Beyond the *Ode to Joy*? The Politics of the European Anthem

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Abstract
Anthems are conventionally viewed as helping to unify and mobilise populations by generating a sense of shared identity. Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, which currently serves as the European anthem, occupies a more equivocal place in the European Union's symbolic armoury. Whether performed with or without Schiller's original text, the piece raises important questions regarding the nature of the European Union and the purpose of Beethoven's music within contemporary European politics. Nevertheless, given that any practical alternatives also raise significant difficulties, Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* can be regarded as a useful prompt for reasoned discussions regarding the future of the European Union, especially if reunited with the text of Schiller's *An die Freude*.

Keywords: Brexit, European Union, politics and music, anthems

Introduction

THE PUBLIC vote in favour of leaving the European Union, albeit by a small majority, was the kind of seismic political event whose ramifications extend well beyond the narrow confines of Westminster. The year after the Brexit vote, and about two miles to the west of Parliament at the Royal Albert Hall, a pianist sat down to give an encore after his performance of Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto* in the first night of the 2017 Proms. Encores are usually brief and relatively light-hearted affairs, a glass of champagne after a stolid main course: classic choices include Schubert's *Impromptus*, waltzes by Chopin, Liszt's *Feux-Follets* and Moskowski's *Étincelles*. But on this occasion the pianist, Igor Levit, chose something rather weightier: Liszt's transcription for piano of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, and specifically the well-known *Ode to Joy* hymn-like theme that anchors the entire choral finale. Liszt's pianistic adaptations of the Beethoven symphonies are unconquerable summits in the art of transcription; even so un-Lisztian a figure as Sir Donald Tovey said of them that they 'prove conclusively ... that Liszt was by far the most wonderful interpreter of orchestral scores on the pianoforte the world is ever

likely to see'.[1] But of course Levit's intention was not (or not merely) to advertise Liszt's genius to the Proms audience. Instead, his choice of encore was a political statement about Brexit, since Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*—his celebrated setting of *An die Freude*, a poem of 1785 by Friedrich Schiller—also happens to be the official anthem of the European Union.

It was a strikingly cosmopolitan moment: a Russian-born, German-educated pianist wearing a European Union lapel pin, playing a Hungarian's transcription of a German symphony on an American-German Steinway & Sons piano in a concert at the heart of the British cultural Establishment, as a moving and pleading European call for Britain to reconsider its decision to sunder itself from the continent. One tweeter (@_aotc) described the experience as follows: '@igorpianist [Igor Levit] started [the *Ode to Joy*] as if a prayer, & audience sensed that ... Will be a major moment in movie of defeat of Brexit'. Levit retweeted the BBC Proms link in February 2019 with the hashtag #IAmEuropean, gaining hundreds of retweets and likes, and comments such as 'Thank you from one of the 48 per cent' (from @suegcraig). Yet not everybody was so enamoured of Levit's choice of repertoire.

Jacob Rees-Mogg commented that since 'the BBC has become the EU's Ministry of Information' the Proms were an 'appropriate place to play Beethoven's 9th Symphony, which has become the institutional anthem of the BBC … What [else] would anyone expect?'[2] Others denigrated not the content of Levit's protest but rather its presence in the Proms, which generally tries to avoid political statements. The music critic Norman Lebrecht, for example, wrote on his blog that '[t]he Proms podium is not a place for sermons, however brief or apposite.'[3]

From the point of view of the Brexit referendum, this sharp divide in opinion is just what might have been expected: 48 per cent of the people who voted in the referendum would probably be pleased by Levit's unusual choice of encore, and 52 per cent annoyed. Of course, the 48 per cent—stereotypically wealthier, more educated, more cosmopolitan people—would be more likely to be in the Proms audience in the first place, so that, in the Royal Albert Hall at least, Levit was perhaps mostly preaching to the converted. But for some of the 52 per cent the event seemed to confirm what they already suspected: the BBC is pro-EU (a difficult view to maintain in view of its Brexit coverage); the elite, represented in this instance by concert musicians, is pro-EU; even European culture itself, represented by Beethoven's *Ode*, seems to be pro-EU. Two nights later, the conductor Daniel Barenboim reinforced this impression in a speech during another Proms concert, deploring isolationist tendencies and stating, by contrast, that musicians (and by extension music-lovers) have always been internationalist in outlook. (In response, Charles Moore questioned why 'so many people just now feel entitled to use their non-political position to try to effect political change').[4]

