

Scored for: one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. Performance time: Approximately 34 minutes.

In the summer of 1806, Beethoven stopped work on his C Minor Symphony, later to be known as the Fifth, in order to compose this comparatively neglected masterpiece. It is an astonishing aspect of his genius that he could turn his attention with such apparent ease from an intense and stormy composition to one that so overflows with wit and good cheer. At the beginning of the first movement, Adagio – allegro vivace, the violins tiptoe mysteriously through a number of unexpected keys before coming triumphantly to rest on F major at the end of the adagio introduction. This chord is then, as it were, wound up until it springs into B-flat major and one of the happiest first movements Beethoven ever wrote. The woodwinds contribute a robust and bucolic second subject, and such is the abundance of melodic material that the development section begins to digress with a theme of its own. Then, while the timpani roll apprehensively, the violins are allowed a rare moment to catch their breath before rushing back to the country dance with a joyful and boisterous recapitulation.

Critics who seek biographical information from a composer's music the second movement, Adagio, as clear evidence that Beethoven was blissfully in love, with a dotted accompanying rhythm, for all the world like a lover's heartbeat. The movement is dominated by two beautiful melodies, the first introduced by the violins, the second by the clarinet, each characterized by sighing, descending slurs. These are repeated, the first with shimmering ornamentation, before a final "heartbeat" from the timpani brings this lovely adagio to a close.

Between the raptures of an adagio and the excitement of a finale, Beethoven was determined to prevent his audience from falling asleep. The third movement, Allegro vivace; trio – un poco meno allegro, mocks the complacent three-four rhythm of the minuet in a short movement of unsettling syncopation and unconventional harmony. The woodwinds establish a rustic interlude in the trio section, but the tipsy opening, with its sliding unisons, returns to restore disorder.

The bubbling finale, Allegro ma non troppo, gives the strings little respite. The ebullient sixteenth notes of the opening measures continue relentlessly with only a brief pause when the winds play their relaxed seconds subject. Eleven bars from the end, the tempo suddenly unwinds and the whole symphony grinds to a halt, only to pluck up courage again in a mad dash for the final double bar.