Ode to Europe

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Esteban Buch. *La neuvième de Beethoven: Une histoire politique.* Bibliothèque des Histoires. Paris: Gallimard, 1999. 364pp.

With *La neuvième de Beethoven: Une histoire politique,* Esteban Buch adds to the important recent work dealing with the reception of Beethoven's music. His topic is most similar to that of David Dennis, who in his 1996 book, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989,* presented English-language readers with a wealth of documentation showing the importance of Beethoven for German nationalism.[1] Like Andreas Eichhorn's *Beethovens Neunte Symphonie: Die Geschichte ihrer Aufführung und Rezeption* from 1993, Buch focuses exclusively on the Ninth Symphony.[2] As these books and others make contributions to our understanding of how this music has been received, we become increasingly aware of the immensity of the task.[3] No one could even aspire to comprehensive treatment of the subject. All these studies must be read, despite some overlap of material, in order to try to put together what will still be an unfinished puzzle. And of course, it is not merely a question of finding the missing pieces; in documenting the various aspects of Beethoven reception, the authors interpret in different ways the texts and events they consider.

1. (New Haven: Yale up, 1996).
2. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1993).
3. See, for instance, Ulrich Schmitt, *Revolution im Konzertsaal: Zur Beethoven-Rezeption im 19. Jahrhundert* (Mainz: Schott, 1990); Nicholas Cook, *Beethoven: Symphony No. 9* (Cambridge: Cambridge up, 1993); and Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton: Princeton up, 1995).

The most recent of these reception studies, Buch's also takes the most critical stance toward its subject. At the outset of his study, he calls the Ninth a "fetish" of Western civilization (p.13) and speculates whether "the immortal" Beethoven is dead (p.17). Despite this provocative opening, however, he presents no evidence that the "fetish" has lost any of its power or that Beethoven is showing signs of mortality. He treats Beethoven's enduring significance as a problem and concludes by prescribing a vigilantly historical perspective to treat this problem.

Buch broadly defines his area of reception as "politics." It gradually emerges, however, that he is tracing a more clearly delineated theme within this category: the political idea of a culturally united Europe. Furthermore, he focuses on a particularly straightforward way that music can be used politically, as a national hymn or anthem. He complements Dennis's study of the nationalistic use of Beethoven in German politics by tracing how the composer has also been identified with European ideals. Buch weights his account toward his detailed examination of how the "Ode to Joy" became the official hymn of the Council of Europe after World War II. This focus enables him to bring his history fully up to date. Whereas Dennis ends his book with the performance of the Ninth to mark the fall of the Berlin Wall, Buch shows that the Ninth not only came home to rest in 1989, but also moved beyond national borders to take on new prominence as the official anthem of the European Union.

Writing from Paris, Buch postulates that there have always been two main poles of Beethoven interpretation: the French pole, which emphasizes the humanistic, universal Beethoven; and the German pole, which subsumes universality as part of Beethoven's specifically German identity. Buch argues that the idea of a Beethoven who symbolized a European cultural identity appeared for the first time in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars at the Congress of Vienna, then reappeared at the Beethoven Festival at Bonn in 1845, then in the pan-European movements after World War I and in the Council of Europe organization after World War II, and finally in the European Union after the end of the Cold War.

Before discussing this first manifestation at the Congress of Vienna, Buch sketches the history of the European national anthem, beginning with "God Save the King" of 1745. This and the "Marseillaise" were popular patriotic songs before being adopted as official music of the state. The origin of the Austrian *Kaiserhymne* of 1797, on the other hand, is a different story. Buch describes "Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser" as a "counter-Marseillaise," conceptualized by the Austrian vice-minister of the police as a way of creating support for the government during a politically unstable time. Haydn was given the task of writing the music (he considered it a great honor) and modeled his hymn on "God Save the King," which he had heard and admired while in London.

