

Quad City Symphony Orchestra

# PROGRAM NOTES

## Masterworks V: Beethoven's Fifth Symphony

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"Glowing rays shoot through the deep night... and we sense giant shadows surging to and fro, closing in on us until they destroy us... Only with this pain of love, hope, joy—which consumes but does not destroy, which would burst asunder our breasts with a mightily impassioned chord—we live on, enchanted seers of the ghostly world!"

—E.T.A. Hoffman  
From a review of Beethoven, Symphony No. 5

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Twelve German Dances

**Instrumentation:** Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, percussion, and strings (no violas).

**Premiere:** November 22, 1795. Redoutensaal, Hofburg Palace, Vienna.

**QCSO Premiere.**

It can be easy to forget that, aside from producing immortal works of genius, composers have occasionally proven themselves useful. Indeed, in many instances, the primary work of a composer has been and continues to be producing "background" music for various uses. For example, although the QCSO has recently performed Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and John Williams' *The Cowboys Overture* on Masterworks concerts, both works originated in contexts (Lutheran worship; a 70s western film) where the music was not (at least officially) the main event.

Our concert experience, by contrast, puts music front and center, and this expectation

is directly traceable to Beethoven, who loaded his works with an unprecedented level of gravity. In his symphonies in particular, it can be difficult to listen in any other way than to imagine the composer in the limelight, calling all the shots and writing for posterity. It is thus important to remember that, on several occasions, Beethoven wrote music intended to support other arts or social activities.

This is the case with his early 12 German Dances, WoO 8. The "WoO" is important: it means "without opus number"; in other words, a work that is outside of a composer's essential catalogue, often unpublished during the composer's lifetime.

So what was the non-concert context for the first performances of these pieces? The building was the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, winter residence of the royal Hapsburg family, and the room was the Redoutensaal ("masquerade hall"), designated by the Empress Maria Theresa to be used for balls and other entertainments. Like his teacher Haydn before him (and Johann Strauss, Jr.

much later), Beethoven wrote pieces for the Redoutensaal to be played on just such an occasion. Decades later, the same hall would host the premiere of his Eighth Symphony.

Written in 1795 and predating his Symphony No. 1 by five years, the dances might all be classified as “minuets”, genteel dances in three, including a “trio” (middle contrasting section) in all but the first dance. The pieces must have served their social function well; though they contain hints of Beethoven’s later orchestral brilliance and creative harmonic shifts, he stays well within contemporary expectations for imperial dance music.

#### **Beethoven, 12 German Dances Listening Guide**

- ♪ You might have noticed that a whole section of strings is absent... the violas! Though violas have always been an essential part of the symphony orchestra, the orchestra regularly providing dance music at the Redoutensaal must not have had violas; Haydn’s music for the same kind of occasion, for example, also lacks viola parts.
- ♪ Aside from the first dance, each dance is in a three-part, ABA form. The “B” is the section called the “trio”, which is usually contrasting in nature and sometimes in key. In these dances, the trio is (with one exception) in the same key, but the delineation between the A and B sections is usually clear.
- ♪ In keeping with the festive atmosphere of an imperial ball, every dance in the group is in a major key (exception: there is one trio, #7, in C minor).
- ♪ Though each dance falls within a single key, the shifts between keys from

dance to dance together comprise something of a long-range tonal journey. The conventional practice was for adjacent dances to be in “closely-related keys” (moving, for example, from C major to G major, a difference of only one sharp). However, in Beethoven’s work, dances #1, #2, and #3 have rather drastic key differences between them (C major, A major, F major). This same pattern of remote key relationships is repeated in dances #7, #8, and #9. Overall, dances #1, #7, and #12 are all in C major, so it functions as a tonal “home” and midway resting place; Beethoven always departs C major in an unexpected way, but always approaches it (from #6 to #7 and #11 to #12) more predictably, from the closely-related key of G major.

- ♪ Foreshadowing his own Symphony No. 3 (“Eroica”), dance #5 is has a regal, triumphant tone in the heroic key of E-flat major.
- ♪ Perhaps livening up the festivities near the end, Beethoven makes use of the tambourine for the first time in #10.
- ♪ As will become his practice in almost all of his major works, Beethoven uses the Coda, or closing passage, to light some fireworks.
- ♪ You will hear the trumpet in the finale playing a soaring “triadic” melody (i.e., all skips and leaps, no steps), similar to Taps, but much livelier. The invention of the valve trumpet was still 20 years away, so these were the only notes available on Beethoven’s trumpet.

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)  
Concerto in D Major for Oboe and  
Small Orchestra

**Instrumentation:** solo oboe, 2 flutes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, and strings.

**Premiere:** February 26, 1946. Marcel Saillet, oboe, Tonhalle Orchestra, Volkmar Andreae, conductor.

**QCSO Performance History:** This is the second QCSO performance of Strauss's oboe concerto. The first was in 1988, with Bert Lucarelli as soloist, and James Dixon conducting.

