

21M011 (spring, 2006)  
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Lecture VII

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

Like Monteverdi, who bridges the Renaissance and the Baroque, Beethoven stands between two eras, not fully encompassed by either. He inherited the Classical style through Mozart and Haydn, and this is represented in works from what is typically called his “first period” (to about 1800), during which time Beethoven performed actively as a virtuoso pianist. The “middle period” (about 1800 to 1818) saw Beethoven break through the classical templates as he wrestled with his increasing deafness, the growing inability to perform or conduct, and his disillusion with Napoleon, whom he had considered a hero of the French Revolution until Napoleon declared himself Emperor in 1804.

1802: Heiligenstadt Testament depicts Beethoven’s desolation over his deafness;  
1803: composition of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony, originally titled Bonaparte, but changed to *Eroica* after,  
1804: Napoleon declares himself Emperor  
**1808: 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony in C minor, Op. 67**

From Beethoven’s middle period come the works most often associated with Beethoven and with what is known of his personality: forceful, uncompromising, angry, willful, suffering, but overcoming extraordinary personal hardship, all of which traits are read into his music. The Romantic cult of the individual who represents himself in his music and of the genius who suffers for his art begins here with Beethoven.

Beethoven’s “late period” (1818 to his death [1827]) becomes more introspective and abstract, as Beethoven’s deafness increasingly forces him to retreat into himself. Although the 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony dates from these years, it is the only symphony to do so, and, in many respects, is a throwback to the middle period. The late period is typified more by smaller, more complex chamber works, among which the “late quartets” are the most abstract in style.

**1826: String Quartet in F, Op. 135, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement K 3:21**

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### **Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C Minor**

This complete four-movement work is discussed by Kerman/Tomlinson, pp. 227-233; it follows the typical symphonic pattern at the same time as it moves beyond it in multiple ways. The four-movement scheme is: sonata, slow movement (variations), “minuet-trio” (scherzo), finale (sonata form).

1<sup>st</sup> movement (K 3:6-14): perhaps known in some form to more people than any other classical work. It begins with a declaration of its “motive” in a four-measure phrase with a hold (fermata) on the second and fourth measures. In some ways this is a preliminary statement, a slow introduction reduced to its smallest components. There is no clear meter, nor even key (it could be E-flat major rather than C minor), certainly no melody to speak of—only this motivic “seed” from which the entire symphony takes sustenance. We have not heard a symphony with a slow introduction before the exposition of the first movement, but they were common. Haydn used them frequently, and Beethoven did as well in his earlier (and later) symphonies. Typically they present less formed material than occurs in the exposition: the harmony is often in flux and distant from the key of the movement, and the overall feeling is anticipatory. Never are they as profiled or chiseled as the four measures that begin the 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony. Further, the fermata at the end of the first theme brings into question whether the exposition has actually begun, even at this late point, or whether this is just an extension of the anticipatory section. Beethoven persistently keeps the listener on edge, upsetting convention and expectation.

It becomes clear pretty quickly, however, that the little, four-note motive is going to dominate the movement. It forms the four-bar “introduction,” first theme, transition material and the bridge to the new key; it harps away under the more lyrical (major) second theme, and forms the closing (or cadence theme) as well. In the development the bridge theme of four notes is reduced to three, to two and then to one (!) note, but the theme is so dominant that even the one note is recognizable as thematic. The recapitulation begins with the motivic announcement again, suggesting maybe that this IS a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> theme; slow introductions do not normally return at this point. Then over the fermata at the end of the 8-bar theme, an oboe cadenza unexpectedly appears, a hint perhaps, in the maelstrom of this relentless movement, of a different kind of time, of beauty and of peace. The coda explodes out of the recapitulation, again referring to the main motive, and develops into what Kerman/Tomlinson calls a “grim minor-mode march.”

In the second movement (K 3:15-16): double variations in A-flat major; 1<sup>st</sup> theme (cellos), 2<sup>nd</sup> theme (clarinets and bassoons)→grabbed by trumpets who blare it in C major. The trumpet “snatch” emphasizes an unexpected relationship between this second theme and the rhythmic motive of the first movement, which is emphasized by the hushed (frightened) section where the motive sounds more clearly. The repeated ff interruptions of the trumpets during the second theme (in the midst of what otherwise would seem to be a straight-forward set of double variations) give this movement an increasingly disturbing and ominous feel.

Third movement (K 3:17-18): again starts off with cellos, now with a mysterious, hushed sound. Again the brass, now the French horns, interrupt with a loud, insistent version of the 1<sup>st</sup> movement motive, now hammered on a single note. An alternation of these two ideas fails to coalesce into the typical rounded binary form, but works almost like a small double variation of its own through three hearings (aab | a'a'b' | a''b''). The next section more traditionally plays the role of trio and does just about fall into rounded binary form (c:||:dc), but the repetition of the second part is reorchestrated and runs without pause into

the return of the “scherzo” (c:||dc'| d'c''), and the scherzo itself is shortened and reorchestrated, and it disintegrates into a transition where the timpani play the 1<sup>st</sup> movement rhythmic motive (the whole trio to scherzo looking like: c:||dc'| d'c''a'''---).

Finally, the tension and uncertainty is overcome (conquered?) with the entrance of the triumphant C major march theme of the final movement. The second theme of this sonata form movement then takes the 4-note rhythmic motive and transforms it into joy. However, the return of the C minor scherzo at the end of the development (just before the recapitulation) seems to imply that while one can overcome fate, one cannot eradicate it.

**Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Op. 31, no. 2 (1802)**  
**Performed by Nick Joliat, special student in Physics and Music**

This sonata was written in 1802, the year of the Heiligenstadt Testament. Beethoven is said to have claimed that it was based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, but this cannot be taken to mean that it depicts the story through individual characterizations. Rather, if there is a relationship, it would appear to be to the figure of Prospero, who overcomes all the difficulties and obstacles that have been placed in his path. Beethoven, with the increased onset of his deafness, may (MAY) have related to this story. At any event, the sonata is certainly tempestuous. A recording of the sonata with Russell Sherman, pianist, is available on Stellar. The following listening guide gives some of the important structural moments. It is based on the recording by Russell Sherman: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Piano Sonatas* (10 cds: GM Recordings, 1995-2000).

First movement: Sonata form

0:00 First theme has some characteristics of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony; it starts slowly with a four note rising theme and pauses (as indicated by a fermata); it then rushes forward (allegro) coming to a slow cadence and a second pause; this is then repeated and expanded

0:52 Bridge: note the use of the rising four-note theme in the bass, now played very loudly

1:15 Second theme group, part 1

1:28 Second theme group, part 2

1:50 Closing material

*The exposition is then repeated*

4:16 Development: first expanding the opening four-note theme in the very slow tempo; then expanding the Bridge theme with the four-note theme in the bass

*Recapitulation*

5:50 First theme now with added recitative in the piano after the slow four-note theme on both appearances (compare to the oboe cadenza in Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony)

7:40 Second theme group

*There is a short coda at the end*

Second movement: a type of binary movement frequently referred to as a sonata form without a development; that is, there are two themes that are differentiated by melody,

rhythm and harmony in the first part; these are recapitulated in the home key in the second part

0:00 First theme: a standard 8-bar phrase but VERY expanded in terms of time

1:29 Bridge: note the oscillating four-note pattern (NOT the same as the first movement) in the bass

2:34 Second theme, after which there is a short transition, using the oscillating Bridge material back to the

3:47 *Recapitulation*

6:53 a more extended coda using the oscillating bass motive and some thematic material; this is the closest this movement gets to a development

Third movement: Sonata form

0:00 First theme, a kind of perpetual motion that animates the whole movement

0:34 Second theme, recognizable by the rapid movement between two consecutive notes

0:51 Closing material

*The exposition is then repeated*

2:22 Development, at first of the general motivic material

3:04 full statement of the First theme

*Recapitulation*

3:52 First theme

4:34 Second theme

5:10 Coda—very extended this time, including—

5:33 full statement of the First theme

6:01 abbreviated statement of the First theme

*(note the recurrences of the first theme give a feeling of rondo form, and indeed composers regularly blended these two forms in the final movements of symphonies and sonatas)*

**--Another example from last semester**

**Violin Sonata, Op. 47 in A major/minor (“Kreutzer”) (1803), first movement**

**Performed by Amanda Wang, violin (G, EECS) and Yu Yasufuku, piano (G, Math)**

Beethoven wrote this work for the violinist George Augustus Polgreen Bridgetower, who played it with Beethoven in 1803 (Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* [New York, 2003], p. 143). Only later was the dedication offered to Rodolphe Kreutzer, a famous French violinist who taught at the Paris Conservatoire, but who never performed the work. Beethoven himself described the piece as “Sonata scritta in un stilo molto concertante quasi come d’un concerto” (“written in a highly concerto-like style, almost in the manner of a concerto”). This was never a work intended for amateurs; it is truly virtuosic throughout, showing Beethoven’s stretching of technique for both violin and piano.

You will hear a “real” slow introduction, which vacillates between major and minor, an important attribute of the following sonata form movement. The introduction starts off in virtuoso style with the violin solo playing from 2 to 4 notes at a time (double-stopping);

this is in major, but the piano immediately responds in minor. This section increasingly fragments as it progresses. The sonata movement in minor follows the typical plan of 1<sup>st</sup> theme, transition, 2<sup>nd</sup> theme group (with two clear themes: I will call them theme 2 and 3) plus closing. The development emphasizes the third theme. There are fermatas and pauses throughout, which disrupt the forward motion. There is a mini, false recapitulation for the piano in the wrong key before the “real” recapitulation enters in the violin. The coda brings back the 1<sup>st</sup> theme and a long *Adagio* (slow) pause in the midst of turbulent activity. In short, the movement contains most of the features you would expect in this period from heroic Beethoven breaking through the bonds of tradition. Timings follow the recording by Isaac Stern, violin, and Eugene Istomin, piano (Sony Classical, 1996, p1986).

0:00 slow introduction (major/minor, harmonic shifts, fragmentation)  
1:37 EXPOSITION  
    theme 1 (A minor)  
2:00 transition  
2:43 theme 2 (E major [violin]; E minor [piano])  
3:14 transitional material/closing? No, it leads to--  
3:36 theme 3 (E minor)  
4:04 closing  
4:15 end of exposition on “deceptive cadence”  
4:22 DEVELOPMENT using theme 3  
6:23 mini, false recapitulation of theme 1 in wrong key (D minor for piano)  
6:43 RECAPITULATION theme 1 in right key (A minor for violin)  
7:39 theme 2 (A major [violin]; A minor [piano])  
8:31 theme 3 (A minor)  
9:15 coda