

Beethoven Symphony 5

1st Movement

Tempo. Beethoven's tempo marking from 1817 (9 years after the first performance) is of minim = 108. In recorded performances many conductors go for about 88-94. Boulez manages to be as slow as 74. As far as I am aware nobody has gone faster than 108! I think that the problem is an equation of the power and depth of Beethoven's C minor with breadth of tempo. But what is so special about this movement is the combination of the power and the depth with the relentless, almost hypnotic, one-in-a-bar swiftness. Reasons for ignoring Beethoven's tempo marks are rather passé, but for some general comments on tempo please see the [Rough Guide](#).

1. 1st Movement: Bars 1-5

Whilst it seems reasonable to discuss whether this musical germ can be played slower and/or with a rit later in the movement, undoubtedly this opening is intended to be played in tempo. Some have argued that the very presence of the pauses implies a rit. This is obvious nonsense as shown by the opening of the 3rd movement where Beethoven carefully writes a one bar poco ritardando before the pause - in other words, he could write things like that when he wanted them. Whose piece of music are we trying to play here? Beethoven's? I'm not suggesting for a moment that tempo fluctuations not written in a score are wrong, but rather that the (often excessive) treatment of this all-important opening can give it a wholly different character to what it appears that Beethoven intended. If you want to do big rits and pauses then go ahead, it might be really effective, but please realise that (IMHO ... or sometimes not-so-humble!) it's probably not what Beethoven intended.



2. 1st Movement: Bars 1-10

The length of the phrases that Beethoven writes is crucial in performance. There are a number of possibilities for which I would recommend the discussion in Gunter Schuller's *The Compleat Conductor*, pp.109ff. Suffice to say that this feels right and works well in simple 4 bar patterns. Note two things: firstly that the first bar must have an upbeat feel, and secondly that bar 4 is an extra bar, simply inserted to ensure the second pause is longer than the first. This logic applies well to the whole movement.

4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

3. 1st Movement: Bars 63-66

Before I'd ever seen a score of this I thought the rhythm was as in the top stave (the second stave is the original)! That's often how it sounds. We need to recognise that slurs in the early 19th century imply phrasing every bit as much as bowing/breathing, and that the C-Bb is an appoggiatura resolving. In other words there needs to be the tiniest of articulations between the two Cs to allow the C to have a clear beginning and be slightly louder than the Bb resolution.



4. 1st Movement: Bars 380-391

Beethoven loves throwing in an extra bar to the phrasing structure at climactic moments. Here we have a usual 4 bar phrase followed by a 5 bar phrase and then we're back to 4s again. This explains why, in rehearsal at least, someone often comes in a bar early after the 5 bar phrase - if this orchestra knows about the phrase lengths it might help prevent it from happening!



5. 1st Movement: Bars 423ff

Heavily accenting on the first note of each slur plus a shortened second note is required here.



6. 2nd Movement

The short extract below strongly suggests to me that Beethoven intends the final two notes of bar one in the lower part to be tripletised. The notation to write it as such didn't yet exist! However, if that is correct one has opened a can of worms as there are many places where the same logic could be applied. Norman del Mar says that figures like the prevalent dotted semiquaver - demisemiquaver - dotted crotchet would be 'woefully softened' if tripletised. I think, rather, that that is a problem with his chosen tempo of quaver 72. At Beethoven's quaver 92 the effect will be a gentle rather than woeful softening. Tripletising plus Beethoven's tempo will produce (especially in the opening melody) the desired effect of escape from the brutal questions raised by the first movement. Suffice it to say that this is not a problem with a simple answer, and I believe each case within the movement needs taking on its own merit.



7. 2nd Movement: Bars 10-15

A subito change from piano to forte happens a lot in this movement (also from forte to piano), and needs handling without a crescendo. Also the slurs in the 3rd and 4th bars demand a gentle lean on each quaver.



