

Beethoven's Ninth Around the Clock



HIGH NOTES

It's tough to listen to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony without going into a trance. The piece has been played and recorded so often, and the concluding "Ode to Joy" has become so in-

grained in our consciousness, that just paying attention to the notes is a challenge.

But that is exactly the state intended in a radical new interpretation by the Norwegian conceptual artist Leif Inge, whose "9 Beet Stretch" digitally elongates a recording of the symphony to make it last 24 hours. The piece slows symphonic time so that movement is barely perceptible. What you hear in normal time as a happy Viennese melody lasting 5 or 10 seconds becomes minutes of slowly cascading overtones; a drumroll becomes a nightmarish avalanche. Yet the symphony remains somehow recognizable in spirit if not in form, its frozen strings fraught with tense, frowning Beethoven-ness.

"This trance feeling, letting the sound just go on without trying to expect anything, is really the way to listen to it," Mr. Inge said from Oslo. "You get away from the idea of music having a definite start and a definite end."

Like Morton Feldman's glacially paced

Stretched to 24 hours, a joyous symphony can put listeners into an uncomfortable trance.

works for string quartet, "9 Beet Stretch" plays with a listener's response. The slowness eases you into a trance, but the layers of dissonance make the experience slightly uncomfortable.

Mr. Inge created the piece in 2002, and he is now bringing it to America. Tomorrow he will discuss it and play excerpts at Free103point9, a gallery in Brooklyn, and on Friday it will unfold in its full 24-hour glory at the cavernous Theo Kupfer Foundry and Ironworks in Madison, Wis. On April 23 it will be played at the Quiet American in San Francisco. A version is online (www.notam02.no/9), and it will be released this year as a double DVD by Table of the Elements.

Mr. Inge was inspired, he said, by the Scottish visual artist Douglas Gordon, whose "24 Hour Psycho" (1993) slowed a Hitchcock film to uncover its "unconscious."

"I simply thought it would be better to do it with sound," Mr. Inge said. He chose Beethoven's Ninth because of its canonical status, he added, but also because "there is a lot of sound in it, a lot going on."

BEN SISARIO