

THE SAYLOR FOUNDATION'S BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY: HEARING AND DESCRIBING THE STRUCTURE OF THE CLASSICAL SYMPHONY

Introduction: The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to understand the development of the symphony as an art form. Using precise, focused descriptions of its formal elements and design, you will examine and describe a complete symphony by Beethoven.

Instructions: Listen to Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5 in C Minor Op. 76*, using the Saylor Foundation's "Guided Listening 3." Please listen to all four movements. Use the knowledge and skills you have acquired in this course to write a brief essay on the elements of form, style, and texture as heard in this work. Your essay should be between 2-4 double-spaced pages. More advanced students may choose to describe the form, texture, and harmony of the piece in greater depth.

Begin with a brief introduction addressing the significance of this work. If you are familiar with the work, you may discuss some of your previous impressions and assumptions. Then, address the elements of music present in the work. Analyze how these elements come together to form a whole according to the basic principles of sonata form, variation form, and the traditions of the Classical (late eighteenth-century) symphony. How do the musical elements of this piece contribute to expressing the meaning of the text? Be sure to relate your discussion to what you have learned about the symphony orchestra and the development of the Viennese classical style.

Questions for Musical Analysis

1. On the background of the work:

- The Symphony No. 5 is one of the more noteworthy products of Beethoven's so-called "Heroic" period that set the standard for the grand symphony tradition of the nineteenth century. Which aspects of this piece suggest heroism or greatness?
- Beethoven himself is said to have remarked with regard to the opening motive of the symphony: "There Fate knocks at the door!" If this story were true, what might Beethoven have been attempting to tell us about fate—its role in his life, the lives of his contemporaries? Is this interpretation useful only for the first movement, or do you believe it acts as a unifying thread for the symphony?

2. On the first movement:



- Discuss the treatment of the opening “Fate” motif. How would you describe the melody? What is its function in the movement?
- What does Beethoven do with the rhythm? What is the effect of the enormous energy unleashed in the development section?
- Beethoven follows the traditional procedure for recapitulation—the return of the theme at the end of the movement—but what surprise is in store? Why is do you think he includes the oboe solo? What is the mood and feeling of this passage?
- The enormous coda that concludes the movement is not typical for a Classical symphony. What happens to the theme(s) in the coda? Again, what is the effect of the enormous energy unleashed in this section?

3. On the second movement:

- The Second Movement Andante introduces a new mood. How does this compare to the four-note motive of the first movement?
- Beethoven uses a familiar Classical form: theme and variations. How does this differ from theme and variations procedure as used by Mozart in “*Ah, vous dira-jai Maman*”?
- Does the mood shift within this movement? How? What effect does this have on the listener?

4. On the third movement:

- In Classical symphonies, the third movement of a symphony or quartet was often a minuet and trio. Haydn and Beethoven wrote a faster, more rollicking piece called a *scherzo* (joke). Is there anything humorous about Beethoven’s *scherzo*? How would you describe the mood?
- How does Beethoven exploit contrasts between major and minor?
- How does Beethoven create the “bridge” between the third and fourth movements? Why do you suppose he chose to make this departure from Classical tradition? What is the effect of this unusual transition device?

5. On the fourth movement:

- The last movement of a symphony had traditionally been a lighthearted finale. Does Beethoven adhere to or depart from this tradition? How so?
- How does the last movement relate to the previous three, if at all?
- Which instruments does Beethoven add to the orchestra in this movement? What effects do they have?
- How does Beethoven convey the idea of heroism and triumph in this movement?



