

## Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 was not to be missed

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How could I pass up a chance to hear Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 (The Choral), especially as it was being performed in Evanston. So, despite the fact that i was reviewing a 4:30 p.m. concert in Skokie (see review of Ars Viva Symphony Orchestra on the Web), I was determined to get over to Pick-Staiger Concert Hall in Evanston to hear the Ninth performed by the Chicago Philharmonic and the North Shore Choral Society, under the baton of the orchestra's music director Larry Rachleff.

By good fortune and with an assist from a light traffic, I arrived at intermission and was able to hear the whole wonderful composition from start to finish.

Many of the principals of the symphony are principals in the Lyric Opera Orchestra and are accustomed to playing Verdi, Puccini, Wagner and other opera composers. So they were well prepared for the intensely expressive work with its wild finale featuring a chorus of more than 130 voices and four soloists from the Ryan Center for Young Artists at Lyric Opera — soprano Amanda Majeski, mezzo-soprano Katherine Lerner, tenor Rene Barbera, and bass-baritone Sam Handley.

It is impossible to get tired of “Ode to Joy,” especially when sung by a chorus with such strong voices and so well prepared by their new choral director Julia Davids.

The soloists simply sparkled, each exhibiting the high level of training that is available to promising young singers at Lyric. Majeski is the soprano who stepped in for two performances as the Countess in Mozart's “The Marriage of Figaro” in March after Anne Schwanewilms cancelled due to illness.

But Beethoven's symphony is more than the finale, beautiful as it is. Its sweep begins with an agitated opening and moves on to a peppy march and touching Adagio, which sings without words. The “Ode to Joy” theme pops up tantalizingly off and on, until we are on the edge of our seats, waiting for the chorus to break out with its vigorous “Freude.”

It was a superior conclusion to the Chicago Philharmonic's 20th season. We wish this fine ensemble many, many more years of making music.

The program also included two works sung by the North Shore Choral Society from Randall Thompson's “The Peaceable Kingdom,” and Beethoven's Romance for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 played by the Chicago Philharmonic's excellent concertmaster David Perry. I'm sorry I missed them.

For information on the orchestra's 2010-11 season, visit [www.chicagophilharmonic.org](http://www.chicagophilharmonic.org).