

[Print This Article](#)

Choruses add more musical depth

Performance of 'The 9th' includes about 160 voices with symphony

Kristen Morales

kmorales@gainesvilletimes.com

October 21, 2009

A few woodwinds, some brass and some strings can make an auditorium sing.

But add a layer of voices — more than 160 of them, to be exact — and you've got a concert of even greater proportions.

The Gainesville Symphony Orchestra is kicking its concert season up a notch starting this Saturday, when choruses from North Georgia College & State University, along with the Lanier Chamber Singers, join forces with the orchestra to perform "The 9th." The piece was Beethoven's final symphony, and its blend of choral singers and a symphonic sound was groundbreaking for its time.

"This entire season is titled 'Music that Sings,' and it features various vocal music throughout the season," said Greg Pritchard, music director and conductor for the Gainesville Symphony. "When you listen to the symphony orchestra by itself, you can close your eyes and it's up to the imagination of the listener on how to interpret the instrumental music."

But adding voices means there is a specific message or story being told with the music, he said.

"So when you're dealing with Beethoven's ninth symphony ... there is a very powerful message that all men should be brothers, as in peace on earth and goodwill toward everything," Pritchard said. "It's such a powerful message, such a universal message."

Michelle Roueche, director of the Lanier Chamber Singers, one of a few choral groups who will share the stage for the final movement in Beethoven's piece, said another aspect of the music that makes it unique is that Beethoven wrote it as he was going deaf.

"At the premiere he was completely deaf, and he was not able to hear the thunderous applause," she said. "The audience loved it, and Beethoven could not hear it."

Luckily Beethoven had perfect pitch, Pritchard added, so he was able to hear the notes

in his head.

"So it's got this incredibly powerful and musical text, and it's some of the best music Beethoven ever wrote - and that's saying a lot."

Roueché said the vocal pieces are particularly challenging because they require a range from the singers.

"The ranges are very demanding," she said. "And so it takes really good singers to pull off this piece."

Another trick with the concert is coordinating the musicians and the vocalists, all together on one stage.

Pritchard said once you get more than 100 musicians on stage together, with woodwinds and strings and singers, his job as conductor is more like playing traffic cop.

"Well, there's just a lot more to pay attention to. With a string orchestra, for example, you're dealing with five sections of instruments, and it's pretty easy to concentrate on that," he said. "In this particular concert ... there's just a lot going on on the stage."

"The conductor serves as a traffic cop, and this is like directing traffic in downtown Atlanta, where you've got things coming at you from all directions."

<http://www.gainesvilletimes.com/archives/25019/>