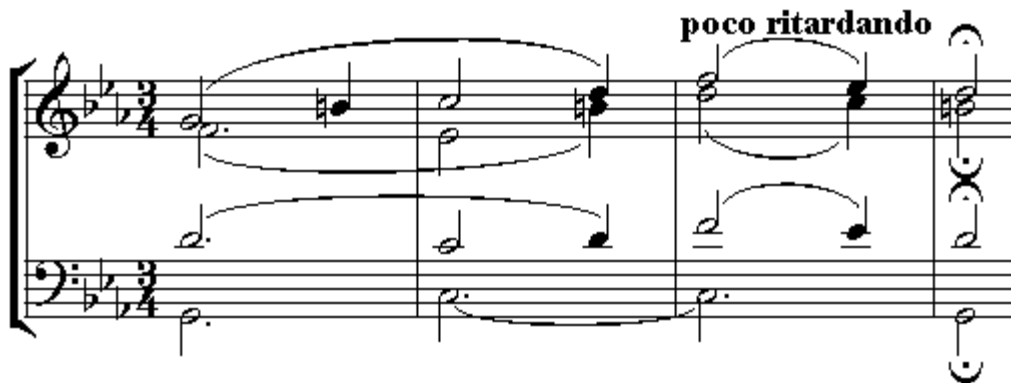
8. 2nd Movement: Bars 243-7

The violins end the movement with a series of multiple stopped chords. Undoubtedly the practice of the day was for everyone to play all the notes, and not the common 20th century practice of divisi (the chords are, after all, not difficult to play). The player therefore arpeggiates each chord (with the bottom note on the beat).



9. 3rd Movement: Bars 5-8

Beethoven writes the ritardando over one bar only. And it's just poco (a little). Most performances stager to a halt at each of these pauses. Why?



10. 3rd Movement: Bars 25-27

This wonderful horn tune is derived in part from the rhythm of the first movement germ. And this is even more clearly so because the phrase structure here means that (again) we start on a weak bar. I prefer to think of this movement in pairs of bars, but of course groups of 4 are also possible.



11. 3rd Movement: 370ff

There is no tempo relationship between this movement and the next. Also there is no need to slow down before the Allegro - how many times I've played one of the violin parts here and the string quavers have not been together because of a pull-up. The tempo simply changes bang on the start of the Allegro. Also, notice the wonderful effect that the pedal note C has during the last 4 bars of the scherzo, pulling us into the blaze of sunshine in C major. In fact this pedal C has been going on for 46 more bars before this excerpt!



4th Movement

It's interesting to note that Beethoven seemed to consider what we would call the 3rd and 4th movements as one entity, because when there is a reprise of the scherzo material (a very unusual thing to do, note) he writes Tempo I which is manifestly not talking of the tempo of the Allegro.

Also it's worth pointing out that this is almost the first usage of trombones in a symphony (there's one obscure earlier example). As well as the trombones the piccolo and contrabassoon play for the first time in the symphony at this point.

12. 4th Movement: Bars 44-47

Here we get some piano interjections. What a relief - we've just had a relentless 46 bars of fortissimo!

A musical score for four staves (Violin I, Violin II, Viola/Vic, and Bass) covering bars 44-47. The music is in 3/4 time. The first two staves (Violin I and II) feature a melodic line with triplets and dynamic markings of *ff* and *p*. The third staff (Viola/Vic) has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes with triplets. The fourth staff (Bass) has a bass line with triplets and dynamic markings of *ff* and *p*. There are first endings marked with a '1' at the end of the section.

18. 4th Movement: Bars 72f

The piccolo has a very important part. Here's just one example. The orchestra is playing the lower line, the piccolo alone interjecting the scampering top line. The piccolo must be heard!

A musical score for two staves (Piccolo and Violin I) covering bars 72f. The Piccolo staff has a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *f*. The Violin I staff has a lower line with a dynamic marking of *f*. The music is in 3/4 time.

19. 4th Movement: Bars 353-362

Here is the start of the final Presto. If we are roughly following Beethoven's tempo markings then we have to accelerate from minim 84 to semibreve 112 over the preceding 9 bars - i.e. it is not far off three times the speed of the Allegro!

A musical score for one staff (Violin I) showing the start of the final Presto. The tempo marking is **Presto**. The music is in 3/4 time and starts with a dynamic marking of *fp*. The melodic line is rapid and features a first ending marked with a '1'.