LISTENING GUIDE

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Six Easy Variations on a Swiss Tune in F Major for Piano, WoO 64

Date of composition: 1790
Tempo: Andante con moto (“Fairly slow but with motion”)
Meter: 3/4
Key: F major
Duration: 2:47

This is one of many sets of variations that Beethoven wrote in his early years. Creating variations on melodies is an easy way for composers to learn their craft. The tune and the harmony already exist; all the composer has to do is think of ways to decorate or vary them.

The little Swiss tune that Beethoven uses as the basis for this composition is very simple and attractive. Underlying its simplicity, however, is an interesting quirk: it is made up of unusual phrase lengths. This is probably the feature that attracted Beethoven to the theme in the first place. Instead of the usual four-measure phrases, this tune is made up of two three-measure phrases answered by a phrase of five measures.

This phrase structure, as well as the skeleton of the tune and its harmony, is maintained in all the six variations. Beethoven uses triplets, march rhythms, dynamic changes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and even the minor key to decorate and vary the music. If you play the recording of just the theme a few times before listening to the variations, you will be able to follow its outline throughout the piece.

CD TIME LISTEN FOR
Theme [Andante con moto—“Fairly slow but with motion”]
28 (9) 0:00 The theme is simple and pleasant. Notice how it ends very much as it begins.

Variation 1
0:23 Beethoven introduces triplets (three notes to a beat) in both the right and the left hand.
| Variation 2 | 0:40 | The melody is mostly unchanged in the right hand, but the left hand has jerky, marchlike accompanying rhythms. |
| Variation 3 | 1:02 | This variation uses the minor key, and Beethoven indicates that it should be played “smoothly and quietly throughout.” The last part of this variation is repeated. |
| Variation 4 | 1:48 | Back to the major and loud again. Octaves in the right hand, triplets in the left. |
| Variation 5 | 2:04 | The fifth variation is mostly in eighth notes with a little syncopation and some small chromatic decorations. |
| Variation 6 | 2:26 | Dynamic contrasts, sixteenth-note runs, and trills mark the last variation, which ends with a two-measure coda to round off the piece. |

### Beethoven's Fifth Symphony

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony was written in the middle of his heroic period, when the composer was in his late thirties. It is his most famous piece and probably the most famous symphony ever written. The music is taut and expressive, and unified to an unusual degree. The opening four-note motive, with its short-short-short-LONG rhythm, pervades the whole symphony in one form or another. There is a cumulative sense of growth right from the beginning of the first movement to the end of the last movement, and many commentators have noted the feeling of personal triumph that this gives. Underlying this feeling is the motion from C minor to C major. Symphonies almost always end in the key in which they begin, but Beethoven's Fifth opens tense and strained in C minor and concludes triumphant and exuberant in C major. Beethoven also adds several instruments to the orchestra for the last movement, to increase the power and range of the music and add to the sense of triumph.

The feeling of unity in the symphony is reinforced by two further techniques. Instead of being separate, the last two movements are linked, with no pause between them. And Beethoven actually quotes the theme of the third movement in the last movement, thus further connecting them.

All of these elements—the progression from minor to major, the larger orchestra, the linking of movements, the reference back to earlier movements toward the end—were new to symphonic music at the time and had an enormous influence on later composers throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century.

In the Fifth Symphony, Beethoven set the stage for an entirely new view of music. Music was now seen as the expression of a personal and subjective point of view, no longer as the objective presentation of an artistic creation. This new view was the basis of Romanticism.

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Two opinions of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony:

"How big it is—quite wild! Enough to bring the house about one's ears!"
—Goethe.