If divided opinions could have been expected, then perhaps the brief outcry following Levit's performance can be dismissed as a storm in a teacup. This is the age of offence, after all, when the slightest act or comment is apt to provoke a Twitterstorm—particularly when Brexit is at stake. But it can be argued instead that the European anthem provokes mixed responses because it is such an ambivalent piece of music—so ambivalent, indeed, that it ironically reflects the character of the European Union itself. Far from exhorting Europeans to band together in a common and noble cause, the European anthem can be read (or rather heard) as revealing the equivocations and contradictions at the heart of the European project—contradictions that occupy a central place in long-standing British suspicions of the EU. Consequently, whereas national anthems conventionally function as important tools in building and maintaining communal identities, the *Ode to Joy* remains a decidedly double-edged sword in the European symbolic armoury. At the same time, as this article will discuss, the aesthetic and political complexities that surround the *Ode* are such that many of the potential responses seems doomed to failure. As such, the choice of a European anthem remains as fraught with uncertainty as the future of the EU itself. It remains to be seen whether this uncertainty can be productively mobilised.

Music, politics, and Beethoven's Ninth

The relationship between music and politics has always been intimate, if at times somewhat fractious. In the classical period, Beethoven furnished history with perhaps the best-known example of musical protest, when he erased Napoleon's name from the title page of his *Eroica Symphony* (originally called the *Bonaparte Symphony*) following his coronation as Emperor. But other examples abound, ranging from Liszt's repeated performance of the incendiary *Rákóczi March* in the years leading up to the 1848 revolutions to Jean Sibelius' composition of the tone poem *Finlandia* in 1899, written as a patriotic call to arms in an era when Finland was still a Grand Duchy under Russian rule.

For their part, politicians have often made use of music to promote campaigns, policies, or regimes, frequently prompting negative responses from musicians themselves. In recent years, a long list of pop musicians has objected to (mostly right-wing) politicians using their music for campaigns or other events, including George Harrison (who threatened to sue Bob Dole for using *Taxman* in his 1996 presidential run against Bill Clinton), Abba (who objected to John McCain

using *Take a Chance on Me* in 2008), Elton John (who dislikes Trump's use of *Rocket Man* at rallies), and Johnny Marr, who publicly forbade David Cameron from liking The Smiths. But the most notorious uses, or misuse, of music in politics took place in Nazi Germany, when the Third Reich co-opted the work of German composers such as Wagner, Brahms, and Beethoven as part of a wider effort to promote so-called Aryan culture and lend a sheen of intellectual respectability to the Nazi regime. By contrast, Jewish composers including Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer and Paul Hindemith were banned from the concert hall, while Jewish conductors, singers and instrumentalists were removed from their positions.

The *Ninth Symphony* was performed many times in Nazi Germany, including a 1942 performance for Hitler's birthday. Goebbels, who was in charge of arrangements, believed that the symphony, 'with its fighting and struggling', portrayed Hitler's capacity for 'triumph and joyous victory'.[5] It was aired frequently on radio in the final disastrous months of the war, also on Goebbels' orders, in a desperate attempt to rally the German population against the Allied invaders. Stalin, too, admired the symphony, describing it as 'the right music for the masses', while the People's Republic of China initially recast Beethoven as a proto-revolutionary and featured the *Ninth* prominently in its tenth anniversary celebrations in 1959.[6] The *Ninth Symphony* has also won many political admirers beyond the narrow sphere of totalitarian dictatorships, ranging from nineteenth century anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin (who told Wagner that 'if all music were to be lost in the coming world conflagration, we should risk our own lives to preserve this symphony') to the *soi-disant* state of Rhodesia (which adapted the *Ode to Joy* in 1974 with the newly-written lyrics 'Rise, O Voices of Rhodesia') and protestors in 1980s Chile, who sang the piece to celebrate the toppling of Pinochet.[7] In 1918, the German Workers' Union began an annual tradition of singing the work on New Year's Eve—a tradition that lasted until after the Second World War, in both East and West Germany. In 1989, Leonard Bernstein conducted Beethoven's *Ninth* at the Brandenburg Gate to mark the fall of the Berlin Wall.

