzolla wrote a short opera named *María de Buenos Aires* that combines the kaleidoscopic cultural life of working-class Buenos Aires with just a touch of magical realism. *Fuga y Misterio* is an instrumental interlude in which Piazzolla blends his fusion jazz-tango-classical style with classical fugal techniques.

The piece is in three parts. The opening is the actual fugue, albeit in tango rhythm; then comes an aggressive, energetic dance section. A lovely arioso, drawn from the opera, provides the *misterio*.

"I am still amazed by Piazzolla's music," says Julián Vat, director of the Quinteto Astor Piazzolla. "The more I hear it, the more I marvel at the genius of his synthesis ... it's music with a big heart."

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### **Symphony No. 9 in D Minor,** **Op. 125 (1824)**

Ludwig van Beethoven

*b* December 16, 1770 in Bonn, Germany

*d* March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

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It extended for 96 miles. It stood for 10,316 days. Then in 1989 the Berlin Wall finally came down. The physical barrier itself required about two months to remove, but the emotional one required far longer—if, indeed, it is altogether gone yet.

Only one musical composition could celebrate the unification of the German people: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its unquenchable message of optimism in the face of adversity.

On March 10, 1824 Beethoven offered the publisher Schott “a new grand symphony, which ends with a finale (in the style of my piano fantasy with chorus, but far greater in content) with solos, and chorus of singing voices, the words from Schiller’s immortal well-known Lied: To Joy.” The great symphony had its premiere a few months later, on May 7 at Vienna’s Kärntnertor Theater.

Here a bit of explanation on symphonic performance in the early 19th century is in order. Although it was common for orchestras to have a conductor in the modern sense, most of the heavy lifting of leading the ensemble was handled by the first violinist—called the ‘concertmaster’ in America or the ‘leader’ in England. The performance was therefore guided by a dual leadership—the leader at first violin and a ‘conductor’ either from a raised podium or just as often from a piano. (Joseph Haydn’s symphonies were produced just that way in London during the 1790s, with Johann Peter Salomon directing from first violin and Haydn at the fortepiano giving the occasional cue.)

Given that Beethoven was almost entirely deaf by 1824, his role in the performance would be of necessity limited; he could easily derail the entire thing with one ill-considered gesture or cue. As it was, he very nearly did, given that he was apparently unaware when the piece actually ended but kept on gesticulating a bit longer, but on the whole it didn’t matter: the performance was borderline unhinged anyway, done in by insufficient preparation, copyist errors in the parts, and the unprecedented difficulty and complexity of the work.

It bowled them over anyway. The Ninth was not one of those seminal masterpieces that was initially scorned and then won acceptance gradually; it entered the world with a roar and has remained the king of the symphonic repertory ever since. One can trace the entire history of the Romantic symphony as a succession of composers all trying to come to grips with Beethoven in general and the Ninth in particular. It was the ultimate, the ideal, the unmatched standard against which any and all would be measured and found wanting.

Even Johannes Brahms—whose craftsmanship was on a Beethovenian level—blanched at the thought of trying to introduce another symphony to the post-Beethoven pantheon, and required nearly a quarter of a century from inception to completion of his superlative first symphony, which acknowledges its debt to the Ninth but goes on to carve out a special niche for itself.

What is it about the Ninth that warrants such a stratospheric reputation? Part of the answer is easy enough: it was longer than any symphony yet written, it required larger forces, it demanded more out of those forces, and then there was that matter of a gargantuan finale requiring full chorus and quartet of vocal soloists. But other works have choral finales (there’s even a piano concerto with one) and nobody puts them on the peak of Olympus. Size alone doesn’t answer the question.

There’s also the palpable sense of victory in the Ninth, in Beethoven’s day understood as the ultimate European victory over Napoleon—who, we should remember, had laid siege twice to Vienna during his career—but afterwards coming to stand for the triumph of will, love, and optimism against adversity. Therefore it is a symphony that means something beyond the notes on its many pages. And for many, that meaning is wrapped up in a hope, or even a certainty, in a future that will be better, that the human spirit will win out in the end, that if we just believe in ourselves enough, present difficulties will give way to future happiness.

Over the course of the Ninth’s 70-odd minutes, Beethoven takes us on a journey through human existence itself. The symphony commences with sonorities so elemental that they would have been familiar to our cave-dwelling ancestors, then expands into a magisterial expression of human civilization at its highest levels, via a grand structure that is the musical counterpart of a soaring cathedral. Strife and battle are covered in the propulsive, surging second movement, while the lyrical heart of the work lies in its imperishably expressive slow movement, a place where time slows and we are consoled in an embrace of luminous compassion.

And then, the colossal finale, itself as long as many earlier symphonies, a multi-sectioned affair that mixes operatic recitative (and not always sung, either), aria, chorus, variation, and a mighty symphonic form blended with Schiller's "Ode to Joy." Be embraced, you millions! The kiss is for the whole world! Brothers, above the canopy of stars must dwell a loving father.

Joseph Haydn ends his glorious oratorio *The Creation* with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, still innocent, still clad 'in native worth.' But Beethoven ends the Ninth not on Earth but with a titanic embrace of the very heavens: Joy!! Beautiful spark of divinity! Divinity! We are all blessed with the divine spark, he says: it is our universal, imperishable and eternal birthright. All we have to do is claim it.