"Ouf! Let me get out; I must have air. It's incredible!"
—Jean François Le Sueur.
LISTENING GUIDE

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Symphony No. 5 in C Minor

Date of composition: 1807–8
Orchestration: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets,
2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings
Duration: 33:06

FIRST MOVEMENT

Tempo: Allegro con brio (“Fast and vigorous”)
Meter: $\frac{2}{4}$
Key: C minor
Form: Sonata-Allegro
Duration: 7:26

The first movement of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is dense and concentrated. There is not a note or a gesture too many in the whole movement. The exposition begins with a short-short-short-LONG motive that colors almost every measure of the movement.

The second theme is announced by a horn call. The theme itself starts quietly and smoothly, but underneath it, on cellos and basses, the initial rhythmic motive quietly makes itself heard. Quickly another climax builds, and the exposition ends with the whole orchestra playing the original motive together.

During the development section, the horn call that introduced the second theme is gradually broken down into smaller and smaller elements until only a single chord is echoed quietly between the strings and the woodwinds. Then the recapitulation brings back the music of the movement’s first part with crashing force. A short coda brings the movement to a powerful conclusion.

Throughout the movement, long crescendos (from pianissimo, $pp$, to fortissimo, $ff$) and short passages of quiet music ($piano$, $p$) serve to increase the intensity and drive. The overall effect is one of great power and compression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CD TIME</th>
<th>LISTEN FOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>First theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening motive is played $ff$ by the strings and clarinets in octaves and then repeated a step lower.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \text{\begin{music}
\newtime{0:00}
\newmeter{4/4}
\newkey{c minor}
\newtempo{allegro con brio}
\newform{sonata-allegro}
\newduration{7:26}
\end{music}} \]
Sudden $p$, strings immediately develop opening motive.

Crescendo and loud chords lead to a high sustained note in the violins.

**Transition**

Opening motive, $ff$, played only once by full orchestra.
Sudden $p$, further development of the opening motive by strings.
Strings gradually crescendo and ascend.
Reiterated timpani notes, sudden stop.

Horn-call motive, $ff$.

A contrasting gentle melody, $p$, relative major key (E♭ Major), accompanied by a version of the opening motive in the lower strings.

Crescendo and ascent lead to another new melody: a jubilant theme, $ff$, in the violins, played twice.

Woodwinds and horns rapidly descend, twice; then a cadence in E♭ minor, using the rhythm of the basic motive. Pause.

(Entire exposition is repeated.)

**Development**

Opening motive in horns, $ff$, in F minor, echoed by strings.
Sudden $p$, basic motive developed by strings and woodwinds.
Another gradual ascent and crescendo, leading to forceful repeated chords.

Horn-call motive in violins, $ff$, followed by descending line in low strings, twice.
Pairs of high chords in woodwinds and brass, $ff$, alternating with lower chords in strings, $ff$.
Sudden decrease in volume, alternation between single chords, key changes.
Sudden $ff$, horn-call in full orchestra; return to alternation of wind and string chords, $pp$, with key changes.
Sudden $ff$, opening motive repeated many times, leading back to recapitulation.
BEETHOVEN

Recapitulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>34 (15) 4:08</th>
<th>First theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening motive, <strong>ff</strong>, in tonic (C minor), full orchestra.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening motive developed, strings, <strong>p</strong>, joined by slow-moving melody on one oboe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oboe unexpectedly interrupts the music with a short, plaintive solo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4:39</th>
<th>Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of opening motive resumes in strings, <strong>p</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradual crescendo, full orchestra, <strong>ff</strong>, repeated timpani notes, sudden stop.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn-call motive, <strong>ff</strong>, in horns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>35 (16) 5:02</th>
<th>Second theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contrasting gentle melody, <strong>p</strong>, in C major (the major of the tonic!), played alternately by violins and flutes. (Basic motive accompanies in timpani when flutes play.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradual buildup to the return of:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jubilant string theme, <strong>ff</strong>, in violins, played twice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodwinds and horns rapidly descend, twice, followed by a cadence using the rhythm of the opening motive. Then, without pause, into:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>36 (17) 5:52</th>
<th>Forceful repeated chords, <strong>ff</strong>, with pauses.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horn-call motive in lower strings and bassoons, along with flowing violin melody, <strong>f</strong>, in tonic (C minor).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descending pattern, violins, leads to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6:17</th>
<th>A completely new theme in the strings, rising up the minor scale in four-note sequences.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violins</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{\textbf{f}} \\
\text{\textbf{\textit{Violins}}} \\
\text{\textbf{\textit{Violins}}} \\
\end{array}
\]