More recently, the *Ode to Joy* was played at Macron's victory rally after the French presidential elections, and has also featured in anti-Brexit marches in Britain; it was even whistled and sung in the House of Commons, albeit rather tunelessly, by Scottish National Party MPs protesting during the Brexit Bill vote in 2017.

In other words, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* has served as a musical symbol for the widest imaginable range of political causes: totalitarianism, (late) colonialism, anarchism, socialism, liberalism, and social democracy. For Theodor Adorno, the *Ninth* was the foremost example of a work destroyed through social usage, a piece interpreted out of existence by innumerable readings of the symphony's immense complexity. The musicologist Nicholas Cook, indeed, argues that the symphony itself, like Wagner's *Parsifal*, contradicts every interpretation that might be canvassed.[8] As mentioned above, this very ambivalence offers an ironic resemblance to the EU itself, which is viewed variously as a sclerotic bureaucracy stifling individual enterprise; an oppressive super-state undermining national democracy; a daring experiment in multinational cooperation; and a powerful force for peace, economic development and cultural harmony, fully meriting the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. Of course, the resemblance in terms of ambivalence can only be described as ironic because it is unintentional. Neither individual countries nor multinational unions choose equivocal anthems on purpose. They do, however, sometimes choose them by committee.

The stubborn complexities of the *Ode to Joy*

In 1971 the Council of Europe issued a call for a European anthem, following the adoption of the European flag in 1955 and the designation of Europe day in 1964. As Caryl Clark relates, when a standing committee of the Council of Europe considered the choice of anthem in 1971, they unanimously concurred that 'Beethoven's music was representative of European genius and was capable of uniting the hearts and minds of all Europeans, including the younger generation'.[9]

The committee agreed that the *Ode to Joy*, the hymn-like melody from the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth*, would fulfil the Council's remit to propagate the ideal of European unity. Some members remarked, however, that Schiller's text concerned 'a universal expression of faith rather than a specifically European one'.[10] The poem was, moreover, written in German, which, on Clark's account, may have raised concerns at the time in light of the 'problematic' nature of the language both historically and politically. Consequently, despite frequent choral performances of the *Ode to Joy* in local communities across Europe, the committee resolved to adopt only Beethoven's melody, while expressing a hope that '[o]ne day perhaps some words will be adopted by the citizens of Europe with the same spontaneity as Beethoven's eternal melody has been'.[11] In the meantime, as the EU website states, the *Ode to Joy* could be regarded (rather nebulously) as 'expressing ideas of freedom, peace and solidarity' in the 'universal language of music'.[12]

In a somewhat controversial choice given his wartime links with the Nazi regime, Herbert von Karajan was then commissioned to make instrumental arrangements of the *Ode* for solo piano, wind band, and orchestra, with the official premiere of the orchestral arrangement taking place on 5 May 1972. Fourteen years later, on 29 May 1986, the European Community formally adopted the anthem, officially without words—although the first performance at Berlaymont was performed by a choir singing Schiller's text, therefore introducing a persistent uncertainty as to whether the European anthem is properly orchestral or choral.

Of course, this uncertainty may simply reflect a realisation that Beethoven's choral setting is considerably more powerful than the instrumental arrangements alone, and a consequent reluctance to perform the anthem as officially recommended, for instruments alone. Without massed voices hymning Schiller's intoxicating words, Karajan's arrangements risk sounding rather like karaoke accompaniments, potentially denuding the anthem of the unifying and mobilising power that led to its adoption in the first place. As Clark states, the 'impassioned fusing of melody and text' had obsessed Beethoven for over thirty years; consequently, its reduction to a purely instrumental hymn meant the *Ninth* was 'now bowdlerised by the very entity that sought to embody its spirit'.[13] Since the time of Pindar, the ode has always been primarily a textual rather than a musical form; the performance of a musical ode for instruments alone therefore raises the question of why the music has been shorn of its text. Consequently, opting to perform the *Ode to Joy* with its original text, as frequently takes place, seems to remove an unnecessary source of ambiguity—especially since German has long since ceased to be viewed, by the vast majority of Europeans, as a 'problematic' language. By including the original text, performers amend and challenge the Council's original decision to create an anthem with the title, but not the text, of Schiller's poem. However, the text itself is by no means free of its own ambiguities and challenges, especially for contemporary audiences. As such, while performing the anthem with Schiller's text avoids some equivocations, it introduces many new and equally challenging difficulties.

