

“Joy, Fair Divine Spark”

Sanford Baran: Welcome all. It is terrific to gather again in friendship and agreement to joyfully sound the tone together.

As many of you are probably aware, our dear friend John Amey passed away on July the 6th. For those who knew John he had a deep spiritual core, giving selflessly to serve a higher purpose. I would like to read a poem of his that speaks of his large and gentle spirit. It is entitled *In Attunement*.

*In quietness I come before you
Still, tall, serene.*

*The fire of love is burning
And I stand unashamed knowing
The purity of His great love.*

*Come close.
Closer
One.*

*Yielded, life's flow
Blesses His whole holy world.
It is so.*

Most beautiful words. John's presence particularly on our *Tone of Life* teleconferences will surely be missed.

The pandemic has certainly demonstrated that the tone is more than capable of being sounded regardless of the limitations imposed by social distancing. However, now that many of us are vaccinated it is delightful to gather again with friends, in person.

Over the last couple of months Linda and I have had the wonderful pleasure of spending time with PenDell and Melanie Pittman in person. It turns out the four of us have been having fun making music together, seeing what could emerge between us as a vocal quartet. And of course, it has been lovely to be together as friends. Collaborating with us remotely in all of this has been our accomplished colleague and friend, Alex Bootzin, on piano.

As we worked together on this it was very good to let go of any preconceived notions of what should happen and simply let it naturally take its course. And that it magically did.

So, this morning, the five of us would like to present via a video that we produced, the composition entitled, “Peace,” music by PenDell and words by Martin Exeter. ([Watch the video](#))

I love Martin Exeter's words in this hymn, so simple yet so potent and practical. "That the peace of God *may* be known on earth." A recognition of what is possible, having a clear vision of the creative potential. But it doesn't stop here. In the final line the vision is fulfilled, there is follow-through to victory. "That the peace of God *be* known on earth." In other words, the job is done because of what I/we do in our living.

Two weeks ago, Linda and I went camping just outside of Aspen, Colorado. Our campsite overlooked a creek and was situated in the middle of a verdant aspen forest, just a few miles down the road from the majestic Maroon Bells, a series of distinctively bell-shaped, wine-colored peaks towering 14,000 ft. above the pristine, glacial Maroon Creek Valley. The wildflowers were in full bloom and it was absolutely magical to walk through meadows of columbines as far as the eyes could see.

One of the reasons we like to go camping there is that it combines our love of the outdoors and hiking along with the opportunity to hear some really fabulous music over at the Aspen Music Festival that runs through the summer in the nearby town of Aspen.

This particular festival is a gathering of the truly classical-music elite, where established musicians of significant stature mingle and mentor the next generation of up-and-coming talent. The bounteous offerings of performances, rehearsals and master classes are a testament to music-making at its finest.

We did have opportunity one morning to sit in on a rehearsal of the 4th movement of Beethoven's monumental choral symphony, his Symphony Number Nine. Needless to say, it was absolutely thrilling. And in a little bit you'll see what I mean because I'll be playing a few snippets for you. But I have to say, there's nothing like seeing a live performance of such a work, in person.

You know, it's funny how some elements of experience keep coming back to us over the course of our lives, and every time such factors resurface, we have opportunity to lift them up from where we last left them off. It turns out I have a long history with Beethoven's 9th.

In my early teens I had quite a bit of exposure to classical music as my father was an avid listener and early *Hi-Fi* enthusiast. His taste leaned toward orchestral music more than vocal or choral. In his record collection there were a number of the Beethoven symphonies, but not the 9th. So, I wasn't acquainted with it yet, and besides I had this idea that it was probably too advanced for me to appreciate anyway.

Fast forward to 1972, my senior year at the University of Illinois located downstate in Champaign-Urbana. The movie, "A Clockwork Orange," was making the rounds and I went to see it. In this film the very violent and disturbed protagonist was incongruously a Beethoven lover, and strains of the 4th movement from Beethoven's 9th Symphony played throughout. By the end of the

movie, I not only knew what the 9th sounded like, but the melody from the 4th movement morphed into an earworm in my head.