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## Lenora Green-Turner

Soprano

American soprano, Lenora Green-Turner, is being recognized as one of America's most loved sopranos with her full warm, gorgeous, lyrical voice.



Green-Turner is hailed by *Opera News* as an impressive vocalist and by the *New York Times* as a most expressive singer. The *NOLA Defender* says "When Lenora sings, it is apparent that she is an indulgence the audience can wholeheartedly support." Leonora has been a featured soloist with the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas under the baton of Maestro Paul Haas and has also performed with the Fort Smith Symphony under Music Director John Jeter. Her opera roles include Mimi, Mary (*Highway 1, U. S. A.*), Countess Susanna (*Il Segreto di Susanna*), Donna Anna, Suor Angelica, and Antonia (*Les Contes d'Hoffmann*). Her awards include the Jane Willson Emerging Artist award and a scholarship from the Sarasota Opera Guild. She is Vice President/President Elect of the

Arkansas Chapter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS).

Dr. Green-Turner is former Artist-In-Residence for Stax Music Academy, LeMoyné-Owen College, and Opera Memphis. She earned her DMA and MM from University of Michigan, and Performance Diploma from Indiana University.

She is a member of Exigence (Dr. Eugene Rogers) and Tactus (Dr. Warren Puffer Jones), the founder of Green Room Studios, and a member of the voice faculty at the University of Arkansas. Dr. Green-Turner resides in Fayetteville with her husband, Anthony, and daughter, Addie.

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## Katherine DeYoung

Mezzo-Soprano

Mezzo-soprano Katherine DeYoung, originally from

Traverse City, Michigan, is a 2023 graduate of The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. In the 2023/24 season, she returned to Lyric Opera of Chicago performing *The Mayor's Wife* in *Jenůfa* and covering the Marquise de Berkenfield in *La fille du régiment*. In the Fall, she performed as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* with Opera San Antonio and as Prince Orlofsky for Dayton Opera's Season Opening Gala. In the 2022/23 season at Lyric Opera, she sang Giovanna in *Ernani*, Mercédès in *Carmen* and Sibyl in the world premiere of *Proximity*. She covered Ragonde in *Le Comte Ory* and Hänsel in *Hänsel und Gretel*. In the 2021/22 season at Lyric, she performed as the Second Lady in *The Magic Flute*. Katherine is a 2019 Sullivan Award Winner from The William Mathews Sullivan Foundation, a 2021 Richard F. Gold Career Grant recipient from the Shoshana Foundation, and the 2022 Eileen Deneen Scholarship Award Winner from The American Opera Society of Chicago. She was a 2023 Semifinalist for the Paris Opera Competition



and is a 2024 Semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition.

In the summers of 2018 and 2019 Katherine was an apprentice singer with the Santa Fe Opera and was a member of the Detroit Opera Studio from 2018 to 2020. She is an alumna of Michigan State University and the University of Houston.

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## Joel Burcham

Tenor

Joel Burcham is an exceptionally talented American tenor who has been highly acclaimed for his outstanding vocal performances in over 35 principal tenor roles with some of the most renowned opera companies in the world, including Utah Opera, Central City Opera, Opera Omaha, Madison Opera, Opera Fort Collins, Opera Theatre of the Rockies, and Painted Sky Opera. His portrayals of Alfredo, Don José, Pinkerton, Cavaradossi, Canio, and Faust have been especially impactful, leaving lasting impressions on audiences everywhere.

Apart from his operatic accomplishments, Dr. Burcham is also an active concert soloist who has graced the stage with several symphonies, including Hawaii Symphony, Colorado International Mahler Festival, South Bend Symphony, Omaha Symphony, Madison Symphony, and the Classical Music Festival in Eisenstadt, Austria. His repertoire, which includes Beethoven's *9th Symphony* and *Missa Solemnis*, Haydn's *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, *War Requiem*, and Handel's *Messiah*, is truly awe-inspiring.



Dr. Burcham has earned several Voice Performance degrees, including a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a Master of Music from the University of Arkansas, and a Bachelor of Music from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Currently, he serves as an Associate Professor of Voice and Past Voice Area Chair at the University of Oklahoma School of Music.

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## Timothy Jones

Baritone

Timothy Jones enjoys a reputation as a charismatic presence on operatic and concert stages throughout the United States, Europe and South America. *The Boston Globe* hailed his voice as “stentorian and honeyed,” and the *Chicago Tribune* called his “complete connection with the text extraordinary.” His eagerly anticipated performances combine intelligent musicianship, commanding vocal technique and a unique ability to connect with audiences. Jones has soloed with the Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Baroque, Baltimore Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Houston Symphony, and many other orchestras. Jones is widely celebrated as an enthusiastic champion of new and contemporary music. His tour de force performance of *Eight Songs for a Mad King* by Peter Maxwell Davies was called “an amazing feat, making unnatural demands seem natural ... bizarre behavior coalesced into a sympathetic portrayal.” (*The Salt Lake Tribune*) His performance of Pulitzer Prize Winning Composer Kevin Puts' *Einstein on Mercer Street* is featured on PNME's recent recording *Against the Emptiness*.



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