

# Beethoven Symphony No. 5 Study Group

Week 3 : Second and Third Movements

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In symphonies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries,  
second movements are typically slower in tempo  
and more melodic than first movements,  
and in a different (but related) key.

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## Symphony No. 5, Movement 2

Andante con moto      Meter: 3/8      Key: A flat Major  
(moderate pace, with motion)

Form: theme and variations

Theme and variations form consists of a theme which is played at the beginning, followed by altered versions of that theme

Pianist Jeremy Denk calls this process of variation “repeating with changes”

It is the process involved in jazz music

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## Theme and variations

What can change?

- the melody (for example, by adding ornaments or figuration)
- the rhythm
- the tempo
- the accompaniment
- the instrumentation
- the key (e.g., major to minor) and the harmonies
- the dynamics, etc.

The result is that the variations can transform the character and mood of the original theme

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## Theme and variations, cont.

In the classical music tradition, theme and variations can be:

1. An independent composition\*
2. The form used for a movement within a symphony, sonata, or string quartet

(\*Examples: Mozart wrote 14 sets of theme and variations for piano; Beethoven wrote 20 such sets. Many other famous examples include Bach's Goldberg Variations, Brahms Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Rachmaninoff Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, etc.)

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## Musical material

In Symphony No. 5, the second movement has three types of musical material:

1. Two contrasting themes
2. Variations on the first theme (the second thing is basically just repeated)
3. Transitional, "in-between" music

The movement can be described as "variations with interludes"

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## A road map for movement 2 (follow as we listen)

### Statement of themes

Theme 1: soft, lyrical melody played in strings and echoed by woodwinds. Key of A flat major.

Theme 2: starts softly in strings, clarinet, and bassoon; suddenly jumps to C major, with full orchestra playing fortissimo

Transition: soft sustained chords, wandering harmonies

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### Variation 1 (first theme)

Theme 2, restated

Transition: very soft, sustained chords, wandering harmonies  
(Repeated note figure in low strings recalls 4-note motive of movement 1)

### Variation 2 (first theme)

Transition: soft, repeated chords; fragment of Theme 1

Theme 2, restated

Transition: soft, repeated triadic figures

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Variation 3 (first theme). Key changes to A Flat minor; melody played soft and staccato in woodwinds.

Tiny interlude

Variation continues in full orchestra, back in A flat major.  
The climax of the movement.

Coda

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## Character of Theme 1

What is the effect of the opening theme after the intensity of movement one?

Violas, Cellos

*p dolce* *f p*

How do you describe the quality of movement in this theme (this is related to the question of how you would dance to it)

Note:

Movement 1: no dotted-note rhythms, no triplets

Movement 2: dotted-note rhythms are a significant feature of both themes;  
also triplet accompaniments

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## Theme 1, contd.

Some observations:

This melody is long, smooth, and seamlessly constructed, one idea flowing into another.

Many Classical period melodies divide evenly into two phrases, such as in Eine Kleine Nachtmusik and the theme from the Haydn Surprise Symphony.

In this theme, Beethoven carries the melody across eight bars, and then has a series of echoes and extensions that glide on for several more measures.

[Play/demonstrate.]

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## Theme 2

Play theme two. Words for the second theme? How would you describe the quality of its motion?



Note how incredibly different the same melody sounds in the fortissimo, full orchestra version compared to its quiet first statement in woodwinds and strings.

Startling eruption created by:

- volume changes from pp to ff in the course of one beat
- addition of brass and timpani
- the key suddenly changes to C major, the key of triumph, the key of the final movement.

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## Theme 2, cont.

These big C major majestic passages — theme 2:

- occur three times
- never last long
- followed by soft transitional passages
- never have strong harmonic endings

In particular, the first two statements of the majestic theme are followed by strange, wandering passages of long held chords. The harmony is ambiguous and the musical motion is stalled. Creates an effect of unease, tension, and doubt — right after that big blowout C major theme.

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## Theme 2, cont.

Why does Beethoven do this?

One interpretation: “As in movement one, the victorious C major goal is promised, but unfulfilled.”

(Eastman School of Music: *Beethoven Symphony Basics*)

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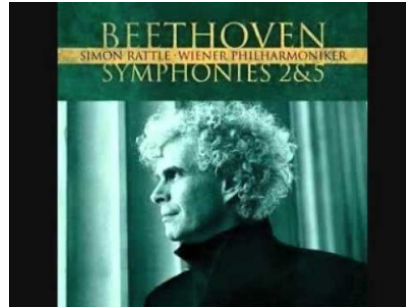
## Variation 3

Key changes to A flat minor

Returns to dotted rhythms of original theme, but with staccato articulation and change of instruments.

