

# Musical army takes off with Ode To Joy

By Ronald Hambleton Special to The Star

Never underestimate the power of 250 musicians determined to accept the challenge of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The latest attempt to scale those great musical heights was made last night at Massey Hall, in a repeat of their Saturday program, by the combined forces of the North York Symphony, (99 strong) and a 150-voice choir made up of the Jubilate Singers of North York, the North York Philharmonic Choir, the Toronto Korean-Canadian Choir, and four vocal soloists, all under the direction of Dr. William McCauley.

For most, this symphony begins and ends with its memorable final movement, a choral setting of Schiller's Ode To Joy; and in fact, that can be said of this performance. It is as if the entire ensemble moved to a higher ground the moment the soloists (soprano Janet Smith, contralto Catherine Robbin, tenor Glyn Evans and bass John Dodington) walked on stage after the slow movement.

They set a splendid tone of competence, which both orchestra and choirs rose to meet, to make the choral movement immediate and self-contained in its impact.

The English translation (Ode To Joy became Ode To Freedom), if a little surprising, was worth the minor shock to a system accustomed to the German, for it gave a welcome clarity to this occasion and helped to veil some of the problems of the three earlier movements.

This large orchestra has its weaknesses: A somewhat heavy sound with an irrepressible trumpet section that tends not to know its own strength; the pace is methodical without much breathing space; and some tempi are a trifle cautious, even timid. But the woodwind choir is reliable, and the strings, though not brilliant, are warm and, in general, unified. The ensemble's best work lies in those passages long enough for the players to be sure of its direction, as compared with episodes of contrast between sections.

## Composers' Concert

The Faculty Artists Composers' Concert at Walter Hall Saturday evening was actually a half-dozen concerts in one, for there were six works by six different composers, all members of the University of Toronto Faculty of Music. And it took 32 musicians to perform the various ensembles.

Why these six? No one explained, but if this music is representative, they are mostly an insular lot of composers under glass.

Walter Buczynski's Violin and Piano Sonata is an acrid, cerebral, and very private communication, though it ends with a powerful barrage of sound. John Hawkins, as revealed in his settings of three poems, each couched in peculiar diction, belongs to what Sonia Eckhardt-Grammate used to call the "hee-haw" school of music. The harp accompaniments might have been agreeable on their own, but the vocal line was unbelievable. Edward Laufer's Concertino for eight instruments fairly creaked with technique, all very useful for ensemble players, but scarcely tolerable as music. John Beckwith's Case Study, less musical than stagey, showed the five performers in informal business probably meant to be comic that should be left back in the dressing room.

Only two items enlivened and enriched the evening: Lothar Klein's two piano arrangement of 19th century Canadian dances; and Talivaldis Kenins' substantial and richly worked out 1982 Concerto for 14 instruments.