



# Ludwig van BEETHOVEN

## *Symphony No. 5*

Ludwig van Beethoven (/ˈlʊdvɪɡ væn ˈbeɪtoʊvən/); German: [ˈluːtvɪç fan ˈbeːtʰoːfən]; baptised 17 December 1770 – 26 March 1827) was a German composer and pianist; his music is amongst the most performed of the classical music repertoire, and he is one of the most admired composers in the history of Western music. His works span the transition from the classical period to the romantic era in classical music. His career has conventionally been divided into early, middle, and late periods. The "early" period in which he forged his craft is typically seen to last until 1802. His "middle" period, sometimes characterised as "heroic", showing an individual development from the "classical" styles of Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, covers the years 1802 to 1812, during which he increasingly suffered from deafness. In the "late" period from 1812 to his death in 1827, he extended his innovations in musical form and expression.

Beethoven was born in Bonn. His musical talent was obvious at an early age, and he was initially harshly and intensively taught by his father Johann van Beethoven. He was later taught by the composer and conductor Christian Gottlob Neefe, under whose tutelage he published his first work, a set of keyboard variations, in 1783. He found relief from a dysfunctional home life with the family of Helene von Breuning, whose children he loved, befriended, and taught piano. At age 21, he moved to Vienna, which subsequently became his base, and studied composition with Haydn. Beethoven then gained a reputation as a virtuoso pianist, and he was soon courted by Karl Alois, Prince Lichnowsky for compositions, which resulted in his three Opus 1 piano trios (the earliest works to which he accorded an opus number) in 1795.

His first major orchestral work, the First Symphony, appeared in 1800, and his first set of string quartets was published in 1801. During this period, his hearing began to deteriorate, but he continued to conduct, premiering his Third and Fifth Symphonies in 1804 and 1808, respectively. His Violin Concerto appeared in 1806. His last piano concerto (No. 5, Op. 73, known as the 'Emperor'), dedicated to his frequent patron Archduke Rudolf of Austria, was premiered in 1810, but not with Beethoven as soloist. He was almost completely deaf by 1814, and he then gave up performing and appearing in public. He described his problems with health and his unfulfilled personal life in two letters, his "Heiligenstadt Testament" (1802) to his brothers and his unsent love letter to an unknown "Immortal Beloved" (1812).

In the years from 1810, increasingly less socially involved, Beethoven composed many of his most admired works including his later symphonies and his mature chamber music and piano sonatas. His only opera, *Fidelio*, which had been first performed in 1805, was revised to its final version in 1814. He composed his *Missa Solemnis* in the years 1819–1823, and his final, Ninth, Symphony, one of the first examples of a choral symphony, in 1822–1824. Written in his last years, his late string quartets of 1825–26 are amongst his final achievements. After some months of bedridden illness, he died in 1827. Beethoven's works remain mainstays of the classical music repertoire.

The Symphony No. 5 in C minor of Ludwig van Beethoven, Op. 67, was written between 1804 and 1808. It is one of the best-known compositions in classical music and one of the most frequently played symphonies, and it is widely considered one of the cornerstones of western music. First performed in Vienna's Theater an der Wien in 1808, the work achieved its prodigious reputation soon afterward. E. T. A. Hoffmann described the symphony as "one of the most important works of the time". As is typical of symphonies during the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is in four movements.

It begins with a distinctive four-note "short-short-short-long" motif. The symphony, and the four-note opening motif in particular, are known worldwide, with the motif appearing frequently in popular culture, from disco versions to rock and roll covers, to uses in film and television. Like Beethoven's *Eroica* (heroic) and *Pastorale* (rural), Symphony No. 5 was given an explicit name besides the numbering, though not by Beethoven himself. It became popular under "Schicksals-Sinfonie"

(Fate Symphony), and the famous five bar theme was called the "Schicksals-Motiv" (Fate Motif). This name is also used in translations.

Beethoven in 1804, the year he began work on the Fifth Symphony; detail of a portrait by W. J. Mähler  
The Fifth Symphony had a long development process, as Beethoven worked out the musical ideas for the work. The first "sketches" (rough drafts of melodies and other musical ideas) date from 1804 following the completion of the Third Symphony. Beethoven repeatedly interrupted his work on the Fifth to prepare other compositions, including the first version of Fidelio, the Appassionata piano sonata, the three Razumovsky string quartets, the Violin Concerto, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fourth Symphony, and the Mass in C. The final preparation of the Fifth Symphony, which took place in 1807–1808, was carried out in parallel with the Sixth Symphony, which premiered at the same concert.

Beethoven was in his mid-thirties during this time; his personal life was troubled by increasing deafness. In the world at large, the period was marked by the Napoleonic Wars, political turmoil in Austria, and the occupation of Vienna by Napoleon's troops in 1805. The symphony was written at his lodgings at the Pasqualati House in Vienna. The final movement quotes from a revolutionary song by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle.

