

ML 4009

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 5 in C Minor



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**BEETHOVEN:**  
**SYMPHONY NO. 5**  
in C Minor, Op. 67

**BRUNO WALTER**  
conducting the  
**PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY**  
**ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK**

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NONBREAKABLE



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Ed. Messine

The Fifth is undoubtedly the best known of Beethoven's symphonies. Indeed, to say this is to say too little. It is the best known of all symphonies, the symphony that nine persons out of ten—the musically lettered and unlettered alike—would designate if asked to name a symphony. Why? The question is unanswerable. Many reasons might be given, but none would have weight except as the opinion of an individual.

Is it the greatest of symphonies? One would need to define greatness and even then a decision would be difficult. For any definition of greatness would leave the Fifth matched against other mighty contenders—the *Eroica*, the Ninth; the *Jupiter* and G minor symphonies of Mozart; the Schubert C major; the Brahms C minor. Is it the most perfect in form? The answer is that perfection is not a matter of degree and that there are symphonies by Haydn and Mozart, symphonies even by Mendelssohn, that achieve it in all that appertains to structure and design.

One concludes that Beethoven's Fifth owes its unique position to a combination of qualities which cannot be formulated in a word, and to associations that have accrued to it in the course of time. One of these associations is a product of the present, for the four note phrase that introduces and dominates the first movement, through its metrical correspondence to the Morse code symbol for V, three dots and a dash, has become the symbol of all free peoples everywhere fighting aggression and tyranny.

There are many interpretations of the content of the Fifth Symphony, but all agree in this: the theme of the work is the struggle of man against an enemy. Avoiding the literalness of most commentators, Louis Biancolli has treated the matter with illuminating insight in notes which he wrote for the program books of the Philharmonic Symphony Society of New York: "Some experience or group of experiences had shaken Beethoven profoundly... (His) deafness was steadily growing worse. In the Heiligenstadt Will he reviewed his 'blighted hopes' and in his wretchedness shrieked to high heaven for one more day of 'pure joy.'

Thoughts of suicide and early death probably assailed him. Then themes began to filter through his mind, colored by these thoughts and seizures of grief, until the plan of a great moral drama took shape. He would fight destiny to victory, he resolved, and achieve reconciliation with the world. Around this decision musical and emotional patterns slowly formed. With the musician and the man so closely coordinated in thought and feeling, the process of shifting from emotional to artistic planes was complete and true. After stern and uncompromising scrutiny of each detail, the struggle finally took finished form as the C minor symphony."

The date of the Fifth has not been definitely determined. The Symphony was begun in 1805, shortly after the completion of the *Eroica*, but it was laid aside almost at once and Beethoven presumably did not resume work on it until 1807. It is supposed that he completed it in this year, though it remained unplayed for another twelve months. The first performance took place in Vienna, at the Theater An der Wien, on December 22, 1808. Concerts were concerts in those days, and the audience that heard the premiere of the Fifth also heard the Sixth Symphony and the Choral Fantasia, the Piano Concerto in G, two numbers from the Mass in C, the aria *Ah, Perfido*, and an improvisation by the composer. Apparently the performances were deplorable, and perhaps for this reason the new works on the program were indifferently received. But the subsequent history of the Fifth was one of repeated triumphs.

The symphony opens with an *Allegro con brio* of overmastering passion. The whole of this movement is dominated by the four note figure with which it begins, and from which the principal melodic and rhythmic patterns derive. The effect is of a unique concentration of thought and feeling. A consolatory *Andante* con moto follows; contrasting themes are developed in variation form. The Third movement, a *Scherzo*, is sombre in tone and leads, by a transition that is one of the most famous passages in symphonic music,

directly into the bold, affirmative finale. Few listeners can be unfamiliar with this work, but even those who are will experience no difficulty comprehending Beethoven's ideas and following them through the various stages of their development. For the Fifth Symphony combines unique directness of statement with perfect clarity in the elaboration of detail.

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Bruno Walter, who directs this performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, is one of the greatest of living orchestral conductors. Mahler's assistant at the Vienna Opera in the early years of the century, general music director of Munich, in succession to Felix Mottl, conductor of the Berlin Charlottenburg Opera, of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, general music director of the Vienna Opera—these are a few of the many important posts that he has filled at one time or another during the past forty years.

Born in 1876, he exhibited musical gifts at an early age, and it was decided that he should have a musical career. After graduating from the Stern Conservatory in his native city (Berlin) he served his apprenticeship in various provincial German opera houses. In Hamburg he came under the influence of Gustav Mahler. His association with Mahler had a profound effect on his artistic outlook and his career. He went with Mahler to the Vienna Opera in 1901 and remained there for five years after Mahler's retirement in 1907, carrying on the traditions of his master and friend. In 1914 he was made general music director in Munich. Other distinguished appointments followed. His international career began with his engagement as guest conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra in 1923. Since then he has visited the United States repeatedly. During the season of 1940-'41 he made his debut in the pit of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. He has now identified himself completely with the musical life of this country.

He was appointed Musical Advisor to the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York for the 1947-'48 season and for the following year.



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SIDE 1  
(XLP 200)

Band No. 1: First Movement: Allegro  
con brio

Band No. 2: Second Movement: Andante  
con moto

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SIDE 2  
(XLP 201)

Third Movement: Scherzo (Allegro)

Fourth Movement: Finale (Allegro)

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