

Beethoven Symphony No. 5, movement I

Texture

- Beethoven varies the texture as quickly as he changes dynamics. This adds to the tension.
- The opening is very weighty, but the texture is actually monophonic, just G – G – G – E flat in all parts, i.e. no chords or polyphony.
- Bars 6–9 begin with one part and quickly add 3 more, a move from monophony to polyphony. The “melody” quickly moves from one part to another in continuous eighth notes—the first 3 eighth notes of each entrance plus the attack of the 4th note immediately followed by the next instrument’s eighth notes. The held 4th note becomes the supporting harmony.
- Bars 18–21 are chordal or homorhythmic, i.e. different voices playing the same rhythm.
- Bars 63–66 are homophonic. The first violins play a dolce melody above a soft accompaniment in the other instruments.

Timbre (Orchestration)

- The symphony opens with all of the strings and 2 clarinets. I am unable to hear the clarinets, but I have been told that it would sound “wrong” without them.
- Violins are pitched a perfect fifth higher than violas, but the Violin II entrance in bar 6 is lower than the Viola entrance in bar 7. Why? (Several answers are valid.)
- The first violins’ sustained half note G in m. 21 of the exposition corresponds to m. 268 of the recapitulation, a brief oboe solo—the only solo in the entire movement. Why? (Once again, several answers are valid.)
- The horns herald the exposition’s second theme area in mm. 59–62. The bassoons take this responsibility in the recapitulation in mm. 303–306 probably because Beethoven’s horns struggled to play in different keys. Modern horns have no trouble with this modulation and today some conductors opt for horns in both places. What choice would you make?