

**BEETHOVEN'S FINALE**  
**A GUIDE TO THE LAST MOVEMENT OF THE NINTH**

For the ASO Chorus  
by Jeffrey Baxter  
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Much has been written and said about this masterwork of human creation, but here for you is both a “stopwatch and an ordinance map” to guide you through the composer’s organizing principles in the choral finale to his Ninth (and final) Symphony.

**Choral Finale to Beethoven 9<sup>th</sup>** (with text from Schiller’s “An die Freude”)

While the words may be Friedrich Schiller’s, the hymn, “to joy,” will forever be Beethoven’s! Here’s why:

**The Big Picture**

Beethoven brings in voices (and trombones!) for the final movement of this final symphony which he casts as a set of twelve variations on a theme, grafted onto a modified Sonata-Rondo form:

Rondo = A-B-A-C-A-D-A...

Sonata Form = Exposition-Development-Recapitulation

Sonata-Rondo (incl. an Introduction and Coda) = [A-B-A] exposition [C] development [A] recapitulation

Schiller’s complete poem consists of twenty-four quatrains grouped into eight “stanzas” (three quatrains per stanza). The first two quatrains of each stanza have a rhyming scheme of a-b-a-b:

<i>-funken,</i>	- a
<i>Elysium,</i>	- b
<i>-trunken,</i>	- a
<i>Heiligtum!</i>	- b

-And each third quatrain is offset with a rhyming scheme of a-b-b-a:

<i>Millionen!</i>	- a
<i>Welt!</i>	- b
<i>-zelt!</i>	- b
<i>wohnen.</i>	- a

Beethoven crafts a mighty D-Major hymn out of nine of Schiller’s quatrains (along with an “introductory” poetic statement of his own), grouping them into five stanzas – all in 8-lines – except for one 4-line half-verse (“Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen”). Beethoven’s stanzas are made from Schiller’s verses with the rhyming scheme of a-b-a-b, except for the “Turkish” March half-stanza and two of the a-b-b-a quatrains (that he combines for his Development section): “Seid umschlungen” and “Ihr stürzt nieder.” -Not your Baptist hymnal-setting!



### Some Interesting Details

Beethoven crafts an eminently singable, symmetric tune – rising and falling in stepwise motion, at ms. 92-93:



He then unleashes the full force of his lifetime’s arsenal of variation-technique – a skillful, organic development of thematic material – by:

1. Turning his “lofty” theme into a very “earthy” march, at ms. 343-345:



He indicated “Marcia” [march] in the score, knowing that adding “alla turca” was unnecessary. His use of winds, with accompaniment of triangle, cymbal, and bass drum would have immediately conjured up in his audience’s ears the jangle of Janissary – an evocation of an Ottoman military band.

2. Whipping up an orchestral double-fugue built on the “Turkish” March-rhythm (short-LONG, short-LONG) and a modification of main theme, at ms. 431-432:



3. Combing the new theme (and new text) with the main theme (and text) for a dizzying Recapitulation in D-Major:



4. Concluding with a Coda, by presenting the main theme in diminution:



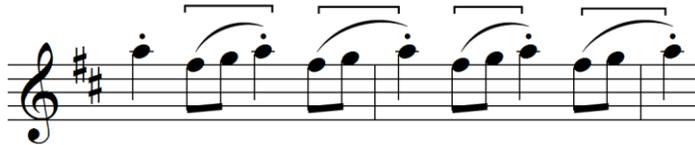
5. Continuing with a Codetta, with the new theme (“Seid umschlungen Millionen”) in diminution:



6. Finalizing the ecstatic frenzy (whirling Dervish?), with snippets of the main theme also in diminution, both here (in the piccolo):



-And in fragments here (violins/piccolo):



-But amidst all the clamor and excitement, Beethoven never loses his way, or more importantly his intuitive sense of proportion: the “Golden Mean,” or structural and emotional highpoint, occurs at exactly the right moment – around ms. 595 (.618 of the total number of measures in the finale and just over halfway durationally). Beethoven instinctively sensed this as the artistic apex for the *Andante maestoso* stanza (and noble trombone entry), “Sied umschlungen, Millionen!” Structurally, this is the Development section, where Beethoven stops all the clocks (with a slower tempo and longer note-values) and takes us away from D-Major to the subdominant and beyond, “überm Sternenzelt” [beyond the stars].

If there were any question that – as Robert Shaw often mused – the inverse of the Biblical phrase, “And the Word was made flesh,” could be true, it is nowhere more positively and emphatically answered than here, in Beethoven’s finale. There are few instances of human endeavor where the world of opposites is so eloquently – and even coarsely – united, from the “Wurm” to the “Cherub” next to God. -And some two centuries later, Beethoven continues to make a strong case for the hope of a “Götterfunken” [spark of divinity] in all of humanity.

*Freude!* -And thanks to all of you,

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