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violins</td>
<td>Violins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four-note fragments of the new theme are forcefully alternated between woodwinds and strings. |
| A short passage of fast, loud, repeated notes leads into a return of the opening motive, **ff**, full orchestra. |
| Suddenly **pp**, strings and woodwinds develop the motive for a few seconds. |
| A swift and dramatic return to full orchestra, ending with **ff** chords. |

SECOND MOVEMENT

- Tempo: *Andante con moto* ("Fairly slow but with motion")
- Meter: $\frac{3}{4}$
- Key: A$\flat$ major
- Form: Modified Theme and Variations
- Duration: 10:32

The second movement is lyrical and reposeful in contrast to the first movement, but there are passages of great strength and grandeur. The movement is cast as a theme and variations, but it is unusual
because there are two themes instead of one. The first theme, which is very smooth and songlike, comes at the beginning on the low strings: violas and cellos, accompanied by pizzicato (plucked) basses.

The second theme is introduced softly on the clarinets and bassoons but is suddenly transformed into a blazing fanfare. Then come several variations on both of the themes, with changes of mood, instrumentation, and structure. Even the central section of the movement and the coda are based on the two themes.

The coda contains striking dynamic contrasts and ends with a big crescendo that leads to the short final cadence.

**CD TIME LISTEN FOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>Theme A</td>
<td>Lyrical melody in tonic (A♭ major), first presented by violas and cellos, ( p ). Accompaniment in basses, pizzicato.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Melody is continued by woodwinds, concludes with alternation between woodwinds and strings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:59</td>
<td>Theme B (in two parts)</td>
<td>(1) A gently rising theme in the clarinets, ( p ), in the tonic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarinet theme is taken over by violins, ( pp ). Sudden crescendo forms a transition to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:14</td>
<td>Variation 1(A)</td>
<td>Theme A, varied, in the tonic, again on the violas and cellos, ( p ), enhanced by a smooth, continuously flowing rhythm, and with long notes from the clarinet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note that Variation 1A contains all the notes of the original Theme A. These notes are printed in black in the example above.)

Again, a conclusion with an alternation between the violins and woodwinds.
BEETHOVEN

40  (21)  3:05  Variation 1(B)
The B theme—clarinet part as well as fanfare part—is presented with a more active accompaniment.
The concluding sustained chords, **pp**, are now accompanied by quick repeated notes in the cellos, and ended by a brighter cadence.

41  (22)  4:11  Variation 2(A)
Theme A, varied, again enhanced by a smooth, flowing rhythm, but twice as fast as the first variation, and with long notes from the woodwinds.
This embellished melody is repeated by the violins, **pp**, in a higher register.

42  (23)  5:12  Central Section
Sudden **pp**, repeated string chords accompany a short, delicate phrase based on Theme A and played by the clarinet, bassoon, and flute in turn.
This blossoms into a woodwind interlude, leading to a return of:

6:12  Brass fanfare from Theme B, **ff**, with timpani rolls, in C major.
A short repeated motive in the strings, **pp**, leads to:
Staccato passage in the woodwinds based on Theme A, but in A♭ minor.
Ascending scales in the flute and strings, crescendo, into:

43  (24)  7:43  Variation 3(A)
Climactic restatement of melody from Theme A by the full orchestra, **ff**.
(Violins play melody, while woodwinds work in imitation with violins.)
The end of the first section of the melody is accompanied by rising scales in the strings and woodwinds.
Once more, a conclusion with an alternation between the violins and the flute.

