

# THE FORM OF THE FINALE OF BEETHOVEN'S *NINTH SYMPHONY*:

*A Journey to Elysium*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents and examines different ideas surrounding the form of the fourth movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, with the goal of showing how the movement can be interpreted as containing both a large scale musical form and a lack of formal structure, and how both of these analyses illustrate Beethoven's idea of Elysium. A brief definition of this concept is given, and three different interpretations of the form are presented with specific references to the score.

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Within the last fifty years, scholarship on Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* has been broad and inconclusive. Controversial since its premiere in 1824, numerous analyses of the choral finale have emerged. Some scholars have presented interpretations of the form as a double exposition sonata form.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars have seen the form as a four movement "symphony" within the movement.<sup>2</sup> There is even a third group of scholars who have interpreted the form as through-composed.<sup>3</sup> Because the form appears to be unclear, some might infer that it serves no greater purpose, but it actually serves a higher, exalted function. Through the form of the choral finale of his *Ninth Symphony*, which can be interpreted as having both formal structure and a lack thereof, Beethoven communicates his idea of Elysium.

The text of Schiller's poem *An die Freude* plays a pivotal role in understanding the choral finale because of the significance it had for Beethoven. Beethoven's idea of Elysium represents a heightened ideal of joy and brotherhood on earth, both of which contribute to a moral life.<sup>4</sup> This is what Elysium means. It is reached by a sense of brotherhood, attained through absolute joy, represented by the "Ode to Joy" melody, which comes from heaven itself. In other

words, the “loving father” gives us joy so we can become brothers and find the Elysium where he dwells.<sup>5</sup> In Elysium, with this moral perfection, there is also a sense of freedom.<sup>6</sup> These ideas stem from the Enlightenment, where they were interpreted in a political sense; moral perfection meant freedom from tyranny, and thus Elysium was attained. Though Beethoven lived after the Enlightenment, he was inspired by these ideas when designing the choral finale.<sup>7</sup>

If interpreted as a double-exposition sonata, the finale functions similarly to the sonata movements of Classical concertos, with two expositions, a development, a recapitulation, and a coda. Foundational scholar, Ernest Sanders, provides an analysis of the finale in sonata form.<sup>8</sup> The first exposition starts at m. 1 with the *Schreckensfanfare* (the “terror fanfare”), the recitative for the cellos and basses, and the reprise of material from the previous three movements serving as the introduction.<sup>9</sup> The first theme is the “Ode to Joy,” which enters first in the lower strings at m. 92.<sup>10</sup> Gradually, the whole orchestra takes up the tune, and there are three variations on the theme before the *Schreckensfanfare* enters once again. This marks the beginning of the second exposition; unlike Classical concertos, there is only one theme in the first exposition. The terror fanfare once again serves as the introduction. However, this time the baritone soloist sings the recitative and carries on to sing the “Ode to Joy” melody. He is soon joined by the choir and the rest of the vocal soloists, which, if equated to a Classical concerto, are the “soloist” of the piece. This time the exposition has a second theme, which after a short bridge and deceptive cadence on flat III in D major, appears in B-flat major. The second theme, the Turkish March, is dominated by the singers. There are two variations on the theme before Beethoven launches into the development, which is seemingly short when compared to the other sections in the movement. Nevertheless, Beethoven briefly explores different key areas, enharmonically reaching B major. At this point the composer begins to set up for the recapitulation, but not through a standard dominant preparation. Instead, he prepares an F#, which at this point is the fifth scale degree of the key, in order to return to the tonic of D major and to the first theme. This note becomes the third scale degree in the tonic key and also the first note of the “Ode to Joy” melody on the recapitulation. In the recapitulation, a new theme,

slower and more contemplative than the previous two, is introduced on the text *Seid umschlungen* [Be embraced all ye millions], which is later combined with the “Ode to Joy” theme in a double fugue to end the recapitulation. The movement comes to a close with a coda and a coda of the coda, all based on the first “Ode to Joy” theme and the new theme from the recapitulation. However, the form is not a flawless example of sonata form because there is only one theme in the first exposition, and Beethoven returns to the main theme through melodic material instead of harmonic progressions. Sanders calls the form “a modified sonata form.”<sup>11</sup>

