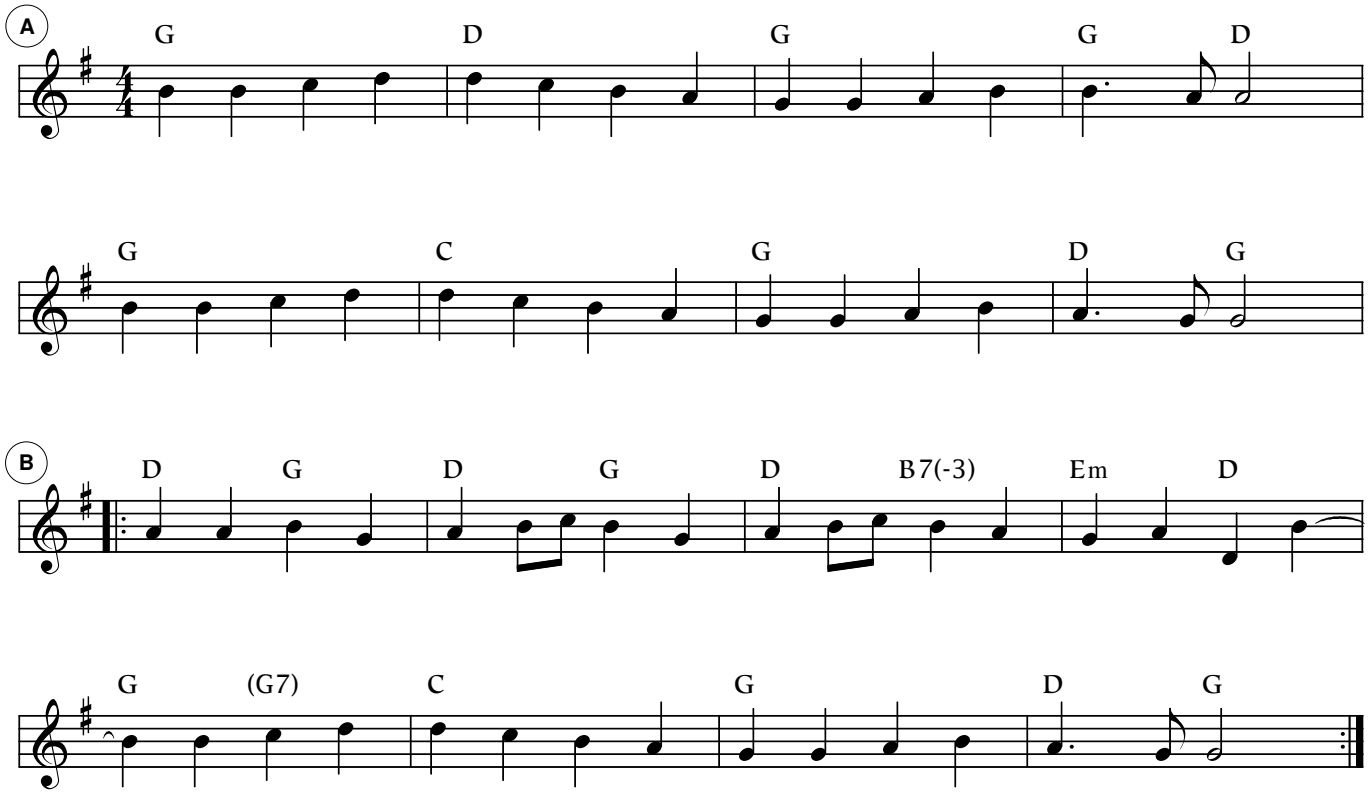
Ode to Joy

Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770-1827



This tune forms the basis of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor (Opus 125), which had its first performance in Vienna on May 7, 1824. A staple of the classical symphonic repertoire, Beethoven's 9th is one of the most-performed orchestral works of all time; this theme is one of the world's best-known classical melodies.

In the symphony's grand finale, the tune becomes a setting for excerpts from the poem "An die Freude" published in 1785 by German playwright, philosopher, poet, and historian Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805). Many of Schiller's plays and poems have been used as the basis for well-known works by other composers including Brahms, Schubert, Verdi, and Tchaikovsky. In a 2008 vote by the audience of the joint French and German television channel Arte, Schiller was named the second most important playwright in Europe after William Shakespeare.

When this tune is used as a hymn, the syncopation found in the B part is almost always lost and the repeat of the B part is usually omitted. It is most commonly sung in churches with the text "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" written by the American author, Presbyterian minister, and Princeton literature professor Dr. Henry van Dyke in 1907.

The tune (without lyrics) is also the official Anthem of Europe, first adopted by the Council of Europe in 1972 and reaffirmed by the European Communities (now the European Union) in 1985.