

1. Adagio: Allegro vivace
2. Adagio
3. Allegro vivace
4. Allegro ma non troppo

It is known that Beethoven was already at work on the fifth symphony, and had virtually completed the first two movements, when he turned aside to complete this B flat work in 1806. All through his middle period Beethoven seems to have felt the need for relieving the intense concentration of his idealistic works by writing others of a more genial human character, and the fourth, closely following the mighty Eroica, is generally seen as a moment of calm in the composer's symphonic development.

Apart from the seventh, the fourth contains the most imposing introduction of any in the series. It consists of thirty-eight bars of tense groping figures held together by sustained octaves, the whole passage having a curiously remote and shadowy effect. Only very gradually does a lighter coloring emerge, until finally a series of F major blows drive the music into the exuberant B flat major first subject of the allegro vivace. Numerous other ideas follow, the almost dance-like second subject among them. The transition of the recapitulation is heralded by a striking passage accompanied by drum rolls, these being maintained at one point for twenty five bars.

The second movement is in sonata form without a development section, in which the throbbing accompaniment of the second violins is a feature almost throughout. There is a latent drama in the music, even though both themes have an appealing and tender mood about them; the second subject in particular radiates intimacy and warmth with its soft clarinet tones.

The third movement, though labeled "minuet", is actually a scherzo and the first example in the series in which the trio is also repeated in alternation with the minuet section. The theme of the scherzo, like that of the opening movement, is built on broken chords and is of great rhythmic ingenuity, being a combination of two and three part groupings. The finale is full of innocent humor and high spirits, with its swirling first subject and almost Haydnish second theme, although the whole treatment and temper of the movement are pure Beethoven. There are one or two incomparable little touches, such as the bassoon solo just before the reprise, and the augmentation of the main theme, eked out with pauses, a few bars before the end of the movement.