The next interpretation of the form of the choral finale offers a different analysis of the movement: in it there exists the context of a whole symphony within the movement itself. While the analysis of the forms used within large sections remains the same as Sanders’s (theme and variations or fugue), the larger sections and their classifications change. David Levy offers an analysis of this type. He divides the finale into four “movements” and analyzes each one as if it were the movements of a whole symphony.<sup>12</sup> The first “movement” essentially contains an introduction, followed by a theme and variations. The introduction includes the “terror fanfare,” the instrumental recitative, and the reprise of the previous movements. This is followed by the presentation of the “Ode to Joy” theme and instrumental variations. After a repeat of the opening fanfare, the theme returns, this time proclaimed by the singers, followed by more variations. The first “movement” ends on the flat III chord acting as a deceptive cadence, which suggests a complete end to the previous section and a new beginning of the next movement.<sup>13</sup> The second “movement” consists of the Turkish March and acts as a scherzo in 6/8. While this can be viewed as a new variation on the main theme, as in the sonata interpretation, “its change of key, tempo, and meter sets it apart in many ways.”<sup>14</sup> The “movement” is rounded out by a return of the “Ode to Joy” theme. Next, the third “movement” begins at the *Andante maestoso* with the *Seid umschlungen* theme, and it can be equated to the largo of a symphony. The fourth and final “movement” consists of a combination of both the “Ode to Joy” theme and the theme from the third “movement” in a double fugue. Incredibly, just as in the beginning of the choral finale of the symphony, Beethoven begins the final “movement” of the finale with

“recollections” from the previous three “movements”; the “Ode to Joy” returns in D major in combination with the *Seid umschlungen* theme, all of which is in a compound meter.<sup>15</sup> The rest of this “movement” consists of variations on these themes until the end of the piece.

If one supports this interpretation, then the form of the chorale finale is rather unconventional. Since Beethoven had not written a finale in a symphony like this before, the form is not governed by strict principles like sonata form, and it is harder to find specific key relationships and patterns that dominate large forms, like rondos and sonatas. However, the form still exists. While not as definitive and specific as sonata form, a symphony generally has form based on the conventions of the forms of all the movements themselves. Therefore, the four movement interpretation of the choral finale is logical, just in a smaller context. Like the sonata form interpretation, it breaks from tradition to fit the music Beethoven had in mind.

After analyzing the choral finale, one can see that there is an inherent ambiguity in its form. The two aforementioned interpretations are logical and appropriate, given what is happening within the context of the music, but clearly scholars have always been baffled at the form of the finale; it has “at times seemed ineffable.”<sup>16</sup> Not only this, but there is ambiguity with regard to the interpretations that have been presented, whether it is the missing theme from the first exposition in the sonata form, or the fact that the entire “symphony” in the last movement needs to be played without a pause. Additionally, neither of the interpretations account for the smaller compositional techniques that Beethoven employs, such as the constant variations on the main themes or the fugue at the end of the movement. They are explained in relation to larger sections, but not with the possibility that they are the larger sections. Undoubtedly, interpreting the form of the choral finale raises more questions than answers.

These questions do not need to be answered, for Beethoven’s true purpose lies in the ambiguity itself. “The ability of the Choral Finale to be all things to all people—to defy interpretive limitations” acts as Beethoven’s vehicle for conveying his perception of joy and brotherhood in Elysium.<sup>17</sup> The choral finale exists as a “proliferation and blending of formal types.”<sup>18</sup> It is up to the educated listener to interpret it as he will, and as such, there will be many different

interpretations of the form. But, these forms will exist simultaneously within the unchanged fourth movement. Thus, in this ambiguity, there is coherence and unity. Charles Rosen's interpretation perfectly demonstrates this idea when he asserts that the four movement structure exists over the sonata form, thus displaying two disparate forms coexisting within the movement.<sup>19</sup> When Beethoven choose the text "*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*" [All men will become brothers] and "*Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt*" [This kiss for the whole world], this coexistence is what he intended for humanity through the music.<sup>20</sup> He wrote the "Ode to Joy" for each and every human being to see and experience in their own way, so that all men will indeed become brothers. This encounter with joy, the "Daughter of Elysium" from which brotherhood stems, occurs through the form. Just as through many interpretations there is one movement and cohesive unit, through many individuals there is one human race and one brotherhood in Elysium.

