

**Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68, “Pastorale”
– Ludwig van Beethoven**

Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

The work was premiered on December 22, 1808, at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, with the composer conducting. It is scored for pairs of woodwinds with added piccolo, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, and strings.

Ludwig van Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony represents a different side of Romanticism than any of his other symphonies. The early Romantic poets, most notably Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, found a spiritual quality in nature and felt that mankind could experience happiness by reflecting upon the volatility and beauty of the natural world. Beethoven found Eichendorff’s speculation to be true, as he took many long walks around the parks and gardens of Vienna in order to clear his mind.

When he composed the Pastoral Symphony in 1808, Beethoven had many troubles that must have demanded especially long walks. His hearing continued to decline and Beethoven understood, even at the relatively young age of thirty-eight, that his eventual deafness was inevitable. To complicate matters, the political climate of Vienna was quite precarious, as the city had been occupied by Napoleon’s troops since November of 1805. Because of this, Beethoven occasionally left the city to find solace, sometimes traveling to Budapest or to his favorite resort town of Heiligenstadt.

Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony is unique in his output, but is an example of a common genre called a “characteristic” symphony. One of the most famous examples of this genre is the series of six symphonies composed in 1785 by Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf based on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Each of the six works depicts an episode from Ovid’s book, including “The Transformation of the Lycian Peasants into Frogs” and “The Transformation of Acteon into a Stag.” Beethoven likely found inspiration in Justin Heinrich Knecht’s *Le Portrait musical de la nature* – a 1785 symphony that bears similar movement titles to Beethoven’s work.

Composed at the same time as the legendary Fifth Symphony, the Pastoral represents the emotional complement to that stormy and tense masterpiece. Instead, the Sixth is bucolic and placid. Although there is a fierce thunderstorm depicted within the work, it is a fleeting show of nature’s power and dominion over mankind, and the celebratory atmosphere resumes after the dark clouds dissipate. Beethoven’s complete title of the piece at its premiere was “Pastoral Symphony, Recollections of Country Life, More an Expression of Feeling than Painting.” The overall impression of the work is akin to what Beethoven must have felt on his long therapeutic strolls.

The Pastoral Symphony opens with a movement entitled “Awakening of cheerful feelings on arriving in the country,” which is conspicuously lacking the propulsion and storminess that characterize most of Beethoven’s first movements. Inching along at a leisurely pace, the movement is dominated by the principal theme. “Scene by the Brook” is remarkable

in its woodwind quotations of cuckoos, quail, and nightingale calls, while rippling string figurations are descriptive of the flowing brook. The final three movements are played without pause. “Merry Gathering of Country Folk” portrays a rustic festival in which the folk dancing becomes increasingly frenzied until it is interrupted by the “Thunderstorm” as the next movement begins. With timpani providing the thunder and the orchestra portraying blustery wind and lightning strikes, this is one of the most memorable musico-meteorological depictions of a storm in history. As the weather clears, Beethoven’s finale begins with the translucent sound of the clarinet. “Shepherd’s Song, glad and grateful feelings after the storm” builds gradually as Beethoven’s hymn to the simple beauty of rural life comes to a poignant conclusion.

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92
– Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna, Austria

This work was first performed on December 8, 1813, in the Hall of the University of Vienna. It is scored for pairs of woodwinds, horns, and trumpets, with timpani and strings.

Ludwig van Beethoven’s works are grouped into three periods. The Early Period ends about 1802 and includes the works from his hometown of Bonn, where Beethoven lived until 1792, and all of his music from his first decade in Vienna (1792-1802). Music from the Early Period is largely classical in structure – much like the later works of Haydn and Mozart. The Heroic Period (1802-1812) includes most of his symphonies, all of the concerti, and his opera *Fidelio*. This music features bold contrasts and often deals with revolutionary subjects. Largely coinciding with his thirties, this is the period that saw Beethoven’s reputation grow and his hearing almost completely disappear. The Late Period (1812-1827) produced fewer works, but the ones Beethoven did compose were of the most profound nature and were often misunderstood by his public. Perhaps most notable of these were the *Missa Solemnis* and the *Ninth Symphony*. Beethoven faced many personal demons in the Late Period, especially his long battle to gain guardianship of his nephew and his increasingly reclusive lifestyle.

The nine symphonies of Beethoven are for many the cornerstone of the Western symphonic tradition. Written three full years after the *Pastoral Symphony*, the *Symphony No. 7*, composed in 1811-12, is one of the last major works of the Heroic Period. Its premiere took place on December 8, 1813, at a benefit concert for Austrian and Bavarian soldiers wounded in the Battle of Hanau while fighting against Napoleon. Interestingly, the *Symphony No. 7* received a less enthusiastic ovation at its premiere than did another work on the program – Beethoven’s *Battle Symphony Wellington’s Victory*, a work revived only occasionally today as a historical curiosity. The *Seventh Symphony* is now universally regarded as one of Beethoven’s most significant works.

This symphony is in four movements, beginning with a slow introduction. The opening is quite extensive, with a famous oboe solo and an extended transition to the quicker main section of the movement. Beethoven, showing one of his trademark gestures, sets up anticipation for the fast section ten measures before it actually occurs. When it finally arrives, the lively theme, featuring sprightly dotted rhythms, is presented by the flute and oboe. The slow dirge-like beginning of the second movement, set in variation form, begins with one of Beethoven's most skillful gestures. The listener struggles to find the melody, but it is elusive. The repeated monotone acts as a kind of anti-melody. The result is one of the most electrifying moments in Beethoven's output. The Scherzo, marked *Presto*, is an example of the composer's fondness for unsophisticated humor, with its lumbering opening theme contrasting with the response in the high woodwinds. There are abrupt shifts in the harmony that add an almost boorish effect. An elegant trio interrupts the festivities, only to be overpowered by a return of the main theme of the Scherzo. The finale uses a traditional sonata form with a coda, but is progressive in its shifting of emphasis to the second beat of the measure to end the symphony with an overwhelming burst of energy.

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