

Beethoven Symphony No. 5 Study Group

Week 2

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Movement 1

(Class members share their words for Movement 1)

- The first movement of Beethoven's Fifth is "...one of the most tightly wound and disturbing symphonic movements ever penned"

Ted Libbey, [The NPR Guide to Building a Classical CD Collection](#)

- (play movement 1)

Class : identify exposition, development, recapitulation and coda while listening

During exposition : hold up 1 finger for theme one,
2 fingers for theme two

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Movement 1

Allegro con brio ***Key: C minor*** ***Time signature: 2/4*** ***Form: Sonata form***

Shortest opening movement in all of Beethoven's nine symphonies

Unusual: the four main sections (exposition – development – recapitulation – coda) are all essentially equal in length, within 2 to 3 measures of each other. "One of the most perfectly balanced" movements that Beethoven ever wrote.

Extremely unusual for a coda to be this long and thus equal in importance to the other main sections of a movement in sonata form.

Beethoven also expands the function of the coda. This coda not only delays the final resolution, but it is extremely dramatic and intense. It also presents new ideas/new working out of the material.

In this sense the coda acts like another development. A great example of Beethoven expanding classical form.

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What's a motive?

A **motive** is a short, distinct musical idea

It is distinct in the sense of "distinctive" – it is catchy, it stands out, you can hear it as the song or the piece progresses

Sometimes, a composer builds up a song or a whole piece from one or more motives

Examples:

"I Feel Pretty" from *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein

"S'wonderful" by George Gershwin

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What's a theme?

A **theme** is a central melody in a musical piece including its rhythm, harmony, instrumentation, etc.

Generally longer and more complete than a motive

Examples:

Ode to Joy

Pomp and circumstance

Theme for the Olympics

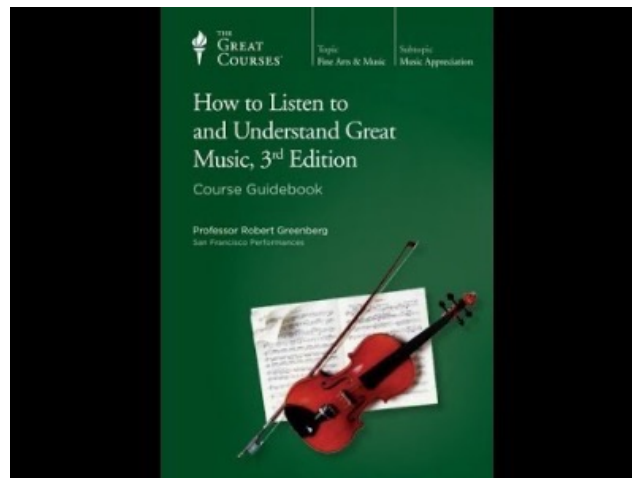
A theme can be made up of one or more motives.

Example: Lone Ranger (William Tell Overture)

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Click to start the video (at the start)



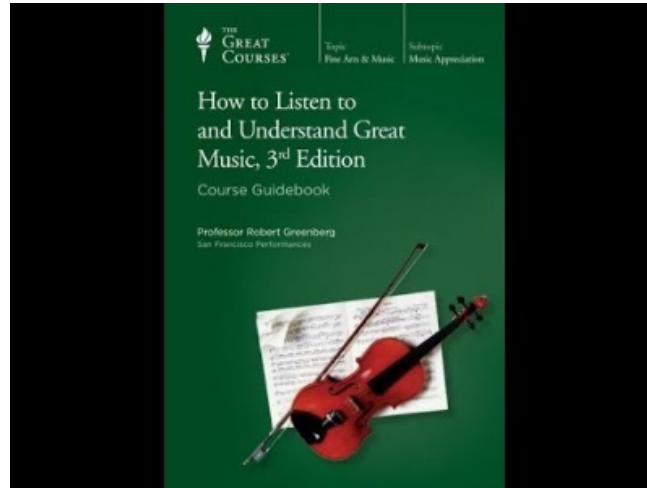
<https://youtu.be/AbiPfbXsErE>

Click again to stop

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Click to start the video (at 5:05)



<https://youtu.be/AbiPfBXsErE>

Click again to stop

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Greenberg's points about opening motive / theme 1

Theme 1 is not a singable tune, not really a traditional "theme," but a series of repetitions of the four-note motive



The opening four-note motive is more of a rhythmic idea than a melodic one

If someone says "what's the Beethoven symphony that starts 'dah dah dah dum,'" people will recognize it just from the rhythm

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Greenberg's points, continued

This also means that while we listen, it is primarily the rhythmic pattern – short, short, short, long – that our ears will pick up on. The rhythm is more important than whatever pitches or tones are being played.

(However, as Greenberg points out, the repeated pitches that begin the motive are also very distinctive and very identifiable to the ear.)

Beethoven uses the four-note motive to construct both the first theme and much of the material of the entire movement. This makes the movement highly concentrated and thematically connected.

Also, the four-note motive can be found in other movements of the symphony, at times disguised. This is another Beethoven innovation: unifying a symphony through repetitions of a motive.

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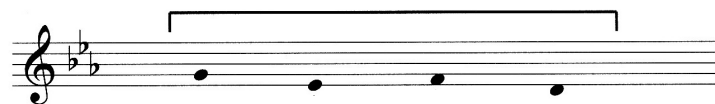
Opening motive / theme 1

The opening statement of the movement looks like this:



It is made of two statements of the four-note motive. Each ends with a long note, and each long note has a fermata over it, indicating a pause.