Variation continues, after a brief interlude, with return to A flat major, full orchestra, canonic imitation.

Climax of the movement.



<https://youtu.be/5N-zemoOQE8?t=359> 15

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## Function of Movement 2 in Symphony

Contrast and respite

Foreshadow C major victory

### **A similarity between movements one and two:**

Both have two highly contrasting themes in different keys

In the second movement, “the two main key centers of A flat and C major mirror the first movement in which our hero was caught between two exaggerated worlds – the C minor fate motive and the E flat, major, hopeful theme.”

(Eastman School of Music: *Beethoven Symphony Basics*)

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## Symphony No. 5, Movement 3

Allegro            Meter: 3/4            Key: C minor

Form: Scherzo and trio

Sections: A            B            A'            Transition to Movement 4

Scherzo    Trio    Scherzo

Key: C Min    C Maj    C Min

(Or: A B A B A' followed by the Transition)

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## Minuet and trio

The third movement of a symphony in the Classical period was traditionally in a three-part form known as minuet and trio. (The pattern was minuet – trio – repeat of minuet.)

The minuet originated as an elegant dance in 3 that was popular in aristocratic courts from about 1650 to 1750. (The trio was the name given to the second section of this dance.)

Composers adapted the minuet and trio for use as a movement in instrumental works such as symphonies, string quartets, and sonatas.

Typically, the trio section in symphonies featured the wind instruments, and was often rustic or pastoral in character.

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## Haydn Symphony No. 100, Minuet

**Symphony No. 100 in G Major**  
(“Military”; 1793–4)

I

*Adagio*

Flute  
2 Oboi  
2 Fagotti  
2 Cori (G)  
2 Trombe (G)  
Timpani (G, D)  
Violini I  
Violini II  
Viola  
Violoncelli e Contrabbassi

<https://youtu.be/Bdw9wac4qIU?t=910>

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## Scherzo

Starting with Beethoven, the minuet and trio movement in symphonies began to be replaced by a scherzo and trio.

The scherzo is also in 3, but is faster than a minuet, and often has accents on offbeats and phrases of irregular length.

Scherzo means “joke” in Italian.

Beethoven only used the term scherzo for the 3<sup>rd</sup> movements of his Symphony No. 2 and No. 3. However, in most of his symphonies the 3<sup>rd</sup> movements are referred to as scherzos.

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## Movement 3, opening scherzo

(play)

Two themes

Theme 1: Pianissimo ascending theme in low strings, answered by upper strings and woodwinds

Note: this opening theme has two statements, both of which end with a pause/Fermata. This parallels the structure of the opening of movement 1, in which the opening phrases are also separated by pauses.

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Theme 2: Loud vigorous theme on repeated pitches in the horns, answered by the orchestra.

Note:

- the rhythm and the repeated notes recall the 4-note motive of movement 1
- like movement 2, this movement begins with two highly contrasting themes

How do you describe these two themes, including the quality of the motion in each.

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## Trio

(play)

Key: C major

- A fugal section (called a fugato) in which an ascending theme begins in the low strings and is imitated by successive instruments, rising up through the orchestra.
- Note the “halting attempts” in low strings to get started again.
- The trio in C major counters the C minor of the opening scherzo and anticipates the C major of the finale.

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- What is the overall spirit of this section? Is it serious? Mock-serious? Downright humorous?

Commentators have very different ideas about the trio:

Greenberg: Beethoven takes the fugue, a serious high-brow form, and makes it humorous and dance-like.

Eastman School of Music: “The use of a fugue not only pushes forward the excitement and tension, but also suggests a sacred topic...giving the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement a surprising seriousness...”

Steinberg: “Fierce and jocular at the same time”

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## Scherzo (return)

(play)

Key: C minor

- Opening theme, and especially the heroic horn theme are grotesquely transformed through changes in dynamics (piano and pianissimo throughout), instrumentation, and use of pizzicato in the strings.
- What is Beethoven saying here?

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## Transition to Movement 4

Musical elements:

- Strings: long held notes in low register; *ppp*
- Timpani: Always plays the pitch C, *pp*; eventually playing on every beat
- Fragment of opening theme in violin 1

Effect:

- The music is suspended and feel motionless
- “A murky tunnel of thudding drums and groping bits of melody” (Steinberg)

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## Ivan Fischer on the Transition



<https://youtu.be/ZgOTVoDqZKc?t=538>

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