To begin with, Schiller's text can appear unreasonably optimistic in the light of subsequent history. It is revealing that Schiller may have originally intended to call the poem *Ode to Freedom* (*An die Freiheit*) rather than *Ode to Joy* (*An die Freude*), reflecting the outburst of utopian sentiment that gripped many Europeans in the 1780s and early 1790s. The French Revolution created a generation of thinkers who, in Bernt von Heiseler's words, 'wanted to change everything and create a paradise on earth'.[14] Disillusionment soon set in for Schiller, as for many other writers and artists, when the full scale of France's revolutionary bloodshed became clear; and in 1803 he published a revised version of *An Die Freude* that toned down some of the earlier poem's more overtly political passages, for example, changing 'Beggars shall be the brothers of princes' to 'All men shall be brothers'. (Schiller's fellow Weimar classicist Goethe followed a similar path a year later when revising his play *Götz von Berlichingen*; and like Goethe, who had already been ennobled in 1782, Schiller obtained a patent of nobility in 1802.) Beethoven made use of Schiller's revised

(1803) text in the *Ninth Symphony*, which he composed still later, between 1822 and 1824. Many have read the text, included below in the re-arranged form in which Beethoven set it, as (in Basil Deane's words, cited by Cook) 'a great affirmation of [Beethoven's] youthful idealism which remained unshaken by thirty disillusioning years':[15]

Joy, beautiful spark of the gods, daughter of Elysium,

Intoxicated with your fire, heavenly one, we enter your shrine.

Your magic power reunites what strict custom has divided;

All men shall be brothers where your gentle wing rests.

Whoever has the great good fortune to enjoy mutual friendship,

Whoever has taken a loving wife, let him join us in celebration!

Yes! Even he who has nothing to call his own but his soul!

But he who cannot rejoice, let him steal weeping away.

All creatures partake of joy at Nature's breast;

Nature nourishes all that is good or evil,

Dispensing kisses and wine to us, a friend tested in death.

The worm is in ecstasy, and the cherub stands before God.

Brothers, go on your way as glad as the stars as they hurtle

Through the heavens, as joyful as a hero on his way to triumph.

Be embraced, you millions! Here's a kiss for all the world!

Brothers! above the canopy of the stars there must dwell a loving Father.

Do you fall to your knees, you millions? World, do you sense your Maker?

Seek him beyond the stars! Beyond the stars he must dwell.

Beethoven was a composer rather than a philosopher or a close observer of politics and society. But, as Nicholas Cook asks, can Beethoven 'really have been so unthinking,

so *dumb*, so unaffected by the history of his own time, [as to hold] true to the beliefs of the 1780s in the Vienna of the 1820s, with its censorship, secret police, and network of informers'—so naïve as to have set Schiller's idealistic text without being aware of the sharp contrast it presented with the cynical, jaded Biedermeier era in which the *Ninth Symphony* was composed and first performed?[16] Furthermore, even if Beethoven's *Ninth* is able to bridge this historical disjuncture, what about the vastly greater fissure generated by the contrast between the sunny, if largely untested, optimism of the 1780s and the unimaginable horrors perpetuated in the twentieth century?

Faced with these impossible tensions, many artists and intellectuals have, in effect, lifted up their hands and admitted defeat, most famously in Thomas Mann's masterpiece, *Doktor Faustus*. Mann has the composer Adrian Leverkühn, heavily influenced by the aesthetics of Mann's friend Theodor Adorno and the life and philosophy of Nietzsche, tell the book's narrator that 'I find that it is not to be … The good and noble … It will be taken back. I will take it back … The Ninth Symphony.'[17] Leverkühn's last and most ambitious composition, *Doktor Fausti Weheklag* (*The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*), represents a negation of the *Ninth*'s optimism and exalted melodiousness. Furthermore, by combining a rigid, almost mechanical twelve-tone structure with overwrought emotive elements culminating in a nihilistic rejection of any hope of redemption or reconciliation, the work is also a parody of the *Ninth*'s apparent reconciliation of subjective and objective, or individual and communal, freedom. It even begins, rather than ends, with a choral movement. Mann began *Doktor Faustus* in exile in America during the Second World War, and the novel, and specifically Leverkühn's Faustian bargain with the devil and subsequent terminal illness, can be read as an allegory for Germany's catastrophic fall into barbarism. The only possible response to Nazism, Mann implies, is a denial of aesthetic beauty, and with it all art–music prior to the serialism of the Second Viennese School of Berg, Webern, and, above all, Schoenberg, who was in many ways the musical model for Mann's Faustian composer. Consequently, the *Ninth*

