

How wild Beethoven's Fifth Symphony must have sounded to its first audience—an audience that did not meet it as the most familiar of Classical masterpieces and that, what's more, encountered its aggressive mien after the spaciousness and warmth of the Fourth Piano Concerto and the *Pastoral* Symphony, as those people in the freezing Theater an der Wien did on the day it was first performed. The Fifth and the *Pastoral* are opposites in harmony, pace, and mood. But they are also twins, in gestation at the same time and born very nearly together. Each sheds light on the other.

The first movement of the *Pastoral* portrays "the awakening of joyful feelings upon arriving in the country"; of its counterpart in the Fifth, Beethoven said "Thus Fate knocks at the door." In the *Pastoral*, he evoked serenity by a slowness of motion that was new to music. Sometimes the harmony does not change for 28 measures at a time, and the melodic patterns with which Beethoven fills those spaces are almost as static and unchanging. This creates a sense that the *Pastoral* is saturated by certain chords and figurations. But saturation is also the very word to describe what happens in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, where the famous "ta-ta-ta-Taaa" pattern is hardly ever absent (and where its rare disappearances always create tremendous tensions). But where the saturations in the *Pastoral* produce an infinitely spacious feeling, those in the Fifth generate music that seems faster, more impacted and compressed, than any ever heard before.

About the "ta-ta-ta-Taaa": Beethoven begins with eight notes. They rhyme, four plus four, and each group of four consists of three quick notes plus one that is lower and much longer (in fact, unmeasured). The space between the two rhyming groups is minimal, about one-seventh of a second if we go by Beethoven's metronome mark; moreover, Beethoven clarifies the shape by lengthening the second of the long notes. This lengthening, which was an afterthought, is tantamount to writing a stronger punctuation mark. As the music progresses, we can hear in the melody of the second theme, for example (or later, in the pairs of antiphonal chords of woodwinds and strings) that the constantly invoked connection between the two four-note units is crucial to the movement.

It has often been said that the first movement of the Fifth Symphony is all "built up" from its first four notes. But, as the musical analyst Donald Francis Tovey pointed out long ago, if that were so, we would have instead of a Beethoven *allegro* one by Schumann, a composer who really does put movements together by that kind of additive process. The source of Beethoven's unparalleled energy here is in his writing long sentences and broad paragraphs whose surfaces are articulated with exciting activity. Indeed, we discover soon enough that the double "ta-ta-ta-Taaa" is an open-ended beginning, not a closed and self-sufficient unit. (Misunderstanding of this opening was nurtured by a nineteenth-century performance tradition in which the first five measures were read as a slow, portentous exordium, the main tempo being attacked only after the second hold.)

What makes this opening so dramatic is the violence of the contrast between the urgency in the eighth notes and the ominous freezing of motion in the unmeasured long notes. The music starts with a wild outburst of energy, but immediately crashes into a wall. Seconds later, Beethoven jolts us with another such sudden halt. The music draws up to a ha If-cadence on a G-major chord, short and crisp in the whole orchestra, except for the first violins, who hang on to their high C for an unmeasured length of time. Forward motion resumes with a relentless pounding of eighth notes. The music modulates to a new key, E-flat, the relative major, and only now do we get a change of atmosphere.

The horns introduce this new chapter with a fanfare that is a variant of the symphony's opening. The initial rhythm, the "ta-ta-ta-Taaa," is the same. Beyond that, what Beethoven has done is to stretch the intervals: the thirds (G and F-flat, F and D) have been opened up into fifths (B-flat and E-flat, F and B-flat). The middle two notes, F and E-flat, are the same as before, even though other essentials (such as manner of presentation, key, orchestration, and context) are different. Another difference is that this time there is no space between the two pairs of notes: E-flat moves to F without a break.

An interesting detail about the horn call at this section's opening is that the fourth note, B-flat, is held for 13 measures so that it serves as a bass to the *dolce* violin melody that follows. This corresponds to the extra length of the D at the beginning of the symphony; and no doubt when Beethoven had the afterthought of lengthening that D it was to clarify this relationship. As for the violin melody, the first two measures outline the B-flat/E-flat dyad (though in reverse order), and the third and fourth outline F and B-

flat. In other words, it uses the same pitch vocabulary as the opening and the horn call, and again the link in the middle is E-flat/E. So with horns and upper strings retaining the pitches of the opening motif, the cellos and basses meanwhile make sure that the "ta-ta-ta-Taaa" rhythm stays in our consciousness. All this is an amazing tour de force of concentration and saturation. For a long time the development is totally occupied with "ta-ta-ta-Taaa." This rhythm becomes so much a norm for us that when it is lengthened, the effect is of something crazed.