Shortly after that, I started hearing that the world-renown Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus were slated to come down to campus to record none other than Beethoven's 9th! Normally they would record in Chicago but instead came down to take advantage of the outstanding acoustics of a newly built concert hall on campus.

This was all very exciting and somehow I was able to get one of the very few passes into one of the recording sessions in the concert hall. I really wanted to be there for the 4th movement, the choral movement, but instead the pass was for the 3rd movement. I still was absolutely thrilled at my good fortune.

At the time, The Chicago Symphony was under the direction of Maestro Georg Solti, a stern old-school European conductor who ruled over the orchestra with an iron baton. This guy was no-nonsense and could quickly communicate exactly what he wanted from the orchestra and they in turn knew precisely how to deliver it.

There were about a dozen of us admitted to this third-movement recording session. We were sitting about ten rows back from the stage. The orchestra was in the middle of a take and all of a sudden there was this rattling noise coming from the back of the balcony section above and behind us. Someone was rattling a locked door up there trying to get in! Mind you the sound of this was quite distracting, as you could hear a pin drop in that hall, the acoustics were so good.

Maestro Solti abruptly stops the orchestra—he's absolutely furious. He turns around and scolds us, "You need to leave!! You will not waste my precious time!!" We're all quaking in our seats with looks on our faces imploring him, "Please don't make us leave." Finally, a few members in the orchestra stick up for us and tell the maestro "It wasn't them." Totally flustered and rolling his eyes he turns back around to the orchestra, and they pick up where they left off. And we just barely escape being thrown out. I can assure you that none of us moved a muscle for the remainder of our time in that session.

But the drama aside, I do distinctly remember being in awe of this entire creative process unfolding before me—of glimpsing what goes on behind the scenes in the upper echelons of classical music making. And I remember having this thought that it would be so amazing to one day be in a chorus such as this, performing a work like Beethoven's 9th.

Over the years it has worked out for me to sing in a couple of large choruses performing this monumental work. And what an experience that has been!

Anyway, there we were in Aspen and the cycle of Beethoven's Ninth was back in my life again. This definitely gave me pause and I thought what an excellent opportunity to meditate more

deeply on the spiritual implications of this work. So here are some reflections of what I think is happening underneath the hood, which you might find interesting.

The story begins with a poem written in 1786 by the German playwright, poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, a poem he entitled, *An Die Freude*, which in English is *Ode to Joy*. This poem has often been construed as a call for political freedom, and an embracing of the notion of universal brotherhood and the unity of mankind. In my mind it goes much deeper than that. Yes, it is a celebration of joy. But joy not for its own sake, but rather a realization that joy is the by-product of *being in heaven*. And *being in heaven* is just another way of saying that we intentionally let the life current within ourselves permeate everything that we do and touch in our day-to-day living. So *being in heaven* is the point. And springing from that is the natural emergence of brotherhood, of unity of mankind and of course joy.

Let me read to you the English translation of one of the main verses in the poem:

*Joy, fair divine spark,
Daughter of Elysium,
Intoxicated with fire, we enter,
O Heavenly One, your sacred shrine!
Your magic once again unites
All that custom had sternly divided;
All men become brothers,
Where your gentle wings abide.*

I think we can see what Schiller is getting at here: divine angelic function. And he talks about entering into and residing in a sacred, magical place transcending the coarseness of human-nature custom and habit.

Beethoven became enthralled with Schiller's poem when he was a young man back in the early 1790's, and he knew immediately that he wanted to do something musically with it. But interestingly it would take another thirty years before he would find his way to appropriately incorporate it into one of his compositions.

Now it was a well-accepted convention back in the day that a symphony was comprised of four movements of strictly orchestral music. Singers were simply not part of the mix. But Beethoven was not your typical conventional composer. He had been ignoring conventions throughout his entire life, certainly as a composer and not just for the sake of breaking conventions. He was constantly paving new ground because he was attuned to what must emerge for collective musical expression to move forward and reach its full potential.

