Moments from the end, the first movement of Beethoven’s Ninth culminates in a sustained funeral march. What place does death have in a symphony about joy? My talk draws on the circumstances of the Ninth’s premiere at the Kärntnertortheater on 7 May 1824 and its surrounding cultural contexts, to reveal an understanding of the work (and of late Beethoven) that has been lost through the passing of time and cultural change: a meditation on and expression of joy as a corollary of death and necessary suffering, one that is deeply seated in faith. The talk stems from my book project, titled Beethoven’s Latening: Music, God, and Transcendence, from Heiligenstadt to the Große Fuge, and Beyond. It reconstructs the phenomenon of late Beethoven as a dynamic psychological process that begins as early as 1802–4 and develops in the decades that follow in terms of metaphorical cycles of death and rebirth. There and in the talk I use microhistory, historically informed music analysis that holistically integrates schema theory, sonata theory, and topic theory, close readings of (auto)biographical documents from Beethoven’s life, and interdisciplinary readings of cultural units. The result is an image of Beethoven that is unfamiliar to most, now in the 250th anniversary year of his birth.