

Beethoven Symphony No. 5 Study Group

Week 4

1

Instruments added at beginning of mv. 4

Piccolo, contrabassoon, and three trombones (alto, tenor, and bass)

The piccolo and contrabassoon extend the range of the woodwind section : piccolo can play an octave higher than the flute, and the contrabassoon an octave lower than the bassoon.

Upper register of piccolo is extremely bright and penetrating; can be heard readily above the full orchestra.

Trombones enrich the orchestral sound overall, making it fuller but without overwhelming the other instruments.

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First performance of the 5th (and 6th) symphonies was in December, 1808. Audiences at that time would be familiar with the piccolo as an instrument in marching bands, but probably had never heard it in an orchestral piece or symphony.

The contrabassoon was frequently used in orchestral music to support the sound of the string double bass.

Although trombones had been used occasionally in previous orchestral pieces, it was rare. The 5th is the first time Beethoven used trombones in one of his symphonies; he also used two trombones in the 6th symphony.

Beethoven was the first to establish the use of trombones in orchestral compositions.

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Transition from movement 3 into mv. 4



Class reactions?

<https://youtu.be/ill3FD8LNGE?t=1195>

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Commentator responses

“The restless yearning which the theme [of movement 3] carried with it is now heightened to a fear which tightly constructs the breast permitting only fragmentary, disconnected sounds to escape... The dull, hollow strokes [of the timpani] having the effect of a strange, frightening voice by their dissonance, arouse the terror of the extraordinary, of the fear of spirits.”

(E.T.A. Hoffmann, 1810)

The transition conveys a sense of “motionless, traumatic tension.”

(G. Pestelli, 1979)

W. Kinderman describes this passage as “a turning point at the threshold of audibility” and points out that some scholars believe Beethoven’s growing deafness was the inspiration for the way he composed this section. (2020)

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Impact of opening of movement 4

“The full orchestra...joins in the statement of the magnificent, jubilant, C-major theme of the final movement. It is like radiant, blinding sunlight which suddenly illuminates the dark night.”

(E.T.A. Hoffmann, 1810)

“...a kind of spiritual rebirth.” The C-major opening theme “conveys an immediate feeling of security and strength,”

(G. Pestelli, 1979)

A “sudden sense of liberation – fairy tale-like in its intensity...”

Also, a sense of “joining the jubilant throng.” M. Geck (2017)

“An overwhelming exclamation of joy.” (Eastman School of Music)

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For an audience in 1808, experiencing the sudden fortissimo explosion of an enhanced orchestra, “the shock and the expressive effect must have been tremendous.” M. Steinberg

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Movement 4

Allegro Time signature C (4/4) Key C major

Form : sonata form

“To give this movement the range and space required to fulfill its purposes, Beethoven needs more than the two basic contrasting themes that have dominated every previous movement.”

L. Lockwood

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Exposition

Theme 1 in C

Theme 1

ff

Theme 2 in C

Theme 2

ff

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Theme 3 in G

Theme 3

ff *p*

Bass Figure

46

Theme 4 in G

Theme 4

fp *fp* *fp*

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Development

Theme 3

Motive from bass line of theme 3 becomes primary

Long dominant pedalpoint; huge cadence on dominant

Return of scherzo material in C minor

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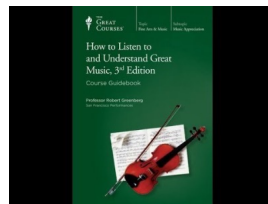
Recapitulation

Four themes restated in C major

Coda: Affirmation of C major

Themes presented in this order: theme 3 plus counter-melody;
theme 2; theme 4; theme 1

Last 29 measures are pure C major chord



<https://youtu.be/Tz23rLWTLMI?t=2394>

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Return of scherzo in movement 4

The first time a passage from a movement in a symphony is reprised in a later movement. Considered a stroke of genius by his contemporaries.

Serves as another element integrating the movements of the symphony into a whole, along with the use of the 4-note motive.

Makes the following recapitulation even more effective: It "...extends the hero's narrative; by bringing back the key of C minor and reminding us of the struggles previously heard, Beethoven allows for an even greater sense of victory and overcoming in the recapitulation..." (Eastman School of Music)

Question: is it possible, as the BBC guide puts it, that the recall of the scherzo is "not just a recollection, but an acknowledgment that the darkness is still there"?

13

13

"And the goblins – they had not really been there at all? They were only the phantoms of cowardice and unbelief? . . . Beethoven knew better. The goblins really had been there. They might return--and they did. . . Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! Even the flaming ramparts of the world might fall.



Beethoven chose to make all right in the end. He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for the second time, and again the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and, amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy, he led his Fifth Symphony to its conclusion. But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely, and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things." (EM Forster, Howard's End)

14

14

Historical overview

Beethoven lived during a period of tremendous change and upheaval: the Enlightenment, the French revolution, the Napoleonic wars. He spent his life in a society still ruled by absolute monarchs.

Born in Bonn in 1770. In the 1780s under its elector, Bonn became a center of progressive reform and the Enlightenment. Beethoven enrolled in the newly formed University of Bonn in 1789 and was exposed to the philosophy of Kant.

Beethoven was 18 years old when the French revolution broke out. He was deeply engaged by the democratic values of the revolution and remain committed to them for the rest of his life.

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In 1792, he moved to Vienna to study with Haydn. Remained there until his death in 1827.

Also in 1792, France declared war on Austria. Over the next 23 years, the two countries were engaged in five wars; Austria won all but the last one.

The French occupied Vienna twice during the years Beethoven lived there: in November 1805 and again in May 1809.

Throughout this time, Austria was ruled by Emperor Franz (ruled 1792 to 1835). The nephew of Marie Antoinette, Franz was determined to keep Austria free from any sort of revolution, and maintained "a pathological dread of democracy and of change of any sort."