Symphony, and by extension the European anthem derived from it, comes up against an historical awareness of the disastrous outcome of German cultural developments over the nineteenth and, especially, early twentieth centuries. Performing any such affirmative work of art, from this perspective, is simultaneously to reject the ethical lessons of the Third Reich.

As against this ascetic view, one might reasonably hold that the modern performance of works composed before the development of atonality, and especially works that affirm positive dimensions of humanity such as the *Ninth*, could be viewed as an attempt to transcend, rather than ignore, the concentration camps and gulags of the twentieth century. On Clark's account, this idea played a significant role in the Council of Europe's decision to adopt the *Ode to Joy*, when 'those who wielded actual political power returned to a version of the supranationalist ideal that had long ago inspired philosophers, poets, and composers ... [in] a desperate attempt to rekindle a sense of hope that had nearly been extinguished in the bloodbaths of the modern era'.[18] Rather than flouting norms of ethical historiography, then, performing the *Ninth* can be seen as respecting them in a deeper, trans-historical sense, with Beethoven's timeless genius overcoming the horrors of history and helping to transfigure old ideals for a post-Nazi era.

Furthermore, any reading of the *Ninth Symphony* that regards it solely as an expression of the good and noble, or even as the exclusive province of aesthetic beauty, radically underestimates the complexity of Beethoven's compositional process, especially in a late work such as the *Ninth*, which he completed three years before his death in 1827. Many musicologists have remarked on the immense complexity of the *Ninth*, and especially the finale in which the *Ode to Joy* occurs, which presents a tightly woven collage of varied musical styles ranging from majestic choral *tuttis* to the slapstick of the Turkish march, and from the rigorous, intrusive virtuosity of the double fugue to pseudo-plainsong and quasi-Rossinian passages. The overall effect is one of ambivalence and questioning, especially at the moment when, in bar 810 as the choir sings

the crucial line 'All men shall be brothers', the music descends from Beethoven's late style into a cod-Mozartian, 1780s mode. Nicholas Cook notes: 'as the verbal expression reaches maximum intensity, the music goes into quotation marks'.[19] For Cook, the entire movement not only sets but also unsettles Schiller's text, undermining (if not denying) its affirmative Enlightenment-era ideals. Like another great masterpiece of the age, Goethe's vast drama *Faust* (written between 1775 and 1832), Beethoven's last symphony, for Cook, is 'like a construction of mirrors, reflecting and refracting the values, hopes and fears of those who seek to understand and explain it.'[20] Interpreting the *Ninth* as an unproblematically affirmative work, then, drastically simplifies and underestimates the work's ironic qualities. So even if one insists that only rebarbative and nihilistic works can be performed in the post-1945 world, Beethoven's *Ninth* still seems to qualify.

Nevertheless, the *Ninth* might only escape the charge of simplistic and ahistorical positivity if the work, or at least the finale, is performed in its entirety. To extract the *Ode to Joy* as an arrangement, and furthermore as a set of instrumental, non-choral arrangements, might be to destroy Beethoven's knowing compositional ironies and to deprive the work of its proto-nihilistic character. But of course the finale, which usually takes around twenty-four minutes in its entirety, can scarcely be performed as an anthem. Whether performed as an anthem or in its entirety, another complication arises from a diametrically opposing direction: while some have worried that the text is too optimistic, as discussed above, others have worried that the text is too oppressive. Susan McClary and Ruth Solie have criticised Schiller's poem from a feminist perspective, for example.[21] As a child of his time, Schiller prioritised male archetypes in his poem: in the stanzas set by Beethoven, 'brothers' occurs three times, while women are mentioned only as 'loving wives'. The poem has also been criticised for its subtle air of compulsion. For musicologist Maynard Solomon, the *Ode to Joy* presents a world in which the individual is oppressed by 'an authoritarian insistence on conformity as a precondition of salvation'.[22] Those who cannot yield their

