

1. Allegro
2. Adagio, un poco mosso
3. Rondo (Allegro)

Beethoven's fifth and last piano concerto was composed in Vienna in 1809, during the occupation of the city by the French. "What a disturbing wild life around me" the composer wrote, "nothing but drums, cannon, men, misery of all sorts". The origin of the title "Emperor" is unknown, and it was certainly not used during Beethoven's lifetime.

The concerto begins in a highly unconventional manner, even by Beethoven's standards, with the three great fortissimo chords from the orchestra being dissected by the piano in a series of arpeggio figures and florid scale passages, which is as near to a true cadenza as the soloist will get in this work. The spacious allegro which follows begins with a vigorous theme on the violins, from which two characteristic figures, the first a "turn", and the other a dotted eighth note-sixteenth note group, play an important part in subsequent developments. When the pause is eventually reached which usually heralds the cadenza, Beethoven's instructions are explicit that there should be no break before the coda, which begins with a short discussion of the two main themes by the solo instrument, joined first by the horns and then gradually by the whole orchestra.

The serene slow movement, in the remote key of B major, makes use of two main elements only - a solemn tune first heard on muted violins, and the pensive theme with which the piano follows. Later, the soloist takes over the violin tune, elaborating and developing it; the woodwind then repeat it while the piano accompanies, and finally nothing is left but a cold grey octave B in the bassoons which, in a magical moment, falls a semitone to become a long held B flat for horns. Above this the piano hesitantly suggests the main theme of the exuberant Rondo, which when it arrives moments later, proves to be based on an arpeggio in distinctive rhythm making its subsequent appearances easily recognizable.

The coda is notable for a striking drum rhythm which has been heard in other parts of the orchestra during the movement, and over which the piano quietly meditates. Finally, some rushing scales from the piano bring in the full orchestra to end the movement with a few bars based on the now familiar main theme.