The Fifth Symphony was premiered on 22 December 1808 at a mammoth concert at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna consisting entirely of Beethoven premieres, and directed by Beethoven himself on the conductor's podium. The concert lasted for more than four hours. The two symphonies appeared on the programme in reverse order: the Sixth was played first, and the Fifth appeared in the second half. There was little critical response to the premiere performance, which took place under adverse conditions. The orchestra did not play well—with only one rehearsal before the concert—and at one point, following a mistake by one of the performers in the Choral Fantasy, Beethoven had to stop the music and start again. The auditorium was extremely cold and the audience was exhausted by the length of the programme. However, a year and a half later, publication of the score resulted in a rapturous unsigned review (actually by music critic E. T. A. Hoffmann) in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. He described the music with dramatic imagery.

*Radiant beams shoot through this region's deep night, and we become aware of gigantic shadows which, rocking back and forth, close in on us and destroy everything within us except the pain of endless longing—a longing in which every pleasure that rose up in jubilant tones sinks and succumbs, and only through this pain, which, while consuming but not destroying love, hope, and joy, tries to burst our breasts with full-voiced harmonies of all the passions, we live on and are captivated beholders of the spirits.*

Apart from the extravagant praise, Hoffmann devoted by far the largest part of his review to a detailed analysis of the symphony, in order to show his readers the devices Beethoven used to arouse particular affects in the listener. In an essay titled "Beethoven's Instrumental Music", compiled from this 1810 review and another one from 1813 on the op. 70 string trios, published in three installments in December 1813, E.T.A. Hoffmann further praised the "indescribably profound, magnificent symphony in C minor":

How this wonderful composition, in a climax that climbs on and on, leads the listener imperiously forward into the spirit world of the infinite!... No doubt the whole rushes like an ingenious rhapsody past many a man, but the soul of each thoughtful listener is assuredly stirred, deeply and intimately, by a feeling that is none other than that unutterable portentous longing, and until the final chord—indeed, even in the moments that follow it—he will be powerless to step out of that wondrous spirit realm where grief and joy embrace him in the form of sound....

The symphony soon acquired its status as a central item in the orchestral repertoire. It was played in the inaugural concerts of the New York Philharmonic on 7 December 1842, and the [US] National Symphony Orchestra on 2 November 1931. It was first recorded by the Odeon Orchestra under Friedrich Kark in 1910. The First Movement (as performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra) was featured on the Voyager Golden Record, a phonograph record containing a broad sample of the images, common sounds, languages, and music of Earth, sent into outer space aboard the Voyager probes in 1977. Ground-breaking in terms of both its technical and its emotional impact, the Fifth has had a large influence on composers and music critics, and inspired work by such composers as Brahms, Tchaikovsky (his 4th Symphony in particular), Bruckner, Mahler, and Berlioz.

Since the Second World War, it has sometimes been referred to as the "Victory Symphony". "V" is coincidentally also the Roman numeral character for the number five and the phrase "V for Victory" became a campaign of the Allies of World War II after Winston Churchill starting using it as a publicity stunt in 1940. Beethoven's Victory Symphony happened to be his Fifth (or vice versa) is coincidental. Some thirty years after this piece was written, the rhythm of the opening phrase – "dit-dit-dit-dah" – was used for the letter "V" in Morse code, though this is also coincidental. During the Second World War, the BBC prefaced its broadcasts to Special Operations Executives (SOE) across the world with those four notes, played on drums.

The symphony is scored for the following orchestra:

Woodwinds

1 piccolo (fourth movement only)

2 flutes

2 oboes

2 clarinets in B $\flat$  and C

2 bassoons

1 contrabassoon (fourth movement only)

Brass

2 horns in E $\flat$  and C

2 trumpets

3 trombones (alto, tenor, and bass, fourth movement only)

Percussion

timpani (in G–C)

Strings

violins I, II

violas

cellos

double basses

Form

A typical performance usually lasts around 30–40 minutes. The work is in four movements:

Allegro con brio (C minor)

Andante con moto (A $\flat$  major)

Scherzo: Allegro (C minor)

Allegro – Presto (C major)

It is commonly asserted that the opening four-note rhythmic motif (short-short-short-long; see above) is repeated throughout the symphony, unifying it. "It is a rhythmic pattern (dit-dit-dit-dot) that makes its appearance in each of the other three movements and thus contributes to the overall unity of the symphony" (Doug Briscoe); "a single motif that unifies the entire work" (Peter Gutmann); "the key motif of the entire symphony"; "the rhythm of the famous opening figure ... recurs at crucial points in later movements" (Richard Bratby). The New Grove encyclopedia cautiously endorses this view, reporting that "[t]he famous opening motif is to be heard in almost every bar of the first movement—and, allowing for modifications, in the other movements."