Far from being contemptuous of this music in service of the state, Beethoven wanted to do the same, Buch suggests. Well aware of the strong and positive identification of Handel with Britain, and Haydn with Austria, Beethoven wished to reach the highest level of recognition by also becoming a composer of his nation. The patriotism during the Wars of Liberation and the celebrations at the Congress of Vienna provided this opportunity. Buch documents the strong connections made between Beethoven's music and Metternich's new, reactionary regime by describing the circumstances surrounding the battle symphony *Wellingtons Sieg* and the cantata *Der glorreiche Augenblick,* works that are usually passed over as insignificant occasional pieces. These works and Beethoven's intentions regarding them reveal his "wish to be recognized as the central figure of a collective patriotic project" (p. 88). Metternich aimed to channel this patriotism into the idea of a cultural rather than political identity that emphasized a common European heritage. The purpose of the Congress of Vienna was to refashion a Europe where no single country could become too powerful. The alliance formed by Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Great Britain to establish a balance of power was called Metternich's "European Concert"—a metaphor Buch finds apt for describing the political context for Beethoven's music at this time.

The composition and first performance of the Ninth Symphony present the biggest challenge for the narrative of the book. Constructing a historical continuum out of the first part, dealing with the origins of the national anthem in the eighteenth century, and the last part, on the "Ode to Joy" as the European anthem of the late twentieth century, depends on the central event of the appearance of the Ninth Symphony itself. Connecting Beethoven's occasional music for the Congress of Vienna with Haydn's "Gott erhalte" and the "Marseillaise" makes sense as a historical sequence that reflects the changing politics of the times. Linking the Ninth Symphony to this chain of musical works, however, requires more justification.

Beethoven, like many others, was initially swept away by patriotism after the defeat of Napoléon and supported Metternich's plan for restoring order. However, again like many others, he later changed his mind and strongly criticized the government for being too repressive. Part of the immense problem of determining what kind of political statement, if any, Beethoven intended to make with the Ninth has to do with its long compositional history, which can be traced back to early works composed in Bonn. From the time Schiller wrote "An die Freude" in 1785 to Beethoven's setting of it almost forty years later, the political landscape had swung from one extreme to the other even before the reception history of the Ninth began. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Ninth can be associated with

both revolutionary and restoration political sentiments. While acknowledging the multiple political meanings that can be read into Beethoven's work, Buch stresses the continuing importance of restoration politics for the composer beyond the Congress of Vienna. He shows that while Beethoven felt free to criticize the government among his friends, he did not want officially to dissociate himself from those in power: in 1822 he even expressed interest in becoming Kapellmeister of the Hapsburgs (p.107).

Buch further claims that the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa solemnis,* written in the public, official, monumental style, were understood by Beethoven's Viennese supporters as patriotic pieces in the manner of his music for the Congress of Vienna. But, he continues, Beethoven did not merely employ the monumental style to suit the political situation, he also adapted it to create and develop his own political universe in music. This "phantasmagorical empire" (pp.108–09) is sketched out by Buch through a discussion of Beethoven's setting of Schiller's poem, the nature of the "Joy" melody, the structure of the last movement, and finally the "Ode to Joy" as a communal hymn of praise.

This concludes part 1. Part 2, on the subsequent reception of the Ninth, takes on a different character. The discussion of the political reception in the nineteenth century drops the specific focus on music for state occasions; in fact, the political dimension itself vanishes at times. This does not have to be the case. Ulrich Schmitt's *Revolution im Konzertsaal* shows that the 1848 revolutions brought on a strong interest in possibilities for politicizing musical life, and Dennis's *Beethoven in German Politics* provides a rich amount of material from the Franco-Prussian War that documents the use of Beethoven for political purposes. The configuration of music and politics, however, does seem to change so drastically during the nineteenth century that it can seem to disappear from view. For instance, Buch devotes much of his discussion of the period 1828–1926 to the ideas for a monument for Beethoven, which finally materialized with the Beethoven Festival at Bonn in 1845. Buch mentions how this was an occasion attended by the King of Prussia and Queen Victoria solely in order to honor Beethoven. This is a remarkable reversal of roles from only thirty years earlier when, at the Congress of Vienna, Beethoven's music celebrated the Royal Heads of Europe. Is this still politics or is it something completely different? Buch avoids discussing this switch from Beethoven serving the reigning government to the royal monarchs serving Beethoven—possibly because this would lead him in the direction of German nationalism and a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between culture and politics in Germany than he wants to give. He preserves the main thread of his book by characterizing the Bonn Festival as an early attempt by the German, French, and British to come

together to celebrate a "European" Beethoven. At a time when nationalism was on the upswing, however, there was little incentive for international cooperation. Buch entertainingly relates how fights broke out at the banquet at the end of the festival when one of the main organizers, Franz Liszt, forgot to include France in his toast to the nations who had supported Beethoven (pp.176–77).

