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A Theater for a Symphony

----- admission free 50 min film screening & discussion -----

Monday, May 18, 2026, 4 to 6PM

Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies, Schiro Hall, 5th floor
Dr. MLK Jr. Library, 150 E. San Fernando St, downtown San Jose



Professor Birgit Lodes

discussion leader

Kärntnertortheater

Vienna



On 7 May 1824, Vienna’s Kärntnertortheater hosted the world premiere of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, alongside the Viennese premiere of three movements from the *Missa solemnis* and a performance of his last overture *Die Weihe des Hauses*. A film by director Barbara Weissenbeck returns to this historic stage—demolished in 1873/74 and later replaced by the Hotel Sacher—through a rigorously researched digital reconstruction.

Viennese architects and animators, led by Bernhard Rapf with students from TU Wien, conducted a detective-style hunt through historical plans and construction records to rebuild the lost theater in 3D and approximate its original acoustics. The film interweaves scholarly and technical strands, documenting the animation workflow and the green-screen reenactments. Berlin electroacoustician Stefan Weinzierl measured and modeled the auditorium to make the sound world of the premiere newly audible.

Drawing on Beethoven’s rich conversation books, the film traces the symphony’s genesis and the chaotic lead-up to the long-awaited premiere. Commentary by Birgit Lodes and John Wilson (University of Vienna), Johannes Prominczel (Head of the Vienna Philharmonic Archive), conductor Martin Haselböck, horn player Herbert Ebner, and percussionist Evelyn Glennie illuminates Beethoven’s working methods and lived context. The score of the Ninth propels the narrative to its finale, where the period-instrument Wiener Akademie under Martin Haselböck performs excerpts from the “Ode to Joy” on the digitally “re-erected” Kärntnertortheater stage—a musical detective story brought to a triumphant close.

Light refreshments follow the event.

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