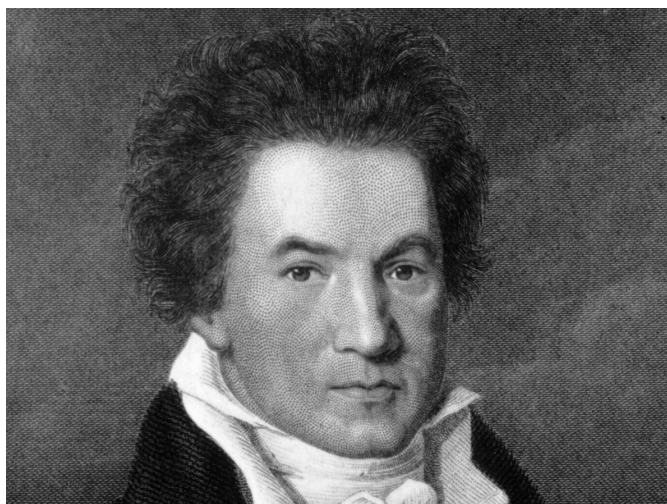


## Cleveland Orchestra, Chorus and soloists excel with ‘Ode to Joy’ performance



German classical composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827) circa 1808 from a painting by J. Mahlers. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images/TNS) TNS

by Stephanie Manning | Cleveland Classical

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CLEVELAND, Ohio – Few melodies in the classical canon hold as much name recognition as Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.” The beloved tune, set to the words of German poet Friedrich Schiller, comes from the composer’s Symphony No. 9 — a revolutionary

piece both in its form and in its celebration of the indomitable human spirit.

The desire to witness such joyful music making in person is undoubtedly what drove a large audience to Mandel Hall at Severance Music Center on Thursday, Oct. 23. And it’s safe to say that the Cleveland Orchestra, Chorus and soloists did not disappoint.

Conductor Franz Welser-Möst and the musicians warmed up the crowd with Finnish composer Jean Sibelius’ symphonic tone poem *Tapiola*, a lush and tranquil 20-minute work that captures the spirit of Finland’s wilds. Languid chromatic passages in the strings cyclically repeated themselves, interspersed with woodwind textures and the occasional stormy mood before reaching a satisfying resolution.

As a prelude to the Beethoven, *Tapiola* left less of an impression than what was to come. But it did reaffirm that the orchestra is sounding particularly polished under Welser-Möst, who has been on the podium for some impressive performances in the first few weeks of the 2025-26 season.

The conductor was in energetic form for Beethoven's Ninth. His brisk tempos in the dramatic first movement rode the wave of the music by keeping things flowing, yet precise. The hushed strings emphasized some sterling section playing, especially from the violins and cellos. Both conductor and orchestra were completely locked into every moment, creating a listening experience to sit back and savor.

That momentum carried quickly into the second movement scherzo where the musicians put particular emphasis on the first note of every bouncing measure. The third, marked "Adagio molte e cantabile," finally offered a chance to breathe. This beautiful chorale trades lines between the strings and winds, an effect that flowed effortlessly from the orchestra like water from a tap.

Bass-baritone soloist Dashon Burton, now sitting onstage, could barely hold back a smile as he listened to the stirring music that opens the fourth movement. Then the "Ode to Joy" beautifully emerged from the cellos and basses. Finally, Burton rose to his feet to boldly sing "Freunde, nicht diese Töne!" (Friends, not these notes) his confident proclamations echoed by the chorus.

Tenor Miles Mykkanen, more reserved but no less attentive, nailed his short but demanding solo during the buoyant Turkish March. He and Burton joined mezzo-soprano Taylor Raven and soprano Joëlle Harvey for some nicely blended quartet moments interspersed with solo mini-cadenzas.

The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, expertly prepared as always by Lisa Wong, joyfully raised their voices again and again, enthusiastic without letting the adrenaline get the best of them. By the blistering final section, Welser-Möst hardly needed to conduct as the orchestra and chorus drove toward a heart-pounding conclusion. Once the applause started, it felt like it might never stop.

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