The idea that the form is a tool to convey Beethoven's idea of Elysium lends itself to his place in history as a bridge figure; the Classicists put a strong emphasis on form, and the idea of universal brotherhood is certainly a highly emotional, Romantic principle. On the other hand, it seems more apt that this idea should be carried out on a more Romantic vehicle. This tool comes in one final interpretation of the choral finale: the form is non-existent, and the movement is through-composed. In this interpretation, expounded by James Webster, "multivalent" analysis is employed.<sup>21</sup> Multivalent analysis classifies a piece of music under different "domains," which include tonality, dynamics, meter, rhythms, cadences, etc., and for vocal works, text. The analysis examines the combinations and patterns of the domains. Webster then applies this to the choral finale of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and argues that it supersedes formal interpretations like the sonata form approach.<sup>22</sup>

In his analysis, Webster divides the movement into eleven sections that are "defined by ten major division points, which are created by changes in the basic rhetorical content, performing forces, and musical characteristics."<sup>23</sup> In other words, the beginnings and ends of the sections occur because of major changes in the domains. Figure 1 outlines the sections of the finale according to Webster. It includes a general musical description of the section as

well as the primary metaphorical and programmatic topics of the section, which will play a role in explaining how Webster's idea of through-composition exhibits Beethoven's Elysium.

Webster uses the domains of the sections to break down formal interpretations of the choral finale, examining them horizontally. He asserts that "the variables in any row are...independent of those in every other row. It follows that a given section is characterized differently in the various rows, and moreover is shown as resembling and contrasting with a different selection with other sections."<sup>24</sup> In other words, domains will change and stay the same between the sections, and this affects how the sections relate to each other. Webster provides examples through Sections 1 and 2, as well as the combination of Sections 1-2 and 3-4.<sup>25</sup> These sections constitute the musical material within the first exposition of the sonata form. Section 1 is similar to Section 2 in that the tempo is the same and it is strictly instrumental, but different in the meter, key, and instrumentation. The larger Section 3-4 is identical to 1-2 in that their subject matter goes from "searching" to "joy," and "in their progression from dissonant recitative to consonant joy and from major to minor."<sup>26</sup> But Section 1-2 is performed by the instruments, while 3-4 has singers added. Therefore, it can be concluded that Section 2 is both similar and dissimilar to Section 1, and that Section 3-4 is a varied repeat of Section 1-2 and also "something fundamentally new."<sup>27</sup> These differences and similarities in the sections cannot be explained in "a single formal principle" such as the exposition of a sonata form similar to the one suggested by Sanders in his interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

Webster explains how the movement is through-composed in order to enact a journey from searching, to joy, to brotherhood, to Elysium. The two main points in his argument are that there are no cadences in the tonic until the end and that there are large-scale crescendos throughout. While there are cadences on the tonic triad, as seen in Section 1 or Section 10, for example, they are in first and second inversion respectively, thus failing to elicit a sense of finality.<sup>29</sup> Apart from these cadences, every other section ends on a chord other than the tonic triad. For example, at measure 330 Section 4 cadences on a flat-III chord.<sup>30</sup> The only time there is a perfect authentic cadence is at the final section, which ends the movement.<sup>31</sup> This then, does not evoke closure, meaning that there

are no independent sections until the end.

The closure is aided by the crescendos. The whole finale is characterized by a constant give and take in the dynamics and performing forces. It is this gradual build-up by which Beethoven pushes the movement forward. Whether it is by adding voices (the singers, the trombones, or the percussion) or by increasing the relative dynamics, he sets up a climax at the end to leave the listener expecting pomp and loftiness. This climax occurs with the entrance of the full orchestra, chorus, and soloists in the last section, thus creating a “larger, fuller, more perfect condition.”<sup>32</sup> The lack of cadences and the presence of large-scale crescendos creates a lack of completeness until the very end, which suggests the music pushes the movement forward to search for something larger than itself. As Webster puts it, the movement “strives toward a culmination.”<sup>33</sup>

This quest is the journey for Elysium.<sup>34</sup> The finale itself represents a search for Elysium, and Elysium is attained through brotherhood, through joy. Therefore, the through-composition allows the journey to always continue; it does not stop because of sections “that stand alone or are independent.”<sup>35</sup> Without having to adhere to strict principles of form, Beethoven could always work his way back to joy. Beethoven wrote the finale to be through-composed so that the “Ode to Joy” theme could always return.<sup>36</sup> This theme is the most influential topic among the primary topics listed in the table, and it predominates the movement once it is found. The search for joy starts with the first topic, which is searching. The orchestra flounders around in all the themes from the first three movements, desperately searching for a way to begin the journey towards Elysium. Yet, joy is found; it is practically inaudible at first, almost as if the composer is “quietly humming to himself.”<sup>37</sup> D major triumphs over D minor in the large scheme, and it is evident that this joy, the daughter of Elysium, truly is a gift from the heavens.<sup>38</sup> From here, the topics change, whether it is the “terror fanfare,” the Turkish March, or a short orchestral fugue.<sup>39</sup> Without being confined to strict formal principles, Beethoven is able to continue on his journey and return to the joy again and again. His purpose is not to return to the tonic through the dominant, but to return to the joy theme, and he is able to do so through the lack of cadences, which elicit irresolution, and

