

MUSIC

An Early Setting of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy'

Many Americans may know Germany's national poet of freedom, Friedrich Schiller, only through the musical setting of a part of his most famous poem, the "Ode to Joy," as the choral finale of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Beethoven's setting is so sublime—and Beethoven himself acknowledged that he considered setting the poetry of Schiller an almost impossible task—that any other music for this great hymn to universal human brotherhood under a benevolent Creator seems out of place today.

Yet, from the very year in which it was first printed, 1786, the "Ode to Joy" ("An die Freude") began to be sung to various musical accompaniments, in the environment of the "house music" that flourished around Schiller, his fellow poet Goethe, and their companions at the height of the German Classic period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

German *lieder* are today so much a part of the recital repertoire and the recording industry, that we forget that these songs were not mainly intended by the Classical composers for professional singers, but rather for the many ordinary citizens who shared a knowledge of beautiful singing and a basic technical command that are lost even to many professionals today.

Schiller's poem was set out with alternating verses and choral refrains, a format adhered to by most of the early composers, until Beethoven dared to reshape it. Written in 1785, the poem was published in Schiller's review *Thalia* in 1786; that

same year, a composer named J. Chr. Müller set it to music. By 1800 there were at least twenty different composers whose versions of "An die Freude" survive today, and of these, some did several different variants.

In 1797 an otherwise unknown, Haydnesque composer with the name (or pseudonym) of Tepper von Ferguson published, in a limited subscription edition in Berlin, a grandiose choral version of "An die Freude" with four soloists, chorus, and with each verse and its refrain set as a separate movement, complete with changes in key and tempo, and beginning with a bass solo—in these respects a curious and perhaps

unique foretaste of Beethoven's much later choral symphony. (The printed version has a keyboard accompaniment which might be a reduction of a lost orchestral score.)

Beethoven was already contemplating the task of setting the poem, as we know from a letter written in 1793 when he was only twenty-three. In November 1799, for Schiller's fortieth birthday, the Berlin composer and music publisher J.C.F. Rellstab put out a collection of six settings of "An die Freude," reprinted as the *Intelligenzblatt* of the Leipzig General Music Review. Besides a version of his own, Rellstab included one by J. Fr. Reichardt, a composer at the

An die Freude

Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken
Himmliche, dein Heiligtum.

Deine Zauber binden wieder,
Was der Mode Schwert geteilt;*
Bettler werden Fürstenbrüder,*
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.

Chor

*Seid umschlungen, Millionen!
Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Brüder—überm Sternenzelt
Muß ein lieber Vater wohnen.*

* Reworked by Schiller in the 1803 edition of his works to the more familiar:
"Was die Mode streng geteilt;
"Alle Menschen werden Brüder,"

To Joy

Joy, thou beauteous godly lightning,
Daughter of Elysium,
Fire drunken we are ent'ring
Heavenly, thy holy home!

Thy enchantments bind together,
What did custom's sword divide,*
Beggars are a prince's brother,*
Where thy gentle wings abide.

Chorus

*Be embrac'd, ye millions yonder!
Take this kiss throughout the world!
Brothers—o'er the stars unfurl'd
Must reside a loving father.*

* Reworked by Schiller in the 1803 edition of his works to the more familiar:
"What did custom stern divide;
"Every man becomes a brother,"

Berlin court who often antagonized Goethe and Schiller, but whose many songs setting Schiller's poems greatly helped to popularize Schiller in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The collection also included an anonymous tune which, before Beethoven, was destined to become the most famous setting, and continued to be sung throughout the last century.

Indeed, in 1805, when Beethoven first produced his opera *Fidelio*, he used the theme of the last line of that popular version of "An die Freude" as the basis for the choral finale, when the chorus of prisoners and townspeople unite to sing "*Wer ein holdes Weib errungen, stimm in unserm Jubel ein*" ("Who e'er a lovely wife has won, chime in with our jubilation!") Any German listener of that era would have recognized the

nearly identical words of the second stanza of Schiller's ode, "*Wer ein holdes Weib errungen, mische seinen Jubel ein!*" This chorus in *Fidelio* can therefore be considered the first major attempt by Beethoven to set "An die Freude," which is highly appropriate, since the whole opera is a tribute to Schiller's ideals.

The anonymous tune was so popular that it was published again in Berlin in 1800 in English (!) as one of "Twelve Favorite Songs." Unfortunately, we were unable to inspect this edition and cannot comment on the quality of the translation.

Thirty years after Beethoven first mentioned his desire to compose the "Ode to Joy," and nearly twenty years after he began working on his opera *Fidelio* in 1803, there appears in his sketches for the Ninth Symphony, a line of music in the bass clef

with the words, "this it is, Ha now it is found," followed by "Freude, schöner," under the opening notes of the choral theme. Beethoven had finally found exactly the right line of music to express the developmental possibilities of Schiller's concept of joy. Like the folk-tune which he had earlier adapted for the great choral finale of *Fidelio*, the melody is one of the utmost "popular" simplicity. By using such simple material and weaving it into higher and higher orders of complexity spanning the entire universe of human thought and feeling, Beethoven unfolded the message of human redemption which is implicit throughout Schiller's "Ode to Joy," and carries us, together with the cherub at the climax of the finale, until we "stand before God."

—Nora Hamerman

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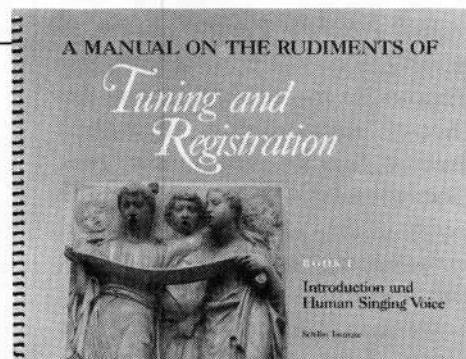
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—Carlo Bergonzi

An die Freude

Friedrich Schiller

Anonymous Folk Song
Printed 1801

Freu - de schö - ner Göt - ter - fun - ken, Toch - ter aus E - ly - si - um, Dei - ne
Wir be - tre - ten feu - er - trun - ken, Himm - li - sche dein Hei - lig - tum.

Zau - ber bin - den wie - der was die Mo - de streng ge - teilt, Bett - ler wer - den Fürs - ten -
brü - der, wo dein sanf - ter Flü - gel weit. Seid um - schlun - gen, Mil - li - o - nen, seid um -
schlun - gen, Mil - li - o - nen! die - sen Kuß der gan - zen Welt! Brü - der ü - berm Ster - nen -
zelt muß ein lie - ber Va - ter woh - nen, muß ein lie - ber Va - ter woh - nen.

“Wer ein holdes Weib errungen”

Opening phrase of the chorus from Ludwig van Beethoven's “Fidelio”

Soprano **Allegro ma non troppo**

Wer ein hol - des Weib er - run - gen, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein,
Wer ein hol - des Weib er - run - gen, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein,
Wer ein hol - des Weib er - run - gen, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein,
Wer ein hol - des Weib er - run - gen, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein, stimm in un - sern Ju - bel ein,