

**Symphony No. 5, Op. 67**  
**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

Allegro con brio  
Andante con moto  
Scherzo Allegro  
Allegro

Very often we are misguided by what composers write, and say, about their own music. Hindsight then provides us with a reality, still struggling to free itself of earlier judgments. This has been particularly true of Beethoven in regard to his first two symphonies. He told us he intended to “embark upon a new road” referring to his third symphony, and like dutiful acolytes we took him at his word. It is true that the ‘Eroica’ is different in many ways to any symphonic work that went prior. It is larger, grander, more involved, more intricate, more rugged and perhaps even more passionate, but not, as is widely believed, without precedence. Partly because of Beethoven’s pronouncement his first and second symphonies have always been lumped with ‘the earlier music’ – ‘the stuff that sounds like advanced Mozart’. On closer evaluation of the vast number of pieces, especially those piano sonatas, written before and up to 1804, it is clear that these two symphonies are a gradual progression in the musical language from which the ‘Eroica’ bursts forth. Beyond this, the struggle so clearly seen in Beethoven’s compositional style, suggests an equally organic four years between 1804-1808, that mark the creation of the mighty Fifth. Nothing in Beethoven is unrelated, despite writings and declarations to the contrary.

Even a cursory glance will show that the Fifth Symphony is a product of language ushered in by the *Eroica*. It follows, almost exactly, the template of movements set out in the Second Symphony. Furthermore, it is during this period that he was also at work on the *Razumovsky* String Quartets, the Violin Concerto, the Fourth Symphony, The Fourth Piano Concerto, the Mass in C and the Sixth Symphony. The creative genius bubbling like a cauldron of molten gold was doled out over all these pieces, many of which found their premieres given at the same marathon concert on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1808 at the Theater an der Wien.

That evening concert in December lasted over four hours and bore witness to the following concert programme:

The Sixth Symphony

The aria “*Ah perfido*” Op. 65

The *Gloria* from the Mass in C

The Fourth Piano Concerto (Beethoven at the keyboard)

INTERVAL

The Fifth Symphony

The *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* from the Mass in C

Solo piano improvisations (Beethoven at the keyboard)

The Choral Fantasy

Here was an offering of music, mostly hot off the press. It would have been attended with eagerness in the vein of, “Come hear what the maestro hath written”. It puts in perspective the common complaints from our own ADD burdened era. Unfortunately, the orchestra only had a single rehearsal. The playing was scrappy – and in a certain moment, following a large derailment, Beethoven was forced to start a section again. Even under these conditions, the greatness of what was happening was not lost on E.T.A Hoffman, recorded for posterity in his super-decadent observation.

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

It is worth bearing in mind a few more pointers when reviewing the place of Beethoven the musician – and this symphony - in the artistic firmament. Beethoven’s raw, “shock value” music making is particularly apparent as part of his symphonic style. It would serve him well in each and every one of his symphonies, from the dramatic opening chord of the First to the awesome shock value of the Ninth. The opening of the Fifth presents a new dynamism in the form of rhythmic tautness. This ‘Herculean’ show of muscle that is so much part of Beethoven’s signature is never better presented than in the C Minor symphony. However, the process is entirely organic, creating the same shock waves through his string quartets and piano sonatas, which are as much a testament of his greatness and in many

ways full of earlier daring that then plays out in his symphonies. Perhaps sentiments of his childhood in abject poverty, his alcoholic parents and his 'breadwinner' status at age 19 gave him his rough edges. Then, there is Beethoven's early genius that was recognized in his piano playing and composition, enough for him to have a lesson with Mozart, and another few sessions later on with 'papa' Haydn, and, more importantly for his daily survival, get him appointed assistant court organist in Hanover, aged 14.

He is, at this stage, 38 years old, his progressive deafness not as ugly as it would be later, but providing a strong debilitation, nevertheless. There is his ever-present underlying sense of struggle in composition- working and reworking sections with a sense of anguish, and rewriting his final thought in a margin, or some unlikely edge of a page, making the job of his editors an absolute nightmare. This is in such marked contrast to his onetime teacher Mozart who, comparatively, wrote his last three symphonies in six weeks, between the end of June and 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 1788.

The powerful influence of Beethoven's legacy doesn't seem to be accumulated over time. It seems to be immediately apparent – in all pieces – and then hammered home so that his rivals and successors simply wilt under the weight. So was the early romantic world of Berlioz, Schumann, Schubert and Brahms forced to create a newly crafted style that flowered from the possibilities set out by Beethoven. Just as in an era gone by, the successors of J. S. Bach had to reinvent themselves to stay in business.

Dr. Rosen sums up aptly.

*"All that is most interesting in the next generation is a reaction against Beethoven, or an attempt to ignore him,...all that is weakest submits to his power and pays him the emptiest and most sincere of homages".*

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