So, when Beethoven was finally writing what would become his Ninth Symphony in the early 1820's he came up with this brilliant stroke: make the 4th movement a choral movement, incorporating some of the core text of Schiller's *Ode to Joy* poem. Mind you, this was a totally

radical, almost shocking, idea. But how to do this gracefully and artistically so all four movements of the symphony tie together as a single unified work?

Well, to grasp what he was doing it's important to understand what is going on in the first three movements. My feeling is that these first three movements represent the physical, mental and emotional planes of expression. Let's take a listen.

I'm first going to play a snippet of the first movement ([Listen to the audio](#)). I hear in this a lot of sweat of the brow. This is all about getting things done by brute force. It's, "Obey or it's the number nine boot for you." In other words, the physical plane of expression.

Now let's listen to a snippet of the second movement ([Listen to the audio](#)). If you're old enough you might recognize this as the theme music of the *Huntley-Brinkley News Hour*. To me, this passage depicts the busyness of methodical and analytical mental processes at work.

Now let's listen to a snippet of the third movement ([Listen to the audio](#)). In this passage we hear strains of the heart putting in an appearance.

Finally we get to the fourth and last movement. Beethoven first replays for us the themes that we just heard of the first three movements. In doing this he's basically pointing out that each of these three approaches to living, symbolized in these first three movements, simply don't cut it on their own. And at this point there is an epiphany, a realization, that something else, something entirely unprecedented is required that transcends the physical, mental and emotional. This is dramatically proclaimed by the baritone soloist. To paraphrase, he sings, "No, not any of this, let us experience something completely different, and let me sing to you this new song, the *Ode to Joy*." This is followed by the choir trying it on for size as well. ([Listen to the audio](#))

Interestingly, Beethoven uses a musical device where the text is first sung by just a few, in this case a quartet of singers, who then vibrationally provide the impetus for a larger collective, the chorus, to offer their agreement. And oh, what pure glory that is when the chorus comes in and offers their agreement in full-throated response! Let's listen as the Ode to Joy opens up into its full manifestation of unequivocal joy. ([Listen to the audio](#))

By the way, the snippets of audio we've been listening to are from that 1972 recording of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Georg Solti conducting, recorded at the Krannert Center of Performing Arts on the campus of the University of Illinois.

The 4th movement is now in full swing. One memorable section that I just positively adore highlights the strength and power of collective masculine expression, as there is a humility on the part of each individual who willingly yields to that originating in heaven. It is performed by the tenor soloist and the entire men's section in the chorus. ([Listen to the audio](#))

Ooh, that sends shivers down my spine!

There is nothing like being immersed in such a majestic composition, being moved by the power of the music performed by an ensemble of many musicians and singers, on tone and in agreement. And how much more so when there also is some conscious awareness of the spiritual meaning behind it all.

Beethoven apparently wasn't the easiest person to get along with. Nevertheless, in spite of his many eccentricities and foibles as a person, he definitely was on to something, spiritually speaking. By the time he composed his 9th and last symphony, Beethoven, remarkably, was totally deaf! In fact, when the magisterial work premiered in 1824, the composer had to be turned around to see the audience cheering—he could not hear their rapturous applause. To compose such a profound masterpiece while being totally deaf... it is clear that he had no choice but to listen and hear what was inside himself, at the deepest of levels.

This certainly points the way for each of us. As we are aligned and resonant with spirit, we are in position to listen deeply, hearing and appreciating the glory of the tone and allowing *that* to manifest in our everyday living wherever we happen to be.

I would like to conclude by playing the very last two minutes of the piece. ([Listen to the audio](#)) Here is a translation of the text of what the chorus sings:

*Be embraced ye millions!
This kiss to the whole world!
Brothers! Above the canopy of stars
Surely a loving father dwells.
Be embraced!
This kiss to the whole world!
Joy, fair divine spark!
Daughter of Elysium!
Joy, fair divine spark!*

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