Coda

44  (25)  8:36  Faster tempo, single bassoon, **p**, plays a passage based on the beginning of Theme A, with comments from a single oboe.
Rising melody in the strings, crescendo.

9:04  The original tempo resumes. Flute and strings, **p**, again play the last section of Theme A, but the violins poignantly extend the final phrase. Cadence in tonic.

9:43  Another variation of the first phrase from Theme A, clarinets, **p**.
First three notes of Theme B (fanfare part), played repeatedly in the low strings, outlining the tonic chord. Gradually builds in intensity and leads to a cadence by the full orchestra, **ff**.

THIRD MOVEMENT

Tempo: Allegro (“Fast”)
Meter: \( \frac{3}{4} \)
Key: C minor
Form: Scherzo and Trio, with transition
Duration: 5:34
The third movement is quite remarkable. It is in the form of a scherzo and trio. Structurally, this is the same thing as a minuet and trio, but a scherzo is usually much faster and more vigorous than a minuet. In this case, there are also some striking changes in the traditional structure. The movement begins hesitantly, but suddenly the horns come blasting in with a repeated-note figure that is taken up by the whole orchestra:

```
\begin{music}
  %#f \begin{fermata} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \\end{fermata}
\end{music}
```

The figure sounds familiar, and we recognize that it combines two features from the first movement: the opening short-short-short-LONG motive and the horn call in the middle of the exposition. In the trio section, a low, scurrying passage on cellos and basses is taken up in turns by other instruments in an imitative section that has the quality of an informal fugue.

At the return of the scherzo, the main surprises begin. Instead of repeating the scherzo music literally, Beethoven changes the atmosphere entirely. The music is played very quietly by plucked strings and soft woodwinds. The whole effect is mysterious, hushed, and a little ominous.

Also, instead of ending the movement after the return of the scherzo, Beethoven adds a transitional passage that continues the atmosphere of mystery, hesitancy, and questioning. Gradually the hesitant fragments take on more and more motion and get louder and louder until they build to a tremendous climax leading directly into the fourth movement.

**CD TIME LISTEN FOR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scherzo</th>
<th>[with several internal repetitions of phrases, but no overall repeats]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>45 (24) 0:00</strong></td>
<td>Short rising unison melody in cellos and basses, unaccompanied, \textit{pp}, in the tonic (C minor).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Cellos, Basses** | \begin{music}
  \begin{fermata} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \\end{fermata}
\end{music} |
| **Strings and woodwinds conclude the phrase. Pause.** |
| **0:08** | Cellos and basses repeat and extend their melody, Same concluding phrase in the woodwinds and strings. |
| **0:19** | Sudden \textit{ff}, horns state a powerful repeated-note melody based on the opening short-short-short-LONG pattern from the first movement. |
| **Horns** | \begin{music}
  \begin{fermata} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \harmonic{F} \\end{fermata}
\end{music} |
| **This repeated-note melody is developed by the strings and winds, changing key, \textit{f}.** |
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The first melody is restated by the cellos and basses and answered by strings and woodwinds. Pause. This is resumed and developed. It intensifies, changing keys rapidly, and leads to:

- 0:37

The repeated-note melody in the tonic, played by the full orchestra, \( f \).

Volume decreases, dialogue between strings and woodwinds, \( p \).

- 0:59

A sprightly, graceful theme in the violins, \( p \), accompanied by offbeat chords in the woodwinds.

- 1:29

The scherzo concludes with cadence chords in the short-short-short-LONG rhythm.

Trio

- 1:47

Trio Section A

Scurrying melody, unaccompanied, in the cellos and basses; in C major, \( f \).

Cellos, Basses

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{f} \\
- & \text{This develops in the style of a fugue and quickly comes to a cadence.}
\end{align*}
\]

- 2:01

Trio Section A (exact repeat)

- 2:16

Trio Section B

After a couple of humorous false starts, the fuguelike theme continues, \( f \), accompanied by a syncopated, leaping melody in the woodwinds. As the sound builds, a portion of the “fugue” theme is stated by the full orchestra, leading to a cadence.

