

Christmas miracles

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The date was May 7, 1824. The city was Vienna.

It was the first performance of Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 9.

The orchestra and choir were on stage at the Theater am Kärntnertor in what was then the music capitol of the world.

During the fourth movement, the cellos begin to play the lead in. The violins take over with the familiar melody quietly, then with slightly increasing intensity as more strings join in.

The music builds to a crescendo, then bursts joyfully alive with the most recognizable 16 bars of music ever written as the trumpets, brass, and timpani join in with a full orchestra filling the concert hall with the sound of one of the most beautiful symphonies ever composed.

That melody is so well known, that during a recent performance of the ninth symphony by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, I saw the conductor close his eyes, lower his head and arms, and simply take it all in as the orchestra played.

Beethoven, a rock star of his day, stood at the side of the stage as the orchestra performed. He tried to be a part of the performance by setting the tempo and following the music score, but all eyes in the orchestra were on the conductor, whose baton they followed for direction.

It was the first choral symphony ? a symphony that included voices as part of the performance.

The vocals start with an individual, then several singers who join in. Eventually the entire orchestra and full choir perform together with choir singing the words of Ode to Joy ? a poem written by German poet Friedrich Schiller.

?Joy! Joy! Joy, beautiful spark of divinity. Daughter from Elysium, We enter, burning with fervor heavenly being, your sanctuary. Your magic brings together what custom has sternly divided. All men shall become brothers, wherever your gentle wings hover.?

When the orchestra finished playing that night in Vienna, Beethoven did not realize it was over. He continued to move his arms in tempo as he followed the score he could read but could not hear.

At this point in his life, Beethoven was profoundly deaf.

The audience rose from their seats in the concert hall, applauding wildly at the conclusion of the performance. He could not hear them and stood facing the orchestra.

Finally, one of the performers walked over to the composer, touched his shoulder, and turned him around to face the audience.

The patrons in the concert hall waved their arms and hats in the air, the women waved their handkerchiefs for a visual expression of their appreciation.

Beethoven could not hear their admiration but he could see it.

This was a man who had lost the ability to hear ? probably the most important sense for a person whose career and talent was in music ? and yet he had written what would become his final symphony, about the joys of life.

As this Christmas season is upon us, quite often we hear of a reference to a 'Christmas miracle', as if somehow a season will produce something we hope and wish for.

For many, that miracle would be hitting six numbers and the bonus number in the lottery. For others, that miracle might be simply to meet a long lost friend at a Christmas party or visit with relatives you haven't seen for many years.

Maybe the true Christmas miracle is the fact that you are here and alive and so are those you know and appreciate being a part of your life.

Quite often we take our existence for granted.

If it was two different people who were your parents, you would not be here at all.

It was the splitting of a single cell that started your consciousness and created who you are.

Maybe if your grandparents had moved to another town, your parents would have never met and your consciousness would still be that as if you were never born at all.

This Christmas, take a few moments to reflect on the fact that you are here and so are the other beings on this planet that make your life better.

Revel in your time!

Merry Christmas to all.