For the rest of the century, nationalism prevented any interest in an international Beethoven from taking shape. It was only after the dangers of nationalism were acknowledged in the aftermath of World War I that the first pan-European movements got off the ground. The occasion of the centenary of Beethoven's death in 1927 was marked by festivals and publications that reflected this new interest in a supranational Beethoven. The founder of the most important pan-European movement of the times, Richard Graf Coudenhove-Kalergi, declared in 1929: "Only the greatest European composer is worthy to be the creator of the Paneuropa-hymn. The great European Ludwig van Beethoven has created the melody that expresses this will, this longing of the masses for joy, unification and fraternity: the Ode to Joy from the Ninth Symphony" (p.236).

This European Beethoven started coming into being not only as Europe tried to find an alternative to nationalism, but also as it began to understand its identity defined against the United States and the Soviet Union. The Beethoven of these two new superpower enemies shared the characteristic of being a popularized Beethoven distributed through the new media of radio and recordings. Europe tried to distinguish itself from the Russians and the Americans by reminding itself of its longstanding shared cultural heritage, which included a Beethoven who had believed in specifically European ideals (pp.234–35).

The outbreak of World War II quickly obliterated the idea of a culturally united Europe, but in a way the European Beethoven survived during this time. The strong identification of Beethoven with Germany did not prevent other countries from finding inspiration in Beethoven's music to fight against that country. Buch comments that for many in occupied France, performances of the Ninth did not so much strengthen a feeling of collaboration as offer an aesthetic escape into dreams of freedom. He further recounts performances of Beethoven in Nazi concentration camps. It was the Nazis themselves who finally cast a critical look at Beethoven, putting him under suspicion at the end of 1944 for possibly being a freemason (pp.252–53).

The first postwar European institution, the Council of Europe, was founded in 1949. That year the "Ode to Joy" was proposed as its official hymn, but it took more than twenty additional years of considering new and old alternatives before the "Prelude to the 'Ode to Joy,' in the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Sym-

phony" was officially adopted in 1971.[4] This peculiar designation was meant to exclude Schiller's poem. The commission that made the decision justified eliminating the text with the statement that the actual words to the "Ode to Joy" "do not represent a specifically European statement of belief, but rather a universal one" (p.274). Buch comments that the transformation of the "universal" meaning into a "European" one was attempted by leaving out the very words that lent the work its political message in the first place. The problem of the text being in German was a pragmatic factor in this decision, and the difficulty of settling on any single language for a substitute text is no doubt part of the reason why, despite the expressed desire to find an appropriate text, the hymn still remains without words.

There was another problem: the "Ode to Joy" could not simply be excerpted to serve as a freestanding anthem; it had to be refashioned out of its symphonic context. In a move that seems politically crass to us today, the Council commissioned former Nazi Party member Herbert von Karajan the task of transforming the last movement into a two-minute piece that could be played in arrangements for orchestra, wind band, and piano. Published by Schott in 1972 and recorded by the Berlin Philharmonic on Deutsche Grammophon, the European Hymn is, legally considered, the work of Herbert von Karajan.

At this point Buch tells the very instructive story of another claim made on the Ninth Symphony. In 1974 Rhodesia declared its independence from the United Kingdom and replaced "God Save the Queen" with the "Ode to Joy." Under Ian Smith's government of Apartheid, white Rhodesians were known as "Europeans," regardless of where they were born. When the white Rhodesians designated the "Ode to Joy" their "European Hymn," the European Community's Secretary General protested. The Council of Europe, however, determined that they could not prevent anyone else from using the Ninth Symphony; only von Karajan's arrangement could be protected by copyright. A sixteen-measure version arranged by a member of the Rhodesian African Rifles was played at the opening of Parliament in Salisbury later that year. Rhodesia did not scruple to add words: following a public contest, the "Ode to Joy" became "Voices of Rhodesia" with text by a Mary Bloom (p.286). The existence of the "Voices of Rhodesia" officially ended in 1980 when the United Kingdom recognized the independent state of Zimbabwe with its newly elected leader Robert Mugabe and new national anthem of African origin.

4. Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, 8 July 1971, Resolution 492 on a European anthem, p.1. Apparently Buch was not aware of Caryl Clark's article, "Forging Identity: Beethoven's 'Ode' as European Anthem," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997), 789–808, which recounts much of the story; it is not cited or included in his bibliography.

Buch keeps in view the way most people would have recognized the "Ode to Joy" at this time: through the 1970 pop hit "Song of Joy," sung by Miguel Ríos, and its use in Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film *A Clockwork Orange*. Yet despite the different and conflicting contexts in which the "Ode to Joy" was being disseminated, it somehow retained an uncorrupted association with European ideals. In 1986 the European Community (now European Union) adopted von Karajan's arrangement as "The European Anthem ('Ode to Joy')."

The 1989 celebration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, with Leonard Bernstein's conducting of a Ninth Symphony renamed the "Ode to Freedom," seemed to bring the "German" Beethoven again into competition with the European version. But on the contrary, it was suggested that the European Anthem adopt the "Ode to Freedom" text used by Bernstein. Buch accounts for the lack of conflict between traditionally competing versions of Beethoven here by pointing out that the fall of the Berlin Wall was seen not only as a reunification of Germany, but also as the triumph of the West over totalitarianism (p.300). This dimension of the idea of Europe in the twentieth century as the defender of freedom against Communism does not appear very often in Buch's narrative. A fuller discussion of how Cold War politics created the Western European identity that was symbolized by the "Ode to Joy" would have been welcome.

Buch, however, is not so interested in determining what European ideals Beethoven's Ninth has symbolized as in showing how it was accomplished. In this last section of the book, he demystifies the relation between music and politics by focusing on the twentieth-century legalistic and bureaucratic procedures used to transform a highly complex musical artwork into an official, politically correct anthem.

In a short but forceful conclusion, he articulates some of the important questions and problems that the reception history of the Ninth raises. The biggest has to do with the quality of music in general, and the Ninth in particular, that allows it to accommodate perhaps too wide a range of interpretations. "One readily accepts that music is a language," Buch observes, "but seldom agrees on what it wants to say" (p.305). Further, in the case of the Ninth, we have the problem of "Freude" or "Freiheit" being abstract ideals that cannot be pinned down. This semantic quality enables mass audiences with many individual differences to feel united by the Ninth in the name of a common ideal or cultural heritage. But as history shows, the abstractions of the Ninth allow it to be used for competing claims, for good or for evil. Buch asks if this means that music itself is amoral, incapable of encoding a specific belief system. He rightly emphasizes how important this question is for the Ninth, since in the recent past this work has come to embody morality itself,

being performed at occasions where proof of humanity is needed, such as at Sarajevo in 1996 and the Austrian concentration camp Mauthausen in 2000. "Should one really accept the principle that art is the ultimate guarantee of the morality of the human enterprise? And if so, should Beethoven always be called upon as witness of this fact?" (p.309) In his closing statement, Buch argues that if Beethoven continues to be used this way, we also have to continue to critique this tradition and be able to articulate how and why the Ninth, "this vestige of a world increasingly more remote, still speaks to us in a significant way" (p.310). Finally, for the Ninth to continue to work its magic, we must be "ready to accept the idea that one day, why not, it falls silent without there being inevitably a catastrophe" (p.310).

This stimulating book intelligently poses difficult questions about the function of music in modern society through the case study of the Ninth Symphony. Published in the Gallimard series Bibliothèque des Histoires, it has been received favorably both in France and Germany more as cultural history for the intellectual than as musicology for the Beethoven expert.[5] Although it could be read without knowing how to read music notation, there is plenty to occupy the professional musician. Beethoven scholars will want to engage with Buch's discussion of the connection between restoration politics and Beethoven's later music in particular. The forthcoming English translation should contribute significantly to the debate on the political use of Beethoven, past and present.[6]

5. There is a German translation, inexplicably called a "biography": *Beethovens Neunte: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2000). It omits all of the many illustrations and useful music examples. The translation leaves out small amounts of the original text and adds many typographical errors.

6. Esteban Buch, *Beethoven's Ninth: A Political History,* trans. Richard Miller (Chicago: u Chicago p, 2003).