- 2:42

Trio Section B (altered)

The section begins again, but now the music dwindles down from the winds to a pizzicato melody in the cellos and basses, leading to a return of the scherzo.

Return of Scherzo

- 3:11

The original minor melody returns, \( pp \), but the answering phrase is stated by winds alone. Pause.

The repeat of the melody is played by bassoons and pizzicato cellos and is answered by pizzicato strings. Pause.

- 3:30

The powerful horn melody appears, eerily and \( pp \), on pizzicato strings with occasional wind comments.

Both themes are again combined and developed (the \( pp \) continues).

The sprightly theme returns, \( pp \), and without its former bouncing character.

Cadence chords, \( pp \), in the short-short-short-LONG rhythm, end the scherzo but also begin the next surprising passage.

Transition to Last Movement

- 4:17

A low sustained string tone, \( ppp \), accompanies ominous repeated notes in the timpani, \( pp \).
A violin melody, *pp*, based on the opening of the scherzo, is added to this suspenseful moment. As the melody rises in pitch, it changes from minor to major. There is a rapid crescendo on a sustained chord, leading without pause into the fourth movement.

### FOURTH MOVEMENT

Orchestration: 3 trombones, a piccolo, and a contrabassoon are added to the orchestra for this movement.

- Tempo: *Allegro* ("Fast")
- Meter: \( \frac{3}{4} \)
- Key: C major
- Form: Sonata
- Duration: 11:27

The fourth movement is the triumphant conclusion to the symphony. It is in the bright and forceful key of C major, and Beethoven now adds to the orchestra three powerful trombones, a deep, rich contrabassoon, and a high-flying piccolo. The overall atmosphere is one of triumph, glory, and exhilaration.

The movement is in sonata form. The exposition positively overflows with themes; there are four in all (two for each key area), each one bright and optimistic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="ff" alt="Theme 1" /></td>
<td><img src="ff" alt="Theme 2" /></td>
<td>![Theme 3](ff, p)</td>
<td>![Theme 4](fp, fp, fp)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The development section concentrates on the third of these themes, which is tossed about in fragments among the instruments of the orchestra. We cannot help noticing that one pervasive fragment is very much like the opening short-short-short-LONG motive of the whole symphony.
The development section builds up to a huge climax, and then suddenly Beethoven pulls off another amazing surprise. Between the end of the development section and the beginning of the recapitulation, Beethoven places a brief reminiscence of the music from the scherzo. This, too, is most unusual. It is as though Beethoven is remembering the past in the midst of his triumph. But the hesitancy and doubt are swept away by the blaze of the orchestra.

The movement ends with one of the longest codas Beethoven ever wrote. It is forceful and definitive. Often it seems as though the music will end, only to get faster and faster and come to a cadence yet again and again. It is as though Beethoven cannot stop emphasizing his feeling of triumph.

**CD TIME LISTEN FOR**

**Exposition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CD</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>LISTEN FOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>Theme 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Electrifying marchlike melody, full orchestra, <strong>ff</strong>, with especially prominent trumpets. The first three notes spell out the tonic chord of C major.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0:14</td>
<td>The rising staccato notes of the end of the melody are developed at length, with full orchestration, <strong>ff</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0:29</td>
<td>A descending scalar melody with off-the-beat accents leads to the transition theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>0:34</td>
<td>Transition Theme (Theme 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0:45</td>
<td>Transition Theme is extended by the violins, leading to a quick dialogue between woodwinds, violins, and low strings, and then:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:00</td>
<td>Theme 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0:45</td>
<td>A light, bouncing melody in the violins (dominant key, G major) with the short-short-short-LONG rhythm, incorporating triplets, contrasts of loud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and soft, and a countermelody (colored notes in the example) that becomes important in the development section.

