

Beethoven Symphony No. 5 Study Group

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(slides beautifully formatted by John Abelson, helpful husband)

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Today's class

Major and minor keys

Listen to the symphony. Reactions to the work as a whole.

Is the Fifth "about" something?

The 18th century symphony

Size of orchestra in Beethoven's time

Great Course excerpt on Beethoven's historical context

Sonata form

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Symphony No. 5 in C Minor



by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Composed 1804 – 1808

First performance Dec. 22, 1808, in Vienna

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Major and minor keys

A key is the set of pitches used in a piece.

This set of pitches is called a scale (do re mi...)

The first note of the scale is the strongest one, called the keynote. The key takes its name from this first note. (The key of A has a scale that begins on the pitch A, etc.)

Starting on any given note, there can be a set of pitches/scale that creates what is called a major key, or a set of pitches/scale that comprises a minor key.

C major scale C D E F G A B C

C minor scale C D E^b F G A^b B^b C

Scale degrees 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Three pitches are different between major and minor scales: the third, sixth and seventh pitches of the scale.

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The role of the key

The key is a musical element that has a big emotional impact, especially the difference between the feelings/mood suggested by major and minor.

Symphony No. 5 begins in C minor and ends in C major.

There are shifts between minor and major during the course of the symphony.

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Minor Keys and C minor

In the late 18th – early 19th century, most pieces were composed in major keys. Less than 1 in 10 symphonies of the time are in a minor key.

Example: Haydn wrote 104 symphonies; 10 are in minor keys.
Mozart wrote 41 symphonies; 2 are in minor keys.

Of Beethoven's 9 symphonies, two are in minor keys:
the 5th (C Minor) and the 9th (D Minor)
both end in major key; the 9th ends in the famous "Ode to Joy."

Some of Beethoven's other important C minor works:

- *Pathétique* Piano Sonata No. 8, Op. 13 (1798)
- Symphony No. 3, 2nd movement (funeral march) (1803)
- Piano Concerto No. 3 (1803)
- Coriolan Overture (1807)
- Piano Sonata No. 32, Op. 111 (1821-22) (the last piano sonata)

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(Familiar tunes in major and minor)

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Symphony No. 5 in C Minor

Movement	Tempo	Key
1.	Allegro con brio	C minor
2.	Andante con moto	A ^b major
3.	Allegro	C minor (trio in C major)
4.	Allegro	C major

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Dramatic Narrative in the 5th

The 5th has no extramusical indication of a narrative : no title, no dedication, no reference to a literary work, no reliable extant source from Beethoven about its meaning. So we have only the musical elements to work with.

But the musical elements themselves suggest a kind of dramatic narrative, whose goal is the final movement.

The musical foundation of this narrative is the tonality: the symphony begins in C minor and ends in C major. "... the catharsis represented by the defeat of C minor by C major is tremendous." (Greenberg, Great Courses)

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This progression from C minor to C major is often interpreted metaphorically as a journey from darkness to light, from tragedy to triumph.

In addition, the alternation between minor and major within the various movements suggests a sense of heroic struggle.

The sense of journey is not unique to the 5th. Beethoven's symphonies Nos. 3, 7, and 9, "...create the impression of a psychological journey or growth process. In the course of this, something seems to arrive or triumph or transcend..." (New Grove Dictionary of Music)

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Lockwood says it best (1 of 2)

“[In the 5th symphony] . . . Beethoven builds a work that seems to symbolically confront fundamental issues of life and death. It is no surprise to find that its performance history includes later occasions on which people living under conditions of mortal duress have felt in this work a revelation of tragedy that ends in a vision of hope . . .

It conveys meanings that lie beyond words yet are emotionally clear, meanings to which listeners have unfailingly responded from his time to ours. The mode of understanding that I am referring to is essentially visceral, spiritual, and deeply emotional . . .

At the level I am now speaking of, the same is actually true for all his other symphonies . . .”

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Lockwood says it best (2 of 2)

“The fifth symphony gripped its early listeners with emotions they had never experienced in concert music . . . one central insight seems to dominate in the reception of this work. That is the feeling that in this symphony Beethoven is speaking to the world not in high rhetoric or in the grand and epic manner, as in the *Eroica*, but rather that he is speaking from deep within himself, creating music that arouses the most basic emotions with an intensity unparalleled in symphonic music before his time and rarely equaled afterward. These emotions include what Hoffmann felt – terror, horror, and pain – and, at the end, when all was done, a vision of triumph.”

Lewis Lockwood, [Beethoven's Symphonies : An Artistic Vision](#) (2015)

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Late 18th century symphony

An extended work for orchestra, usually consisting of four distinct sections or movements.

The four movements follow a general pattern in terms of their forms, their tempos, their characters and their key relationships.

