

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 (1824)

(1)

“Beethoven, who is often bizarre and baroque, takes at times the majestic flight of an eagle, and then creeps in rocky pathways. He first fills the soul with sweet melancholy, and then shatters it by a mass of barbarous chords. He seems to harbor together doves and crocodiles.”

Tablettes de Polymnie, Paris, 1810

(2)

“Beethoven’s compositions more and more assume the character of studied eccentricity. He does not write much now, but most of what he produces is so impenetrably obscure in design and so full of unaccountable and often repulsive harmonies, that he puzzles the critic as much as he perplexes the performer.”

The Harmonicon, London, April 1824

(3)

“We find Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony to be precisely one hour and five minutes long; a fearful period indeed, which puts the muscles and lungs of the band, and the patience of the audience to a severe trial... The last movement, a chorus, is heterogeneous. What relation it bears to the symphony we could not make out; and here, as well as in other parts, the want of intelligible design is too apparent.”

The Harmonicon, London, April 1825

(4)

“Its length alone will be a never-failing cause of complaint to those who reject monopoly in sounds. While we are enjoying the delight of so much science and melody, and eagerly anticipating its continuance, on a sudden, like the fleeting pleasures of life, or the spirited young adventurer, who would fly from ease and comfort at home to the inhospitable shores of New Zealand or Lake Ontario, we are snatched away from such eloquent music, to crude, wild and extraneous harmonies... The chorus that immediately follows in in many places exceedingly imposing and effective, but then there is so much of it, so many sudden pauses and odd and almost ludicrous passages for the horn and bassoon, so much rambling and vociferous execution given to the violins and stringed instruments, without any decisive effect or definite meaning—and to crown it all, the deafening boisterous jollity of the concluding part, wherein, besides the usual allotment of triangles, drums, trumpets, etc., all the known acoustical missile instruments I should conceive were employed... that they made even the very ground shake under us, and would, with their fearful uproar, have been sufficiently penetrating to call us from their peaceful graves the revered shades of Tallis, Purcell, and Gibbons, and even of Handel and Mozart, to witness and deplore the obstreperous roarings of modern frenzy in their art... Beethoven finds from all the public accounts, that noisy extravagance of execution and outrageous clamor in musical performances more frequently ensures applause than chastened elegance or refined judgment. The inference therefore that we may fairly make, is that he writes accordingly.”

Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review, London, 1825

(5)

“Beethoven, this extraordinary genius, was completely deaf for nearly the last ten years of his life, during which his compositions have partaken of the most incomprehensible wildness. His imagination seems to have fed upon the ruins of his sensitive organs.”

William Gardiner, *The Music of Nature*, London, 1837