A frantic, \( ff \), scalar passage in the strings, and two loud staccato chords, herald the entrance of:

54  (35)  
1:25  
Closing Theme (Theme 4)

(3:18)  Theme 4, heard first in the strings and woodwinds:

55  (36)  
(Repeat of Exposition)

Development  [wide mix of keys]

56  (37)  
3:48  
A long section concentrating on the recombination of the triplet motives of Theme 3, eventually accompanied by slowly ascending flute scales.

4:00  Theme 3’s countermelody is now put in the spotlight, first by the lower strings and contrabassoon, then by the powerful new trombones, then by the strings and trombones in imitation, and finally by the full orchestra.

4:49  A long, gigantic climax leads to a real surprise: We hear the short-short-short-LONG horn melody of the scherzo, \( pp \), but on strings, clarinets, and oboes.

This reminiscence is swept away by a crescendo and the recapitulation.

Recapitulation

57  (38)  
5:52  
Theme 1  
The marchlike melody is again stated in the full orchestra, \( ff \). Once again, the staccato notes at the end of the melody are developed at length, and descending scales lead into the Transition Theme.

6:26  Transition Theme (Theme 2)  
Theme 2 is stated in the horns and continued at length by the violins, as in the exposition.
Beethoven’s Late Music

Beethoven’s late music presents great challenges to performers and listeners alike. Certainly, the music is technically difficult to play, yet the true challenge comes in the understanding. The performer has to understand the music in order to play it, and the listener has to be up to the challenge as well.

There is great variety in the late works of Beethoven, but they share some characteristics: a combination of inner depth and outward simplicity; new approaches to multi-movement design; and a return to some of the techniques of his youth, such as song forms and theme and variations form.

To gain some idea of the variety and depth of this music, we will listen to a piano sonata, one of the last three that Beethoven wrote. Remember that of all the instruments, the piano was closest to Beethoven’s heart. These last three piano sonatas contain some of the most profound music that Beethoven ever wrote.
LISTENING GUIDE

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Third Movement from Piano Sonata
in E Major, Op. 109

Date of composition: 1820
Tempo: *Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo* ("Quite slow, very lyrical and expressive")
Meter: \( \frac{3}{4} \)
Key: E major
Duration: 13:34

This is the last movement of one of the last of Beethoven’s piano sonatas, written just seven years before his death. It shows the remarkable freedom Beethoven felt in his compositions toward the end of his life. The sonata is completely untraditional in the form of each movement and in the order of its movements. The music contains abrupt changes of mood and ideas, as though the great composer were improvising at the keyboard. The whole composition transcends the accepted boundaries for the piano sonata genre, both in its architecture and in its emotional depth.

The three movements are *Vivace* ("Lively"), *Prestissimo* ("Very fast"), and *Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo* ("Quite slow, very lyrical, and expressive"). Already this is a radical break from the traditional arrangement of movements, which normally would be fast-slow-minuet-fast. But Beethoven makes even more radical departures from convention in this work. The first movement (*Vivace*—"Lively") is interrupted twice by sections that are labeled *Adagio espressivo* ("Very slow..."
and expressive”), and the last movement has, in addition to the detailed Italian tempo marking, a heading in German: Gesangvoll mit innigster Empfindung (“Songlike and with the innermost feeling”). Beethoven is using every means at his disposal to invest his music (and its performance) with strong emotion.

Third Movement

Gesangvoll mit innigster Empfindung (“Songlike and with the innermost feeling”).

Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo (“Quite slow, very lyrical, and expressive”).

Toward the end of his life, Beethoven returned to some of the simple techniques of his youth. The third movement is in the form of a theme and variations (the same form as the piano piece we studied earlier in this chapter). But the spirituality and depth of feeling of this music belong exclusively to this late period. In scope, the movement dwarfs the preceding two. It lasts more than fifteen minutes, twice the length of the previous movements put together. The theme has the remarkable combination of simplicity and profound feeling that is characteristic of Beethoven’s late music. It is like a song of the soul. There are six variations that seem to explore the rich inner life of the theme and all its potential.