Next Beethoven re-examines the horn call, and this begins his transition toward the recapitulation. Winds and strings play antiphonal chords, first by pairs, then as single chords. As in the corresponding passage in the first movement of the *Eroica*, increased harmonic tension is accompanied by a softer dynamic level. These are patches of illusory calm before violent storms. Once, a five-measure outburst of furious *fortissimo* interrupts the *pianissimo*. Three things come together at that point: the shape of the opening (with the thirds and the five-measure length), the rhythm of the horn call, and a harmonization that is derived from the antiphonal chords in the development.

A great thunder of eighth notes sends us flying into the recapitulation. When first we heard the famous opening notes of this symphony, they were played by strings and clarinets; this time Beethoven hurls them at us with his full orchestra. (Full orchestra, that is, except for the piccolo, contrabassoon, and trombones, which enter only in the finale.) What follows is also rescored in that Beethoven adds more sustained lines for oboe and bassoons to the agitated eighth notes in the strings, as well as supporting chords from flutes and clarinets. And now, when he arrives at the cadence where in the exposition the first violins stopped time by clinging to their high G, it is the oboe that detaches itself from the rest of the orchestra; it not only plays that high G, but even uses it as the start of a pathos-filled cadenza. The cadenza both disrupts and integrates. It totally halts forward motion, but at the same time its melody is a perfectly organic continuation of what the oboe itself and the first violins have been playing in the preceding 14 measures. This paradoxical multiplicity of function is completely characteristic of Beethoven. The cadenza looks forward as well as back, for it sets up the pathos that the wind instruments, the oboe in particular, inject into the movement just before its close.

The coda is big and forceful. The proportions of this movement yield interesting numbers: the exposition totals 124 measures (which are meant to be repeated), the development 122, the recapitulation 126, and the coda 127. Beethoven puts a big silence, articulative as well as dramatic, between the end of the exposition and the beginning of the development, but when he gets to the corresponding joint between the recapitulation and the coda, he tears from one into the other in wild abandon, without a break. The rhythmic disruptions and distension are even more violent than those in the development.

The second movement pursues softness. In one sketch it is marked *Andante quasi Menuetto*, and Beethoven worked long and hard before he found the right shape for the melody and the right expressive tone. Upon that melody he writes a series of variations. The first two break the theme down into faster notes. The third variation is in the minor mode; Tovey aptly characterizes it as "smiling through tears." These variations are, however, separated by interludes that begin softly in A-flat major, like the theme itself, but move on to C major, with drums and blazing trumpets and horns. (In the sketch referred to earlier, this contrasting idea was to serve as trio to the quasi-minuet.) In some ways, this movement resembles Haydn's sets of variations; what makes it different, however, is the absence of full closures after the martial interludes. Furthermore, some of these transitions are so leisurely that they suspend forward motion as surely and—at least to Haydn and Mozart-trained ears in 1808—as startlingly as the fermatas in the first movement. The last appearance, ecstatically transformed, of the little cadential tag at the end of the main theme is a wonderful, proto-Romantic touch. Three times we have heard it, piano, descending gently from E-flat through C to the keynote, A-flat; this last time, the C swells in crescendo and the melody soars up to the high G.

After the storms of the first movement, the second is an oasis of pure and lovely music-making. With the grotesque scherzo, creeping and threatening, the drama is resumed. The writer, musician, and artist E. T. A. Hoffmann viewed the Fifth as a quintessentially Romantic symphony; reviewing it, he

pointed out how unexpected extensions of phrases—again, interferences with "normal" rhythm—are responsible for the "mounting effect" of the scherzo, "its restless yearning...heightened to a fear which tightly constricts the breast, permitting only fragmentary, disconnected sounds to escape."

