

'Ode to Joy' resounds in Europe

by Mark Burdman

In the days preceding the New Year and the new decade, the world public was presented with a stark contrast between two diametrically opposed notions of the cultural expression of political ideas and values. On the one hand, U.S. invasion forces in Panama were blaring satanic rock music against the embassy of the Church of St. Peter in Panama City. On the other hand, people on the European continent, from Romania to the northern tip of Germany, were commemorating the popular uprisings against communist police-state tyranny with such great music as Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" and Mozart's "Te Deum." We report here on that latter, happy trend.

At 5:00 p.m. on Dec. 31, millions of Germans were given a magnificent New Year's present, when German television, both East and West, broadcast a live concert of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, performed by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and Chorus, with Kurt Mazur conducting. Not only was the performance so moving that it was impossible to refrain from weeping with joy, especially during the last section's rendering of Schiller's poem "An die Freude" ("Ode to Joy"), but the event was made even more extraordinary by every viewer's knowledge that Leipzig was the birthplace of East Germany's peaceful 1989 revolution against the communist police state, and that Mazur himself had been one of the key figures in bringing that peaceful revolution about. His conducting was magnificent, especially as he "sang along" with the chorus in the concluding choral movement.

This televised concert was the third of three traditional performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the Leipzig Gewandhaus over the Dec. 29-31 weekend. Prior to that, on the night of Dec. 28, Mazur and the musicians transformed what is traditionally a dress rehearsal for the Ninth Symphony, into a performance of it for the citizens of Leipzig. This was an obvious celebration of Leipzig's role in the October-November 1989 revolutionary transformations, and also of the fact that Schiller had written his "Ode to Joy" while staying in Leipzig.

In a televised interview broadcast both before and after the Dec. 31 concert, Mazur stressed the importance of Beethoven, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in particular, in his own political thinking, and in having created the moral strength for East Germans to overcome the fear they felt leading up to and during the famous night of Oct. 9, when the threat of a bloodbath unleashed by the communist authorities

was very real. Mazur talked of the importance of music in the overcoming of *Angst* (fear and anxiety) and the development of inner courage. He avowed that he and others had been profoundly changed by that process of mastering fear and seeing the revolution through to a bloodless conclusion. Mazur spoke, too, of the specific importance of the Gewandhaus Orchestra as an institution in Leipzig, an institution that maintains a close relationship to the developments in the city, and which has developed an unusual relationship with the audiences.

The broadcast of the interview interspersed Mazur's comments with film-clips of Leipzig residents holding their candlelight vigils.

True German reunification

Leipzig was hardly an isolated episode of Beethoven celebrations. In Weimar, on Dec. 31, the Ninth Symphony was also played, as it was in many other East German towns and cities. In West Berlin, the Ninth Symphony was performed at the Deutsche Oper on Dec. 29. Jesús López Cobos, general music director of the opera company, said that the Ninth Symphony was "highly symbolic" for what is going on in Europe right now. According to the Dec. 30-31 *Berliner Morgenpost*, López Cobos declared: "There is nothing that can better express the joy of the developments of the last weeks than this music." To which the *Morgenpost* added its own comment: "Beethoven's Ninth Symphony has grown beyond simply being a piece of musical art. Today, it is a worldwide symbol of cross-border humanity, longing for peace and fraternity."

At midnight on Dec. 31, as the New Year and new decade were beginning, a recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was played on West and East German television, as accompaniment to the sight of over 100,000 Germans celebrating at Berlin's magnificent Brandenburg Gate.

Also during the previous week, listeners to Radio Moscow's English-language broadcasts might have heard a voice-overlay from a Radio Nederland broadcast, of the "An Die Freude" segments of the Ninth Symphony, followed by the announcer discussing Beethoven's relation to Schiller. Even if it was not deliberate jamming, this amounted to a curious episode of republican cultural warfare in Europe.

During the joyous New Year's celebrations in Prague, Schiller's "Ode to Joy," sung in both German and Czech, was heard in Prague's beautiful Wenceslas Square. Czech students were seen distributing the words in Czech to the assembled crowd. Also heard at the New Year's celebration, was a beautiful Czech Renaissance song, which had been re-composed with new, anti-Bolshevik words, sung by over 100,000 Czech citizens gathered to celebrate the demise of the communist regime.

Earlier in the week, at the ceremony inaugurating Vaclav Havel as Czechoslovakia's first non-communist President in four decades, Mozart's beautiful "Te Deum" was performed.