Movement 1

Key: Tonic / home key
 Tempo: Fast
 Character: Brilliant, noble, high spirited
 Form: Sonata

Movement 2

Key: Dominant, subdominant, or related key
 Tempo: Moderate or slow
 Character: Relaxed, lyrical, melancholy, pastoral
 Form: Sonata, theme and variations, 3-part, etc.

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Late 18th century symphony

Movement 3

Key: Usually tonic
 Tempo: Moderate in 3, dance-like
 Character: Elegant
 Form: Minuet and trio

Movement 4 (also called the Finale)

Key: Tonic
 Tempo: Fast
 Character: Often light-hearted, happy ending
 Form: Sonata or rondo

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Late 18th century symphony

The symphony evolved throughout the 18th century.

Started as relatively brief piece performed as background music for aristocrats in palaces. Developed into a major work performed in public concerts with attentive listeners.

By the later 1700s, the symphony was the single most important and popular type of instrumental music and remained so throughout much of the 1800s.

Haydn and Mozart were the leading symphonic composers prior to Beethoven. After Beethoven, every symphony was judged in comparison with his works.

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Late 18th century orchestra

<u>Four- or Five-part Strings</u>	<u>Winds/Brass/Percussion</u>
Violin 1	Flutes 1 & 2
Violin 2	Oboes 1 & 2
Viola	Clarinets 1 & 2
Cello*	Bassoons 1 & 2
Double bass*	Horns 1 & 2
*together or separated	Trumpets 1 & 2
	Timpani (tonic & dominant)

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Size of orchestra for the first performance

First performance of the 5th and 6th symphonies on Dec. 22, 1808 in Vienna. Beethoven led the orchestra.

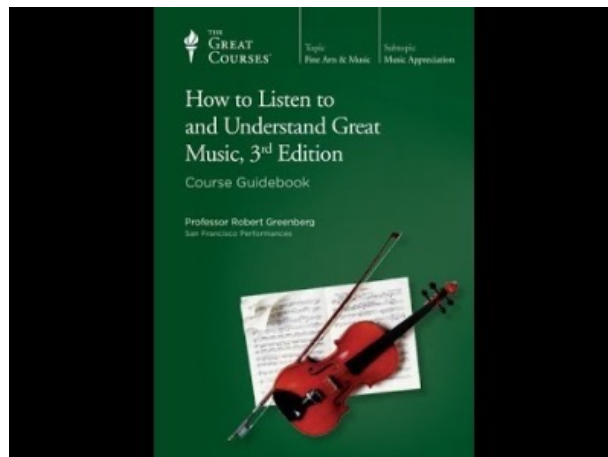
Estimated number of players:

Strings	37 – 45
Winds	17 (includes 3 trombones, piccolo, contrabn.)
Timpani	1
Total	55 – 63

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Click to start the video



<https://youtu.be/BL04L4qX5fY>

Click again to stop

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Sonata form

One of the most important musical forms from about 1750 well into the 1900s

Sonata form \neq the form used for a sonata

It is the internal structure of a single movement which is part of a larger multi-movement work, such as a symphony, sonata, or string quartet

Almost all the first movements of symphonies, sonatas, and string quartets by Classical composers are in sonata form

Other movements can be in sonata form as well. In symphony No. 5, the first and last movements are in sonata form.

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Sonata form, continued

Sonata form is really just an expansion of simple three-part song form, a pattern that many popular songs follow.

Capital letters used to refer to the three parts of a song: A B A

A stands for the primary melody/tune

B stands for a slightly different tune in the middle

A stands for the return of the original melody.

(Example: *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*)

In sonata form:

A section is called the exposition

B section is called the development

Return of the A section is called the recapitulation.

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Exposition

Two themes or melodies are introduced. Theme 1 is in the home key, and theme 2 is in a new key. (There are sometimes additional themes, usually less important.)

The themes are often very different in character, in addition to being in different keys.

The two themes can also be contrasted in terms of the instruments used, the dynamic level, and the musical texture.

The exposition is repeated, in its entirety, to help familiarize the listener with the material.

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Development

Begins away from the tonic and travels even further away harmonically through a series of tonal centers / keys.

One or both themes are “developed,” meaning that they are changed and manipulated in various ways, often taken apart and used in fragments.

These musical processes often create a high degree of tension.

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Recapitulation

Return to theme 1 in the home key; the material of the exposition is then more or less repeated. This time theme 2 is played in the home key/tonic.

The return of familiar material, and the re-establishment of the home key create a sense of satisfaction and completion.

A movement in sonata form can also have a slow introduction and/or a coda, i.e., an ending section.

Sonata form was inherently flexible, with a wide range of possibilities. Audiences knew this formal structure well and would be delighted by unexpected imaginative changes by the composer.

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Next class

Listen to the first movement and try to hear where the development and recapitulation begin.

Identify themes 1 and 2

Is there a coda?

What section / passage seems the most intense to you?

Do you have a favorite passage?

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