

## The Arts: Beethoven's Symphony No. 5

By D. H. Coop

The appreciation of the arts is more than just looking at or listening to something. Looking and listening are enjoyable if one likes a piece and is made to feel something. Appreciation comes with the understanding of the making and construction of a work of art. For example, Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 is probably the most famous piece of classical music. Yet how was it constructed?

The theme of the piece is the four notes everyone is familiar with: three G's and E flat—"Ta, ta, ta, taaa." These four notes are followed by 500 measures of notes, with the melody taking one on a continuity of form or on a journey based on those four notes.

The first movement of the piece went through 14 versions of the melody over an eight-year period before Beethoven settled on the final melody in 1808. The melody follows the theme with 12 instruments in the piece, which are the flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, timpani, violin, second violin, trombone, violoncello and the double bassoon. The flute, oboe, bassoon horn, trumpet and timpani are removed from the first notes of the melody to give a more masculine sound to the opening. The other instruments are brought in to build a harmonic rhythmic sound of the journey that Beethoven takes one on.

The first time the piece was played, the orchestra had rehearsed just once. During this first playing, the music was stopped to pick up the mistakes. The review was not good. However, in time, the piece became the center of classical music perfection, with debate on the meaning of the first four notes.

### Ta, Ta, Ta, Taaa...

Beethoven was believed to have said it was "fate knocking on the door." Others in the romantic period said that it was the song of a songbird in the forest, and others that the trumpets were announcing Judgment Day. Later, during the Second World War, the BBC used the Fifth Symphony at the beginning of a broadcast to signal that a message was coming for the Underground in German-occupied Europe. The four notes—three short and one long—also represented the letter *v* in Morse code: *v* for *victory*.

One final note is that Beethoven was most likely more than 60 percent deaf when he wrote this beautiful piece of art. One can wonder if his head just filled with musical notes. There is a 1994 film titled *Immortal Beloved* that tried to show the workings in Beethoven's mind when writing music. The film is centered on the "Ode to Joy" and shows that the music is a journey.