the crescendos, which propel the movement towards Elysium. At Section 8 (mm. 595), the *Seid umschlungen* melody occurs.<sup>40</sup> This marks a turning point in the journey. Since the text now reads “Be embraced you millions! This kiss for the whole world! Brothers—over the starry canopy a beloved father must dwell,” Beethoven has now achieved brotherhood.<sup>41</sup> The culmination of the first seven sections is the “Ode to Joy,” and universal brotherhood remains as a result of this culmination.<sup>42</sup>

From this point in the music, the path to Elysium is clear. Brotherhood through joy has been reached, and in the last sections of the movement, Beethoven shows the effect of joy and brotherhood, as they culminate in Elysium. In Sections 8-11 the intense changes in tempo and musical content highlight the importance of the new goal.<sup>43</sup> A good example of this is on *Alle Menschen werden Brüder* [All men will become brothers,] mm. 827-832 and the entrance of the soloists in mm. 830.<sup>44</sup> The tempo goes from Allegro ma non tanto to Poco Adagio, and the performing forces are diminished to just the soloists, double basses, bassoons, trombones, timpani, and, clarinets from the chorus and full orchestra. This is a dramatic shift, the likes of which occur all throughout the last sections of the movement. These fluctuations spur the music towards its goal, as it “strives for deliverance.”<sup>45</sup> As a result of the intense musical contrasts, it is inappropriate to relegate this final large section to the rank of a coda in a sonata form as some interpretations do.<sup>46</sup> Through joy and brotherhood, along with prayer and devotion to the loving father above the stars, Beethoven now nears the end of his journey. With this culmination, we can enter with him, drunk with fire, to stand with the cherubs before God.

Beethoven deliberately designed the choral finale of the *Ninth Symphony* with both formal structure and a breakdown of formal structure to convey his heightened idea of joy and brotherhood in Elysium. Both understandings send the listener on a journey to Elysium. It is in this way that the form plays such a key role in the solemn task that is Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. Maynard Solomon asserts that much of Beethoven “carries overtones of Romantic irony—the confession that we can never wholly satisfy our metaphysical desires and thus must settle for finite satisfactions.”<sup>47</sup> The choral finale of the *Ninth Symphony* is a remedy to this irony.

Through brotherhood, through a simple melody of joy, Beethoven delivers a kiss to the whole world. Under the gentle wings of joy, we can call ourselves one human race and transcend the boundaries of this world and the next, to evermore live in freedom with the loving Father beyond the stars.

## FIGURES

Section	Measures	Description	Primary Topic
1	1-91	Terror Fanfare/Recap of 3 Movements	Search
2	92-207	Joy and variations in instruments	Joy
3	208-236	Baritone Recit	Recit./Search
4	237-330	Joy and variations in singers	Joy
5	331-431	Turkish March	March
6	431-542	Instrumental transition	Fugue
7	543-594	Homophonic Joy Theme	Joy
8	595-654	Seid umschlungen theme	Brotherhood/ Prayer
9	655-762	Joy/Seid umschlungen fugue	Joy/Brother- hood/Prayer
10	763-842	Last Joy theme, "Alle menschen"	Joy/ Ecstasy/ Devotion
11	851-940	Presto to end	Joy/ Brotherhood/ Jubilation

Figure 1: Musical sections in the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*.<sup>48</sup>

Figure 2 shows a musical score for a cadence on a second inversion I chord in D major. The score is arranged in two systems. The top system consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The vocal line has the lyrics "Flügel weilt." and the piano accompaniment has the lyrics "Flügel weilt." and "weilt." The bottom system consists of four staves: a vocal line and three piano accompaniment lines. The vocal line has the lyrics "Flügel weilt." and the piano accompaniment lines have the lyrics "Flügel weilt." and "Flügel weilt." The score is in D major and ends with a cadence on a second inversion I chord.