If you take away the repeated notes and the fermatas, you have a melodic outline that looks like this:



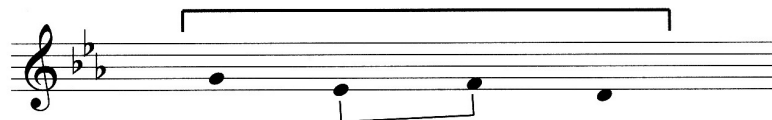
A version of this motive will appear in the development and coda.

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Opening motive / theme 1

There is another tiny figure hidden within the opening bars. The two four-note motives are connected by an ascending step, which is hidden because of the fermata and the rest.



This ascending step motive will have an important role in the horn call of theme 2 and in the development.

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Theme 2

Begins with a horn call motive:



This motive is related to the opening statement of the movement:

it has the short-short-short-long rhythm, but only once

it consists of two downward skips

the skips are stretched out from a third to a fifth

there is no fermata or rest between the two

the ascending step is more obvious

And continues:



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Exposition : Listening Questions

What is the effect of the horn call motive?

How does the feeling of the music change from the theme one area to the theme two area?

Why does the second theme sound so different from the first?

(play exposition)

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Why theme 2 sounds different from theme 1

Change of key from minor to major

More song-like, pleasing melody

Marked *piano* and *dolce* (sweet) in the score

Longer note values (quarters, instead of constant eighths)

Smoother (legato) instead of sharp and articulated

Change in orchestration: fewer instruments, lighter sound, violin, clarinet, flute

Beethoven's goal: maximum contrast between the two themes

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Development : Listening Questions

Are there passages which feel most intense to you? Try to catch what is creating that intensity.

Listen for the horn call motive

Listen for a change in the musical motion

What kind of feeling do you have when the music seems to slow down?

(Play development)

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Development

Compare beginning of movement to beginning of development

Exposition	Development
Pause after each 4 note motive	Pause only after second 4 note motive
G – E ^b , F – D	B ^b – G, D ^b – C
Clarinet and strings	Horn, clarinet and strings

Intense passage: Repeated diminished 7th chords followed by silences. (Diminished 7th: a dissonant chord that creates tension.)

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The slowdown / “disintegration”

Acts as transition between development and recapitulation

Reduction of musical material:

no more short notes, just longer values – one note per measure

horn call motive reduced to ascending step

then just repeated chords, alternating high and low

dynamics reduced from *ff* – *p* – *pp*

This passage creates great unease; interrupted twice by *ff* full orchestra playing opening motive material

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Transition, continued

This is a famous passage in the history of music !

Hector Berlioz described it as “the painful respiration of a dying man.”

Another 19th-c. source called it “the chords of despair.”

Ted Libbey: “an eerie calm in the eye of the storm.”

Lewis Lockwood: “A moment of ultimate strangeness, as if signaling a psychic collapse after the immense expense of energy that has come before.”

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Listening questions : Recapitulation

What is the effect of the oboe solo?

A different instrument plays the horn call motive at the beginning of theme 2. Can you tell what instrument it is?

What is the feeling by the end of the recapitulation?

(Play recapitulation)

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Recapitulation

Opening motive played by full orchestra (at beginning, it was just clarinet and strings)

Oboe solo / cadenza – highly unusual ! Marked *adagio* in score.

Horn call motive at beginning of theme 2 is played by bassoon

Theme 2 in sonata form is always played in the home key, the tonic, which is C minor in this piece. However, Beethoven puts theme 2 in C major !!!

This creates expectation that the piece is going to end in bright, positive C major, not the dark C minor.

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Listening questions : Coda

What physical reactions do you have to the music (if any)?

What do you think when you hear the opening motive near the end?

(Play coda)

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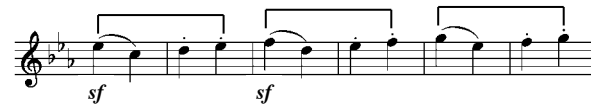
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Coda

Reestablishes the “true” home key of C minor

As in the development, tension created by relentless repeated pitches and chords, followed by dramatic silences. Here in the coda, however, the repeats and the silences go on even longer.

The coda is like a second development in its length, emotional intensity, and in presenting new ways of working out the motivic material.



Note values slow to quarter notes with *sf* accents on first beats, creating an even more forceful, pounding effect of effort and struggle.

Coda ends in restatement of opening theme – does it feel like the piece is starting over?

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First movement as a whole

“...the movement is dominated from first to last by propulsive motoric rhythms . . . [it] is intended to be heard as a continuous crescendo, that, with the exception of the solitary oboe solo at the start of the recapitulation, allows nothing to impede its progress. . . The powerful river of sound seems unstoppable.”

Martin Geck, Beethoven's Symphonies: Nine Approaches to Art and Ideas (2017)

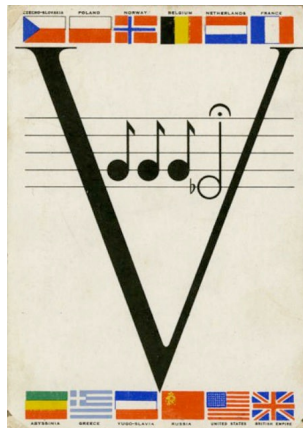
(play recording by Musica Aeterna, conducted by Teodor Currentzis)

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Tempo and victory

NPR *All Things Considered* interview with
Matthew Guerrieri



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A different take on Beethoven's fifth...



PDQ Bach, <https://youtu.be/WR4CdKSeD-E>

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Next week...

Listen to movements 2 and 3

I will send email with a guide to their forms

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