The scherzo is back in C minor, much of it in pianissimo, but with forceful reminders of the first movement's "ta-ta-ta-Taaa" rhythm. The trio is in C major; at once fierce and jocular, and provides a real virtuoso turn for the cellos and basses. It has no formal close, but leads directly into the reappearance of the scherzo, now much altered. The opening phrase is stretched into a sinister variant, while the whole design is compressed from 160 measures (to be repeated) to 88 (not repeated). All of it is in relentless pianissimo, even the reminders of the "ta-ta-ta-Taaa" motif. The new Peters edition used in these performances restores repeats in the third and fourth movements to which most modern listeners will not be accustomed.

The victory symphony was a new kind of symphony, and Beethoven's invention here of a path from strife to triumph became a model for symphonic writing to the present day. This seems to us so central to the whole idea of the Fifth Symphony that it is surprising to learn that it was not part of Beethoven's original plan at all. An early sketch for the finale shows a theme in C minor and in 6/8 time, a nervously impassioned variant of another C-minor piece Beethoven admired vastly—the finale of Mozart's C-Minor Piano Concerto (K.491). But once it was clear to him how the symphony wanted to end, other changes followed. For one, the martial C-major interludes in the *Andante* lost their formal closes; thus they ceased to be quasi-independent episodes but became adumbrations of both a mood and a key to be explored more fully later.

Likewise, certain ideas Beethoven had about the scherzo came into focus. Two sounds had already occurred to him: the diversion of the harmony from C minor to A-flat major by way of a deceptive cadence, and the persistent beating of a drum on C. At some point he saw that these were ideas that belonged together; with that realization, one of the most amazing passages in all music came into being.

The scherzo is never completed, for Beethoven steers what we expect to be its final cadence into a murky tunnel of thudding drums and groping bits of melody. This is an extraordinary joining of Fifth Symphony tension to Pastoral Symphony stasis. At last we emerge into the sureness and daylight of C major, marked by the new sounds of trombones (heard here for the first time in any symphony), piccolo, and contrabassoon. Beethoven asserts his C-major triumph with all the force he can muster.

"Look out for the part where you think you have done with the goblins and they come back," says Helen Schlegel in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*. Beethoven does bring them back before his affirmation is final: more technically put, their return constitutes the transition to the recapitulation. "But the goblins were there," Forster adds. "They could return. He had said so bravely and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things." The goblins do indeed return, and Beethoven has to make his C-major unmistakable a second time. Many people have made fun of Beethoven's concluding 41 measures of tonic and dominant (29 of them just tonic C-major chords), but after such a hurricane, nothing less would do to properly ground this music.

As a boy Mendelssohn had tried hard and not entirely successfully to convert the elderly Goethe to a belief in the Fifth Symphony, or at least to an understanding of it. As a young man, Berlioz tried no less hard to persuade an older man who was almost as determined to resist that impact as Goethe had been. Now let Berlioz have the last word. He was addressing his former teacher, Jean-Francois Lesueur, "an honest man without envy in his nature," as Berlioz explained in his Memoirs (as translated here by David Cairns), "and devoted to art":

Francois-Antoine Habeneck's carefully prepared performances of Beethoven's symphonies were causing an immense stir in the music world of Paris, but Lesueur took no notice. Confronted with the immense enthusiasm of musicians in general and me in particular, he shut his ears and carefully avoided the Conservatoire concerts. To have gone would have meant committing himself to a personal opinion of Beethoven; it would have meant being physically involved in the tremendous

excitement which Beethoven aroused. This was just what Lesueur...did not wish to happen. However, I kept on at him, solemnly pointing out that when something as important as this occurred in our art—a completely new style on an unprecedented scale—it was his duty to find out about it and to judge for himself; and in the end he yielded and let himself be dragged to the Conservatoire one day when the C-minor Symphony was being performed...

When it was over...I found him in the corridor, striding along with a flushed face. "Well, master?"

"Ouf! Let me get out. I must have some air. It's amazing! Wonderful! I was so moved and so disturbed that when I emerged from the box and attempted to put on my hat, I couldn't find my head. Now please leave me be. We'll meet tomorrow."

... The next day I hurried round to see him...Lesueur let me talk on for some time, assenting in a rather constrained manner to my exclamations of enthusiasm. But it was easy to see that my companion was no longer the man who had spoken to me the day before, and that he found the subject painful. I persisted, however, and dragged from him a further acknowledgement of how deeply Beethoven's symphony had moved him; at which he suddenly shook his head and smiled in a curious way and said, "All the same, music like that ought not to be written."

"Don't worry, master," I replied, "there is not much danger."

—Michael Steinberg