Figure 2: Cadence on Second Inversion I (D major), end of Section 10 (mm. 842).<sup>49</sup>

Figure 3 shows a musical score for a cadence on a flat-III chord in D major. The score is arranged in two systems. The top system consists of five staves: four vocal lines and one piano accompaniment line. The vocal lines have the lyrics "Gott, vor Gott." and the piano accompaniment line has the lyrics "Gott, vor Gott." The bottom system consists of one piano accompaniment line. The score is in D major and ends with a cadence on a flat-III chord. The tempo marking "molto ten" is visible at the end of the piano accompaniment line.

Figure 3: Cadence on flat-III chord (D major), end of Section 4 (mm. 330).<sup>50</sup>

Presto.  $\text{♩} = 96.$

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

Presto.  $\text{♩} = 98.$

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

Figure 4: D major (mm. 1-4) versus D minor (932-940).<sup>51</sup>

Seid umschlungen, Mil - li - o - nen! Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!

Seid umschlungen, Mil - li - o - nen! Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!

Figure 5: Brotherhood Theme (mm. 595).<sup>52</sup>

**Poco Adagio.**

Al le Menschen, al - le, al - le Menschen werden Brü der wo dein sanf -

Al - le Menschen, al - le, al - le Menschen werden Brü der wo dein sanf -

Al - le Menschen, al - le, al - le Menschen werden Brü der wo dein sanf -

Al - le Menschen, al - le, al - le Menschen werden Brü der wo dein sanf -

Menschen, al - le Menschen, al - le Menschen!

Menschen, al - le Menschen, al - le Menschen!

Menschen, al - le Menschen, al - le Menschen!

Menschen, al - le Menschen, al - le Menschen!

Figure 6: Tempo and Content Changes, Sections 8-11 (mm. 829-835).<sup>53</sup>

## NOTES

1. Ernest Sanders, "Form and Content in the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *The Musical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1964): 69-76.
2. David Benjamin Levy, *Beethoven, the Ninth Symphony* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), 91.
3. James Webster, "The Form of the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," *Beethoven Forum* 1 (1992): 25-62.
4. Levy, *Beethoven, the Ninth Symphony*, 13.
5. Jan Swafford, Program notes for *Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Opus 125*, (Stockbridge, MA, Tanglewood Music Festival, August 16, 2015), Print.
6. Levy, *Beethoven, the Ninth Symphony*, 13.
7. Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 205-215.
8. Sanders, "Form and Content in the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 76.
9. Ludwig van. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125*, ed. Henry Litolff (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff's Verlag, 1880).
10. Ibid.
11. Sanders, "Form and Content in the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 67-68.
12. Levy, *Beethoven, the Ninth Symphony*, 92-121.
13. Ibid., 106.
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15. Ibid., 115.
16. Ibid., 88.
17. Michael C. Tusa, "Noch einmal: Form and content in the finale of Beethoven's ninth symphony," *Beethoven Forum* 7 (1999): 116.
18. Ibid., 120.
19. Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1972), 440.
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21. Webster, "The Form of the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 26.
22. Ibid., 27.
23. Ibid., 28.
24. Ibid., 29.
25. Ludwig van. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125*. ed. Henry Litolff. (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff's Verlag, 1880).
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27. Ibid., 31.
28. Ibid., 31; Sanders, "Form and Content in the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 59-76.
29. Ludwig van. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125*. ed. Henry Litolff. (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff's Verlag, ca. 1880).

- 30.** Ludwig van. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125*. ed. Henry Litolff. (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff's Verlag, ca. 1880).
- 31.** Webster, "The Form of the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 45-46.
- 32.** Ibid., 51.
- 33.** Ibid., 61.
- 34.** Maynard Solomon, "Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: A Search for Order," *19th-century Music*, 10, No. 1 (1986): 11.
- 35.** Webster, "The Form of the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 51.
- 36.** Ibid., 51.
- 37.** Swafford, Program notes for *Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Opus 125*.
- 38.** Ludwig van. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125*. ed. Henry Litolff. (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff's Verlag, ca. 1880.), See Figure 4.
- 39.** Webster, "The Form of the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 33.
- 40.** Ludwig van. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125*. ed. Henry Litolff. (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff's Verlag, ca. 1880).
- 41.** Text and Translation from David Benjamin Levy, *Beethoven, the Ninth Symphony*, 9.
- 42.** Webster, "The Form of the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony," 61.
- 43.** Ibid.

44. Ludwig van. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125*. ed. Henry Litolff. (Braunschweig: Henry Litolff's Verlag, ca. 1880).
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