The mobilization of the American people during World War II was nearly universal, and this included musicians. Among those recruited into the Allied effort was John de Lancie, then principal oboist of the Pittsburgh Symphony under Fritz Reiner. He joined the United States Army Band and later served as an intelligence operative in occupied Germany. After the war, he would become one of America's most prominent oboists, performing in the Philadelphia Orchestra and running the famed Curtis Institute of Music. (His son, incidentally, would become an actor, portraying the character "Q" on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.)

Shortly after the war had ended, while he was still stationed in Germany, de Lancie heard that the elderly composer Richard Strauss was living in the Bavarian resort town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Curious, the oboist-soldier decided to pay the composer a visit, and Strauss, eager to maintain good relations with occupying American forces, received his fellow musician kindly. Over the course of their conversation, de Lancie asked a burning question: had the old master ever thought about writing an

oboe concerto? Strauss answered with a simple, "No."

To be sure, it was kind of an odd question: oboe concertos are rare, and the 81-year-old Strauss, most famous for his grandiloquent tone poems and operas, had written only three concertos in total (two of them for horn, his father's instrument). But in any case, de Lancie's ended up being a very consequential question: shortly thereafter Strauss completed his Concerto for Oboe and Small Orchestra, explaining publicly that he had written it at an American soldier's suggestion. De Lancie learned of the piece's existence in the newspaper.

The resulting piece provides an illuminating glimpse into the end of an intriguing and influential musical career. Strauss was first credited with initiating the musical shockwaves of the early twentieth century: this was the composer who burst into the international music scene with the overwhelming flourish of *Don Juan* in 1888 and scandalized the world with his salacious, harmonically adventurous opera *Salome* in 1905. But he also began to show a less revolutionary, more nostalgic side as early as 1911 with his comic opera *Der Rosenkavalier*, set in mid-eighteenth-century Vienna (one might almost imagine the opera being performed in the Redoutensaal!). By the 1940s, he had composed himself firmly back into the nineteenth century, with works like *Metamorphosen* for string orchestra, the *Four Last Songs*, and his oboe concerto. This regression was a disappointment to those who had deigned him the standard-bearer of atonality, but a welcome development for mid-twentieth-century audiences still eager for the trappings of romanticism.

## Strauss, Oboe Concerto Listening Guide

### First movement: Allegro moderato

- ♪ Strauss included “for small orchestra” in the title of this work, and for him it certainly is much smaller than usual. Notice that he employs “double winds”, i.e., two each of the woodwind instruments, except only one oboe (which is actually an English Horn). This is a practical consideration: if, as for us at the QCSO, the principal oboist is performing the solo part, the work does not require hiring an additional oboist.
- ♪ Writing for the oboe has some challenges; for one, its range is significantly narrower than most instruments, ordinarily not much more than two octaves. It’s also an exhausting instrument to play, so the part must include frequent opportunities for the oboist to recover.
- ♪ Notice the underlying accompanying figure that sounds like tiny steps. This is an important supporting motive throughout, and will provide the transition to the second movement.
- ♪ Unlike in *Don Juan*, at the concerto’s opening, Strauss seems rather relaxed, and he takes a while to find the vigor that characterizes the middle of the movement. Also unlike in his tone poems, he employs a more transparent orchestration throughout.
- ♪ Listen for the oboe-clarinete imitative counterpoint in the piece’s middle section. Again, in the common scenario where the principal oboist of an orchestra is playing the solo, the oboist and clarinetist will be quite accustomed to playing together in this manner.

### Second movement: Andante

- ♪ There is no break between the movements in this concerto; Strauss instead

recalls the accompanying “little steps” that supported the first movement’s opening to transition to the Mozartean melody that begins the slow movement.

- ♪ Note the eloquent and elegant second movement cadenza, accompanied with simple pizzicatos from the strings.

### Third movement: Vivace-Allegro

- ♪ In a manner similar to the clarinet duet from the first movement, the last opens with happy counterpoint between the soloist and flute, continuing in the violins.
- ♪ The third movement features another cadenza: it’s quite warm and affectionate, and, like the previous cadenza, not particularly flashy.
- ♪ A new tempo follows the cadenza, and with the lilting 6/8 time, it almost seems like the piece will come to a gently lilting end. However, Strauss the showman appears after all, accelerating the tempo to a bold conclusion.

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

### Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67

**Instrumentation:** Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.

**Premiere:** December 22, 1808. Theater an der Wien, Vienna, with the composer conducting.

**QCSO Performance History:** This marks the twelfth time Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony has been programmed by the QCSO, and the second time with Mark Russell Smith, who last conducted them in 2011. Prior performances were under Ludwig Becker (1918, 1924), Oscar Anderson (1941), Piero Bellugi (1954), Charles Gigante (1969), four times with James Dixon (1969, 1975, 1979, and 1988), and Donald Schleicher (2000).

We might wonder whether the audience that heard the premiere of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on December 22, 1808 fully grasped the magnitude of the work. After all, the same concert included the world premiere of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 ("Pastoral"), his Piano Concerto No. 4, and the *Choral Fantasy* for piano, choir and orchestra, throwing in a few Mass movements and a concert aria for good measure. On that cold evening in Vienna, amid an interminable program of overwhelming new works, did the audience suspect that the symphony's fateful opening four-note motive would become the most ubiquitous musical object in history?