individuality, such as the man who Schiller describes in the text as 'he who cannot rejoice', must leave, must 'steal weeping away'.[23] Compositionally, Solomon cites Beethoven's integration of disparate musical elements (mentioned above) as creating a 'sense of fusion so complete that it stands as the model of rapturous surrender to collectivity'. From a political standpoint, the insistence that 'all men *shall* be brothers' (emphasis added) has a troubling quality, a faint echo of twentieth century totalitarianism and Hitler's perversion of the ancient European dream of a united continental polity. And of course Britain, which joined the European Community largely for economic reasons and with little reflection on the constitutional implications of membership, has never enthusiastically shared this pan-European dream. Sir Con O'Neill, the senior official leading negotiations for membership under the Heath government, remarked in 1964 that while on the one hand the developing European Community could be seen as one of the most positive developments in international relations for generations, on the other hand it could also be seen as the kind of pan-European integrated structure that 'we have repeatedly, throughout our history, gone to war to prevent'.[24]

More recently, but in a similar vein, Philip Johnston described the *Ode to Joy* in the *Daily Telegraph* as one of the 'trappings of an embryonic superstate', and stated that the *Ode* and a linked European identity 'cannot turn the EU into an accountable democracy'.[25] The belief that the EU is fundamentally undemocratic played an important role in the Leave campaign, although Brexiteers' concomitant emphasis on parliamentary sovereignty can hardly said to have been gloriously vindicated in recent years. Nevertheless, appealing to Britain to stay in the EU by invoking old dreams of European collective purpose, which Schiller's text appears to endorse, was perhaps an unpromising strategy for Igor Levit to adopt at the Proms —not least because Beethoven himself, who despised Napoleon's overweening, pan-continental ambitions, might even have sided with the Brexiteers. (So Philip Johnston thinks, anyway.) It is also undeniable that the choice of the *Ode to Joy* by the original committee of the Council of Europe was

undemocratic in the most straightforward sense of the term, however enlightened it may have been in other ways.

It seems, then, that significant difficulties beset the European anthem on all sides. If performed as an instrumental anthem, as official rules stipulate, it robs the anthem of its inspiring exhortation to unity; but if performed with the words, as often happens in practice, it risks portraying Europe as an oppressive and patriarchal superstate. In either form, the 'bleeding chunk' approach of plucking out a particular section of Beethoven's finale negates the composer's ironic undermining of the Kantian, Enlightenment-era sentiment, and more widely the operation of a critical and informed historical sensibility; but the finale itself is far too long, and of course too technically and logistically demanding, to be frequently performed as an anthem. From this perspective, the mixed responses to Igor Levit's musical protest at the Proms represent only the tip of a very substantial interpretive iceberg.

Beyond the *Ode to Joy*?

Given these mounting intricacies, the question arises as to whether the EU might be better off with a different, less ambivalent anthem. An anthem with a less controversial and layered history, and with more straightforward lyrics, could potentially play a more significant role in efforts to build a pan-European identity. But finding an alternative could be just as challenging as navigating Beethoven's complexities. One challenge in this regard would be finding a melody to match the instant recognisability of the *Ode to Joy*, which Wagner described as 'divinely sweet, pure and innocent'—even if its sheer familiarity presents a related problem: the risk of people singing along without troubling to think about the complex and layered meanings thus invoked.[26] (Did the SNP MPs who hummed the *Ode to Joy* in the House of Commons realise they could be understood as promoting belief in a creator who dwells beyond the stars—or that Schiller's belief in the magically unifying power of joy could apply as well to the UK as the EU?)

Another challenge for a new anthem emerges regarding the mode of its choosing. A committee with musicological expertise,

