

TCHIVZHEL CONDUCTS THE MIGHTY NINTH

Greenville
Chorale,
soloists
featured in
GSO finale

By Paul Hyde
Arts Writer
phyde@greenvilleonline.com

Is Beethoven's ever-popular Symphony No. 9 the finest work in the history of classical music?

For Greenville Symphony Orchestra music director Edvard Tchivzhel, there's no question.

"I think it's the greatest work ever written," Tchivzhel says. "It's Beethoven's most powerful piece, but it's not only the music but the ideal behind the music that makes it great. Beethoven calls all people to universal brotherhood."

Tchivzhel will close the GSO's season with two performances of Beethoven's mighty Ninth Symphony on Saturday and next Sunday at the Peace Center.



Edvard
Tchivzhel

Joining Tchivzhel and the GSO will be the 120-voice Greenville Chorale and four soloists: soprano Christina Major, mezzo-soprano Stacey Rishoi, tenor Vale Rideout and bass Lester Lynch.

The Ninth Symphony typically is numbered among the most popular works in the classical orchestral repertoire.

It's easy to understand why the symphony holds a special place in the hearts of classical music listeners, Tchivzhel says.

Beethoven's jubilant setting of Friedrich Schiller's ode "To Joy" in the work's finale appeals to a basic human yearning for free-

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dom and brotherhood, Tchivzhel says.

"Beethoven lived in a time of war, and the sacrifice of human life was all around," Tchivzhel says. "The symphony calls for tolerance, freedom and social justice. He was very much against the arrogance of the aristocracy. He valued talent above social distinctions."

The enduring popularity of the 1824 symphony has everything to do with the continued need for its clarion call of unity, he says.

"We're far from universal unity," Tchivzhel says. "That's why this message resonates even today. The music and the message are both tremendously powerful."

Tchivzhel said Beethoven was the first major composer to use a chorus in a symphony. Always an innovator, Beethoven was never more eager to experiment musically than in his final years.

"He felt he needed to offer a clear message to humankind," Tchivzhel says. "Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with

its chorus, became a model for later generations of composers."

The symphony represents something of a miracle in the history of Western art — a colossal musical work composed by a man too deaf to hear its first performance on May 7, 1824, in Vienna.

"He grew increasingly deaf throughout his life," Tchivzhel says. "By the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven was completely deaf. The symphony shows the incredible spiritual strength of Beethoven. His spirit is so strong, and that is why his music is spiritually elevating."

In one of the most famous episodes in the history of classical music, Caroline Unger, the alto soloist in the first performance of the work, had to prompt Beethoven to turn and see the ecstatic response of the audience at the symphony's pre-

miere.

Beethoven contended not only with deafness but other enormous challenges in his life, and that fact also resonates with listeners, Tchivzhel says.

"His whole life was a constant fight with obstacles, but he possessed an enormous optimism," Tchivzhel says. "That's something else that everyone can feel in this symphony that begins on a tragic note but concludes in triumph."

Despite its popularity, the Ninth Symphony has not been performed by the GSO in more than a dozen years.

The symphony's setting of "To Joy" remains the European Anthem.

In the Ninth Symphony, as in the Fifth, Beethoven prominently alternates minor-key tension with major-key optimism, leading ultimately to a vision of transcendence.

YOU CAN GO

What: Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, performed by the Greenville Symphony Orchestra
When: 8 p.m. Saturday; also 3 p.m. on May 6. A free pre-concert talk will be presented one hour before both performances.

Where: Peace Center Concert Hall
Tickets: \$58-\$15

Information: 864-467-3000 or www.peacecenter.org