That audience may or may not have understood the gravity of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5. But Beethoven's contemporary, the Romantic writer E. T. A. Hoffman, certainly did. Aside from his many fantasy stories (including *The Nutcracker*) Hoffman was a composer and cultural critic who wrote extensively about Beethoven. His widely-circulated review of Symphony No. 5 gives an overview of the burgeoning phenomenon of romanticism, and explains why Beethoven's symphony is the romantic work *par excellence*.

Hoffman begins his review by elevating purely instrumental music above music with text, because instrumental music "scorns every aid from and mixing with any other art." Here he initiates a long, often tiresome debate that would continue for much of the nineteenth century: which is better, "pure" instrumental music, or music related to the other arts? The answer, for Hoffman, was instrumental music, which expressed the otherworldly and the transcendental. "Just as Orpheus' lyre opened the gates of the

underworld," he wrote, "music unlocks for mankind an unknown realm—a world with nothing in common with the surrounding outer world of the senses."

This sublimity, Hoffman believed, was most perfectly instantiated in Beethoven's works. "Beethoven's music wields the lever of fear, awe, horror, and pain, and it awakens that eternal longing that is the essence of the romantic." And in this regard, the Fifth Symphony in particular was "splendid beyond all measure. How irresistibly does this wonderful composition transport the listener through ever growing climaxes into the spiritual realm of the infinite."

But amid all of his poetic reflection, Hoffman makes a separate observation which might just capture why we continue to find Beethoven's music so powerful. "We might think," surmised Hoffman, "that from such elements only something fragmented or incomprehensible could arise, but instead we receive from them a sense of the whole." In other words, despite overwhelming us with the onslaught of widely-ranging emotions, Beethoven also constructed his best works with a profound unity. The opening four-note motive of Symphony No. 5 provides the most obvious example: this is a brilliant and striking gesture in itself, but Beethoven doesn't stop there. Rather, he constructs the entire movement (and really, the entire symphony) by manipulating this motive in an endless variety of ways. His combination of carefully-reasoned motivic development with soaring, inexpressible emotion produced music that fulfills the ideals of both romanticism and the Enlightenment which preceded it. His perfect balancing of mind and heart may well be why Beethoven's music has proven so moving, and so lasting.

## Beethoven 5 Listening Guide

### First movement: **Allegro con brio**

- ♪ The four-note motive that opens the symphony is not just a noisome way of getting our attention; it is also the root motive of much of the music to follow.
- ♪ If you have ever wanted to follow a sonata-allegro form closely, now is your chance! The first main section, the *Exposition*, includes two main themes: the dark, intense and driving first theme in C minor, and the elegant, retiring, but volatile second theme. The jubilant music that ends the opening section is called the “closing theme.” After each theme has had its initial say, the whole *Exposition* repeats.
- ♪ After this repetition, the central section follows, called the *Development* as it takes the themes through a variety of transformations. A particularly haunting feature of this *Development* are the long, soft alternating chords between the strings and winds.
- ♪ You’ll know the *Development* is over when it sounds like the movement is beginning again; we call this the *Recapitulation*, which is a “double return” to the opening theme and opening key. Composers love to vary the *Recapitulation*; Beethoven’s most striking departure is a sudden suspension of time, where the orchestra unexpectedly yields to a lugubrious oboe solo.

### Second movement: **Andante con moto**

- ♪ Beethoven follows a familiar recipe for a slow movement, perfected by his teacher Franz Joseph Haydn: he sets a slow triple meter (three beats per bar), then proceeds throughout the movement to place on top of it all different kinds of rhythmic subdivisions.

- ♪ The music may be slow, but the mood changes early and often, alternating frequently between hesitant, solemn, triumphant, mysterious, grand, and tender characters.
- ♪ Listen for a short diversion near the movement’s end, with perky offbeats and a slightly quicker tempo.

### Third movement: **Scherzo: Allegro**

- ♪ The third movement of a symphony was, according to the Haydn ideal, a Minuet, but Beethoven pioneered the alternative option of a Scherzo (he certainly wrote plenty of Minuets up to that point, judging from the Twelve German Dances!). “Scherzo” literally means “joke piece”, but Beethoven’s scherzos are rarely facetious.
- ♪ After a sneaky opening passage in the strings, the horns interrupt with a forceful theme; notice its similarity to the symphony’s opening rhythm.
- ♪ Like a Minuet, the Scherzo has a “Trio” section; this Trio is unusually contrapuntal, sounding almost like a fugue.
- ♪ After the Trio, the Scherzo’s opening returns, but without the horn outbursts. Amid the quiet, quick and murky music, Beethoven provides a few glimpses of sunshine. He’s clearly preparing us for something...

### Fourth movement: **Allegro—Presto**

- ♪ The final movement follows the Scherzo immediately.
- ♪ Like the first movement, the form is also sonata-allegro, though the themes are less distinct from one another. (Here’s a hint for when the second theme is beginning: it sounds like the theme to *Superman*.)
- ♪ As is often his want, Beethoven tricks us with a false ending, but the bassoons and horns convince him to keep going.