expertise which was notably absent from the Council of Europe's initial discussions, could probably make a well-informed and workable choice of a new anthem; but if the choice was made without public participation, it would only exacerbate suspicions that the EU is fundamentally undemocratic. On the other hand, as recent British experiences demonstrate, public votes risk highlighting or even exacerbating antecedent divisions such as the north/south divide or the enduring Franco–German fault-line. In March 2019 the frontrunner to replace Angela Merkel, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, pointedly rejected some of Emmanuel Macron's proposals for EU reform, highlighting continued ideological differences between France and Germany regarding the EU's global role and internal functioning. How would the EU cope if the two leading options for a new anthem turned out to be Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks* and Charpentier's *Te Deum* (two of the original contenders in the 1960s), and if a poll led to a 50/50 divide between those favouring the German-English Handel and those favouring the Frenchman Charpentier? Polls can also be hijacked by facetious options such as Boaty McBoatface, which technically won the poll to name the British Antarctic Survey research vessel, although it was subsequently called the RRS Sir David Attenborough. (A follow-up poll asking Sir David to change his name to Boaty McBoatface by deed poll garnered 3,800 signatures). It seems unlikely that the EU would permit a new composition entitled *Anthem McAnthemface* to open new sessions of the European Parliament.

One way to overcome the difficulty of an EU anthem with a complicated interpretative history and unofficial German lyrics could be for each EU member state to choose its own European anthem tune to be performed with locally chosen lyrics, following the much-vaunted EU principle of subsidiarity. Following his pro-EU speech at the Proms, Daniel Barenboim's encore was not the *Ode to Joy*, but Elgar's *Land of Hope and Glory*. Perhaps each country could choose a similar piece, well-known locally if not continentally, and devise their own pro-European words to fit. However, while this would probably generate interesting insights into

how different member states view the EU, it would also be rather cacophonous, both literally and figuratively. Even Liszt, whose pianistic improvisations excelled at combining multiple melodies simultaneously, might struggle to reconcile twenty-seven (or twenty-eight?) anthems at once. Such an approach might be a fatal remedy, overcoming the complexities of the *Ode to Joy* only for music to divide, rather than unite, the nations of the EU.

It seems, then, that any attempt to replace the *Ode to Joy* might raise as many challenges as leaving it in place. In 1905, Churchill stated: 'In politics when you are in doubt what to do, do nothing'; and perhaps the most obvious solution, after all, is to retain the *Ode to Joy* and accept the complexities that come with it.[27] Indeed, a case can be made for this on normative grounds, since an acceptance of both the presence of complexity and the absence of final closure has often been viewed as an essential democratic virtue. David Runciman argued recently that 'representative democracy longs for what it can't have', understood as 'the possibility of closing the gaps in our politics'.[28] In the context of the European anthem, it is easy to sympathise with the urge to close the gaps of meaning that the *Ode to Joy* creates, falling as it does between text and music, between oppression and liberation, and between authenticity and arrangement. But such attempts at finality may be misguided, since (for Runciman) democracy—and by extension politics *simpliciter*—'presupposes disappointment ... [and] is a deeply frustrating business'. Moreover, as Claude Lefort argued, such incompleteness is essential to the health and vibrancy of democratic politics, which is 'instituted and sustained by the dissolution of the markers of certainty'.[29] From this perspective, an equivocal European anthem might even be advantageous, insofar as it prompts debate regarding its layered meanings in the context of both European and national politics. In a political climate characterised by a rising tide of nationalist populism, no stimulus to reasoned discussion can lightly be disregarded. Arguably, however, the full impact of the *Ode to Joy* can only be realised if the words, however problematic, are finally reunited with Beethoven's music.

In the 1971 discussions at the Council of Europe, as mentioned above, committee members hoped that '[o]ne day perhaps some words will be adopted by the citizens of Europe with the same spontaneity as Beethoven's eternal melody has been.'[30] This suggests that the words to be adopted should come from some extraneous source; but the more obvious solution is of course to simply use Schiller's original text. This would not only signal the maturity of the European community, in the sense that a German text can now be considered as an emblem of European unity, but would also co-opt the anthem's musical and textual ambivalence (and hence its ironic resemblance to the EU itself) for progressive European purposes. It would allow Europeans to go beyond the *Ode to Joy*, to think about how to create a new and more sustainable Enlightenment along social democratic lines —and, substantively, to consider whether the EU should follow the example of Beethoven's Turkish march by seeking to include Turkey within the European circle. This tolerance of ambivalence would not prevent criticism of the *Ode to Joy qua* European anthem; if anything, indeed, it might exacerbate it. But it would, at least, give all sides something more substantial to disagree about.

Notes

1 D. Tovey, *Symphonies and Other Orchestral Works: Essays in Musical Analysis*, Mineola NY, Dover, 2015, p. 441.
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