

1. Poco sostenuto: Vivace
2. Allegretto
3. Presto
4. Allegro con brio

The seventh symphony was written in 1812, some four years after the “Pastoral”, during which time Beethoven was occupied with a number of important works, including the String Quartets Op. 74 and 95, the Egmont music, the Choral Fantasia, two Piano Sonatas and the Trios in E flat, D, and B flat.

The first performance, on 8th December 1813, was conducted with some difficulty by Beethoven himself, who was by then profoundly deaf. The occasion was a charity concert at the University of Vienna for the benefit of soldiers wounded in the battle of Hanau, where Austrian and Bavarian troops had endeavored to cut off Napoleon’s retreat from Leipzig. Among the orchestra were many famous musicians of the day, including Spohr, Romberg, Meyerbeer, Hummel and Salieri. The 15 year old Schubert was almost certainly in the audience.

The Introduction, the longest that Beethoven ever wrote, starts with a short chord of A from the full orchestra which releases a calm phrase on the first oboe, imitated successively by clarinet, horn and bassoon. After eight bars, by which time the remote key of F major has been reached, this dialogue is interrupted and accompanied by an important new feature; scales of two octaves in length, like gigantic staircases. These lead to a third subject, in C major, heard first on the oboe and then on the strings. The original key of A is eventually regained and the transition to the Vivace is achieved by a series of reiterated Es which hold the suspense until with a gathering momentum the rhythm which is to play so large a part in the movement becomes established.

Beethoven in this work reverts to the orchestra which he had used for his earliest symphonies, but the treatment, especially of the wind, is full and at times massive, giving the impression that larger forces are being used than in fact is the case. The driving and pulsating rhythm of the first movement scarcely ever relaxes, though it does undergo some modifications in the second subject group. In its most emphatic form of repeated dactyls it occupies long stretches of the development and only in the coda, in the extraordinary passage where a pedal-point is sustained for twenty two measures (causing Weber’s celebrated remark that Beethoven was now ripe for

the madhouse), is there a change of pulse.

The Allegretto is one of Beethoven's most famous movements, and is again colored by a persistent, though less dramatic rhythm, akin to a funeral march. This rhythm underlies every bar, to the extent that even the lighter interlude in the major and the fugal episode which follows lead only to a return of the somber mood of the opening.

The explosive scherzo, which immediately dispels the funereal mood, is essentially one musical idea marked by unpredictable tonality and accented rhythms, with a contrasting trio said to be based on an old pilgrim's hymn. Each section comes round twice and after the scherzo has been finally repeated the trio attempts to return once more but is cut short by a few abrupt chords.

The immense drive and energy of the finale speak for themselves. After two beats from the whole orchestra the whirlwind main subject bursts in with delirious abandon, centered on rushing figure-work in the strings. Secondary themes scarcely seem possible, but there are nevertheless important subsidiary figures in which woodwind and horns are particularly prominent. Towards the end of the movement comes the extraordinary dramatic passage where a low pedal of E alternating with D sharp is repeated below long-held notes in the wind whilst the strings are occupied by imitation and repetition of the original figure. The sound rises always louder and louder until, it reaches a truly furious outburst, where Beethoven uses the marking *fff* for the first time in a symphony, leading to the great climatic conclusion of one of the most exciting movements in all music.

The abiding memory, throughout the whole symphony, is of the ever present rhythmic drive. Not for nothing did Wagner, writing some twenty years later, refer to this Symphony as "the Apotheosis of the Dance".