



Press Release

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Patron: Her Majesty the Queen

Royal Philharmonic Society Bicentenary Celebrations

"Ode to Joy"

Westminster City Council Green Plaque to be unveiled on the site of the first UK performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony.

Midday, Sunday 11 August, 252 Regent Street, London W1 (Now NatWest Bank - near Oxford Circus)

A major landmark in British musical history - the first UK performance of the world's most famous and enduring symphony, Beethoven's 'choral' 9th Symphony - is set to be marked with the unveiling of a Westminster City Council Green Plaque in Regent Street at Midday on Sunday 11 August.

The plaque is being unveiled to mark the Bicentenary of the Royal Philharmonic Society [RPS], the UK's most illustrious and oldest concert society, which commissioned Beethoven's masterwork in 1822. The Philharmonic Society, conducted by founder member Sir George Smart, gave the first UK performance on 21 March 1825 at the New Argyll Rooms, John Nash's collection of concert rooms which, from 1820-1830, stood on the spot of what is now the Regent Street branch of NatWest Bank. The Society itself, which remains the authoritative voice of classical music for composers, performers and audiences, was founded in nearby Manchester Street and its offices are still based in Westminster.

The plaque will be unveiled by Royal Philharmonic Society Chairman, **John Gilhooly** and Councillor **Michael Brahams**, Deputy Lieutenant of Greater London, to the accompaniment of *Joie de Vivre*, a new fanfare commissioned by the RPS from 18 year old composer **Bertie Baigent** and performed by brass players from the **National Youth Orchestra**.

Launched in 1991, Westminster City Council's Green Plaque Scheme draws attention to particular buildings in the London Borough of Westminster associated with people of renown who have made lasting contributions to society. Other luminaries marked by the scheme include Edward Elgar, Oscar Wilde, Jane

Austen, Robert Browning and Voltaire, and sites of historical significance include the Queen's Hall, The Turks Head Tavern and the Tyburn Gallows.

John Gilhooly, Chairman of the Royal Philharmonic Society comments:
"The RPS's commission of Beethoven's 9th Symphony must rate amongst the best £50 ever spent. Buildings come and go, but the essential nature of the human spirit, which Beethoven so perfectly encapsulates in his famous symphony, remains constant. I would like to thank Westminster City Council for marking this significant moment in London's musical heritage, and for putting the Royal Philharmonic Society – which is Westminster born and bred - quite literally on the map."

Cllr Robert Davis, deputy leader of Westminster City Council, said:
"Beethoven's 9th Symphony is considered by many to be the greatest piece of music ever written – even the original score has been added to the United Nations World Heritage List. This green plaque is the perfect way to celebrate the first ever UK performance of such a masterpiece, and we are delighted to be working with the Royal Philharmonic Society to honour an important moment in Britain's musical history."

On the evening of Sunday 11 August, the National Youth Orchestra, National Youth Choir of Great Britain, and youth choirs from Northern Ireland perform Beethoven's 9th Symphony at the BBC Proms (Royal Albert Hall, 7.30pm and live on BBC Radio 3). The concert, conducted by Vasily Petrenko, also features a newly commissioned work by one of the UK's leading composers, Mark-Anthony Turnage, (commissioned by the RPS, BBC Proms and the New York Philharmonic).

About Beethoven's 9th Symphony.

The Royal Philharmonic Society commissioned – and continues to commission – new music from major and emerging composers. Beethoven's 9th Symphony, commissioned by the Society for £50 in 1822, remains the jewel in its glistening crown.

When the Philharmonic Society asked Beethoven to write a symphony, they took a giant leap of faith, and were repaid with a revolutionary work which caused a stir from the off. When he first saw the score, conductor Sir George Smart was more than a little surprised, and following the first UK performance, the work was roundly criticised for its length and "diffuseness". One critic called it: *"an unequal work, abounding more in noise, eccentricity, and confusion of design."* It was another 12 years before the Society attempted to perform it again.

Today, Beethoven's symphonic masterpiece resonates worldwide, giving voice to the European Union, providing solace to myriad celebrities castaway on Desert Island Discs, and inspiration for millions of music lovers.

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Additional Notes:

About the Royal Philharmonic Society

The Royal Philharmonic Society [RPS] is a charity dedicated to creating a future for music through the encouragement of creativity, the promotion of understanding and the recognition of excellence.

To mark the achievements of distinguished practitioners across the industry the Society presents the annual RPS Music Awards, the UK's leading awards for live music; the Leslie Boosey Award, for those who have made an outstanding contribution to further contemporary music in the UK, often in a 'back stage' capacity – from programmers to publishers; the newly launched Salomon Prize, for orchestral musicians (with the inaugural award recently presented to Hallé double bass player Beatrice Schirmer); Honorary Membership of the Royal Philharmonic Society, for services to music and which has been awarded to composers, conductors, performers, patrons, commentators programmers and educationalists; and the society's highest honour, the RPS Gold Medal. Current recipients of the RPS Gold Medal are: Janet Baker, Bernard Haitink, Alfred Brendel, Pierre Boulez, Simon Rattle, Plácido Domingo, Claudio Abbado, Daniel Barenboim, Thomas Quasthoff, Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Mitsuko Uchida.

The Society's artistic activities focus on composers and young musicians and through a programme of audience development, awards and lectures it seeks to raise the public consciousness of the finest music making today and to create a forum for debate about the direction of classical music.

The RPS is celebrating its bicentenary during 2013. It was formed on 24 January 1813 with the aim 'to promote the performance, in the most perfect manner possible of the best and most approved instrumental music', which it did principally by giving regular public orchestral concerts in London, including through two world wars.

royalphilharmonicsociety.org.uk