The theme is originally presented in two sections, both repeated. Each section is eight measures long, divided into two four-measure phrases. Some of the variations follow the scheme of the theme, with two sections, both repeated. But in some of the variations, the “repeats” of the sections are not really repeats but continue the process of evolution and further variation. Technically, these are known as “double variations.” By 1820, Beethoven had composed more than sixty sets of variations, but with Opus 109 he invests the form with a completely new feeling of transfiguration, almost of ecstasy.

The first variation (again Beethoven marks the music Molto espressivo—“Very expressive”) explores the lyrical, dreamy side of the theme with wider-ranging music and rich harmonies. In the other variations, the character of the music changes, becoming faster and denser, and the outline of the theme itself becomes progressively more obscured, as its inner essence is revealed. But after the sixth and final variation, the theme returns even more simply than at its very first appearance. This final return of the theme (without repeats) is deeply moving. It sounds radiant and centered, as though it has been purified by the fire and passion of its experiences.

CD TIME LISTEN FOR
Theme (dignified, profound)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Listen For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>First section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:35</td>
<td>Repeat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>Second section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:46</td>
<td>Repeat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variation 1 (higher, more decorated, more rhythmic motion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Listen For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:13</td>
<td>First section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:43</td>
<td>Repeat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:22</td>
<td>Second section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:52</td>
<td>Repeat.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 8

Variation 2  [a double variation: lightly delicate, beginning with repeated notes, steady rhythm, and trills, and opening out to syncopated chords]

4:25  First section: light and delicate.

4:49  “Repeat” is varied again. First four-measure phrase: steady rhythm, gradually climbing. Second phrase: alternating syncopated chords.

5:15  Second section: light and delicate again.

5:39  “Repeat” continues the variation, also starting with steady phrases and ending with alternating chords.

Variation 3  [another double variation: lighthearted in tone; fast, louder, and in duple meter]

6:07  First section: staccato eighth notes ascending in right hand, descending sixteenths in left. Switch after four measures.

6:13  “Repeat” with increasing motion.

6:19  Second section: still fast, runs continuously into and through the “repeat.”

Variation 4  [slower than the theme, two-part counterpoint, in 2/4 meter]

6:32  First section: gentle, contemplative.

7:06  Literal repeat this time.

7:41  Second section: louder and more determined in the middle.

8:19  Repeat.

Variation 5  [another double variation: complex four-part counterpoint, duple meter]

9:02  First section: loud and determined, fast.

9:13  “Repeat,” elaborated.

9:23  Second section: higher, still loud.

9:33  Elaborated “repeat.”

9:43  Extra repeat, quiet.

Variation 6  [This is extraordinary music. Back to 3/4. Another double variation—really a quadruple one!]

9:56  First section. The motion increases from quarter notes to eighths, to triplet eighths, to sixteenths.

10:30  “Repeat”—ever-increasing motion: thirty-second notes, and finally trills!

10:58  Second section: cascades of broken chords, rushing passagework, over a deep trilled bass note.
**BEETHOVEN**

| 11:23  | In the “repeat,” with the trill now *above* the rushing scales, the theme tolls out, syncopated, in the highest reaches of the piano. |
| 11:46  | An added three measures of brilliantly gauged descent (both in pitch and in intensity), leading to: |

**Return of Theme**

[magically peaceful return to theme, even simpler than at first, and without any repeats]

| 12:09  | First section. |
| 12:45  | Second section. |

This ending, with its return to purified simplicity, has much the same quality as the close of Milton’s great poem *Samson Agonistes*, which speaks of God:

> His servants he with new acquist  
> Of true experience from this great event,  
> With peace and consolation hath dismiss’d,  
> And calm of mind, all passion spent.