16

16

In 1799, Napoleon is named First Consul of France. Beethoven was a great admirer of Napoleon and of the reforms Napoleon initially promoted. Like many others, Beethoven was deeply disillusioned when Napoleon declared himself emperor of France in 1804.

“The hopes and unfulfilled promises of the French revolution loom large over Beethoven’s creative project.” (William Kinderman)

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French music

French composers continued to produce music during the revolution, the Reign of Terror, and in the Napoleonic era.

Beethoven heard the French music of this period, both while living in Bonn and in Vienna. This included:

- Military band marches
- Grand dramatic French operas, featuring large choral/instrumental forces by composers such as Cherubini and Mehul.
- Hymns and cantatas celebrating revolutionary ideals
- Symphonies by composers such as Gossec

Beethoven made use of French revolutionary era music idioms in his own works, especially in his middle period from c. 1803 to 1814.

18

18

Chant du Départ



<https://youtu.be/c5OdCqUWRyo>

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19

French revolutionary music and the 5th

Scholars have identified examples of these musical idioms in Beethoven Symphony No. 5. In addition, some scholars have discovered what they think are direct quotations or allusions to French revolutionary pieces.

Movement 1: May allude to Luigi Cherubini's *Hymne du Pantheon*, a French revolutionary piece of 1794. Its text reads: "We swear, sword in hand, to die for the Republic and for the rights of man."

Movement 2: The instrumentation of the second theme, with its trumpets and timpani, shows the influence of French military band music. Also, the rising do-re-mi/1-2-3 melodic motive MAY be a quotation from the *Hymne dithyrambique* by Claude Joseph Rouget de L'Isle, the composer of the *Marseillaise*. In the hymn, this motive is sung to the words "La liberté."

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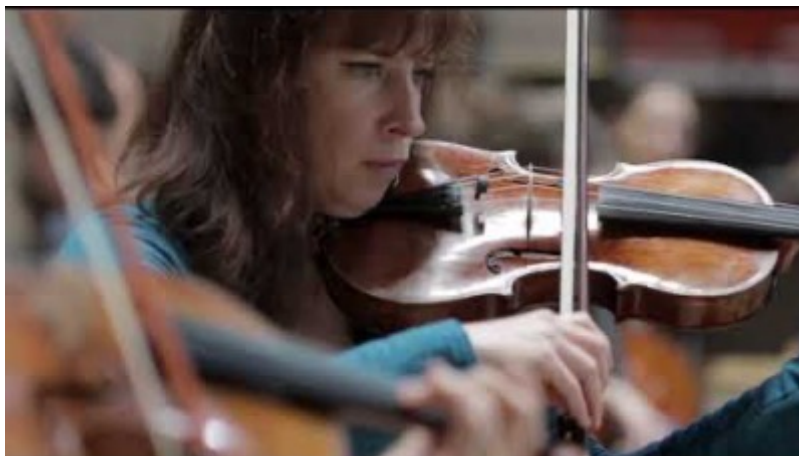
Movement 4 also contains a version of this motive, which is extremely prominent in the development. Also, the enormous and sudden burst of sound that begins the movement – with the addition of piccolos, contrabassoon, and trombones – can be seen as an example of “*éclat triomphale*” or “*triumphant radiance.*” This was the term French composers used for the supercharged expressive quality they wished to achieve in their works, along with an “*élan terrible*” or “*terrible impetus.*”



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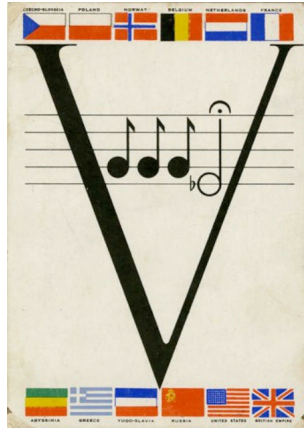
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22

Tempo and victory

NPR *All Things Considered* interview with
Matthew Guerrieri



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23

Beethoven's innovations

1. Conceives of the symphony as a dramatic whole.

Creates a narrative progression that aims toward and culminates in the final movement as a "heroic, victorious goal."

This so-called "finale symphony," with its passage from struggle to triumph, became the model for symphony writing to modern times.

This also shifts the importance/compositional weight from the first movement (as was typical in Classical era symphonies) to the final movement(s).

24

24

2. Unifies the symphony by

- reusing (and transforming) a single motive in each movement
- bringing back a passage from one movement in a later movement
- connecting one movement to the next without a break
- foreshadowing emotional states and keys that will appear later in the symphony

3. Expands the form of the Classical symphony, sometimes changing its proportions. (For example, long development-like codas.)

4. Uses motives – often, very short ones – and their development as the basis for the compositional process. He sometimes repeats motives or single chords in a hypnotic fashion.

25

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5. Expands the emotional range of a symphony by creating extreme contrasts in themes, mood, dynamics, tempos, instrumentation, etc.

6. “Beethoven took music beyond what we may describe as the pleasure principle of Viennese classicism; he permitted aggressive and disintegrative forces to enter musical form: he placed the tragic experience at the core of his heroic style.”
As Greenberg says of the opening of Symphony No. 5,
“This is not about nice.”

7. Beethoven’s music seems to come from deep within him, “expressing personal feelings and emotions in a universal way, which becomes a staple of the romantic symphony.” (John Culshaw, referenced in Eastman School of Music)

26

26

Conclusion

“Beethoven’s 5th is about triumph itself, about every hard won victory there has ever been or ever will be, even yours. Perhaps that is the real reason why Beethoven’s 5th has come to be so famous and symbolic of so many things.”

(Houston Symphony Notes)

27