

Ferenc Fricsay's career lasted barely 20 years, but during that time, he became one of the most acclaimed conductors of his generation and left behind a body of recordings that are still admired. Fricsay studied at the Budapest Academy of Music under both Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók, whose music he later championed. His first conducting appointment came in 1936, in Szeged, where he remained until 1944. His debut conducting the Budapest Opera was in 1939 and in 1945 he was appointed the company's music director, taking the parallel appointment with the Budapest Philharmonic. At the 1947 Salzburg Festival, when conductor Otto Klemperer was forced to withdraw from conducting the premiere of Gottfried Von Einem's opera *Dantons Tod*, Fricsay stepped in, receiving international accolades for a sterling performance. The next year he conducted the world premiere of Frank Martin's *Zaubertrank*, and the year after that Carl Orff's *Antigone*. In 1948, Fricsay made his Berlin debut with Verdi's *Don Carlos* in a production that also featured the debut of baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Thereafter he served as a guest conductor throughout Europe, based in Berlin, where he served as music director of the *Städtische Oper* and the *American Sector Symphony Orchestra (RIAS)*, later renamed the *Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra*. Fricsay was best known in Europe as an operatic conductor, acclaimed for his Mozart and Verdi, among other composers, but in America he made his debut with the *Boston Symphony Orchestra* in 1953. He was conductor of the *Houston Symphony Orchestra* in 1954, but resigned after one season due to policy disagreements with the board of directors. In 1956, Fricsay became music director of the *Bavarian State Opera* and after two seasons, returned to Berlin to resume the music directorship of the *Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra*. In 1961, Fricsay conducted a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* to commemorate the re-opening of the *Deutsche Oper*.

Fricsay's approach to conducting was influenced heavily by Toscanini, whose relationship with the *NBC Symphony* he used as a model for his own work with the *Berlin Radio Symphony*. He emphasized strict tempos and precise playing, with a close adherence to the score. As an operatic conductor, however, he was not afraid to challenge customs and conventions, both in his conception of a work and his way of realizing performances of striking vitality.

Fricsay began developing serious health problems in the 1950s. The vivaciousness of his earlier performances was replaced by a more measured, reflective approach to music as his physical condition deteriorated, and by the end of the 1950s, when he would normally have been expected to be in his prime as a conductor and recording artist, his strength was beginning to fail him. When he died, Fricsay left behind a small, precious body of recordings.

Fricsay had signed an exclusive contract with *Deutsche Grammophon* in 1948 and during the next decade or so, delivered a body of work heavy with award-winning recordings. Fricsay's remarkable textural clarity was captured on record with the help of his close understanding of recording techniques. Perhaps his most-acclaimed record was Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, made in 1955 with Rita Streich, Maria Stader, Ernst Haefliger, and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (who, though completely unsuited for the role physically, sings up a storm as *Pagageno*), which remains a highly recommended performance. His recording of *Don Giovanni* from 1958 is also considered a definitive performance. He was also one of the most-acclaimed interpreters of Bartók, his reputation (and those of his recordings) rivalling that of Fritz Reiner, whose work with the composer is often cited as definitive.



# Beethoven

## Symphony No. 9

In D Minor Op. 125 "Choral"  
Egmont Overture  
Leonore Overture No. 3

Ferenc Fricsay  
Berliner Philharmoniker

On May 7, 1824, Ludwig van Beethoven experienced what must certainly have been the greatest public triumph of his career. The audience which gathered at the Hoftheater adjacent to the Vienna Kärtnertor heard not only the abridged local premiere of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* (the *Kyrie*, *Credo*, and *Gloria* were given) and *Op. 124 Overture*, but also the first performance of the composer's '*Choral Symphony*'. The event was a rousing success; indeed, one of the most moving accounts of Beethoven's final years describes how the profoundly deaf composer, unable to hear the colossal response of his admirers, had to be turned around by one of the soloists so that he could see the hundreds of clapping hands!

Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* started life as two separate works -- a symphony with a choral finale, and a purely instrumental work in *D minor*. He labored on these sporadically for almost 10 years before finally deciding (in 1822) to combine the two ideas into one symphony, with Friedrich von Schiller's *Ode an die Freude* (*Ode to Joy*) -- a text he had contemplated setting for a number of years -- as the finale.

The finished work is of visionary scope and proportions, and represents the apogee of technical difficulty in its day. There are passages, notably a horn solo in the slow movement, which would have been almost impossible to play on the transitional valveless brass instruments of Beethoven's time. As Dennis Matthews writes: "As with other late-peri-

od works, there are places where the medium quivers under the weight of thought and emotion, where the deaf composer seemed to fight against, or reach beyond, instrumental and vocal limitations."

The Ninth also personifies the musical duality that was to become the nineteenth century -- the conflict between the Classic and Romantic, the old and new. The radically different styles of Brahms and Liszt, for instance, both had their precedents in this work. On one hand, there was the search for a broader vocabulary (especially in terms of harmony and rhythm) within the eighteenth century framework; on the other, true Romanticism, embracing the imperfect, the unattainable, the personal and the extreme -- qualities that violate the very nature of Classicism. When viewed individually, the first three movements still have their roots distinctly in the eighteenth century, while the fourth -- rhapsodic, and imbued with poetic meaning -- seems to explode from that mold, drawing the entire work into the realm of program music, a defining concept of musical Romanticism.

Beethoven's Ninth represents a fitting culmination to the composer's symphonic oeuvre -- a body of work that is still unmatched in its scope and seminal ingenuity -- and remains a pillar of the modern symphonic repertoire.

# Beethoven

## Symphony No. 9 In D Minor Op. 125 "Choral"

Egmont Overture

Leonore Overture No. 3

**Ferenc Fricsay - Berliner Philharmoniker**

Alto Vocals – Maureen Forrester • Baritone Vocals – Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau

Choir – Berlin St. Hedwig's Cathedral Of Choir • Chorus Master – Karl Forster

Soprano Vocals – Irmgard Seefried • Tenor Vocals – Ernst Haefliger

Symphony Nr. 9

1 Allegro Ma Non Troppo, Un Poco Maestoso 16:42

2 Molto Vivace 10:31

3 Adagio Molto E Cantabile 18:00

4 Presto 6:13

5 Presto - O Freunde, Nicht Diese Töne! 16:58

6 Egmont Ouverture, Op. 84 8:59

7 Overture Leonora II, Op. 72a 14:08

Total Time: 1:31:31

Recording Info: Transferred from a 15ips 2-track Tape

Recorded by Deutsche Grammaphon 1961



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