

# SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

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Francesco Lecce-Chong, Music Director  
Resident Orchestra, Green Music Center

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

# Road to 100: The Complete Beethoven Symphonies, Year 2

June 1, 2025

Program Notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 36



**COMPOSER:** Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany; died March 26, 1827, Vienna

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1802

**WORK PREMIERED:** Beethoven conducted the premiere during Holy Week, on April 5, 1803, in Vienna.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 34 minutes

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

Lovers of Ludwig van Beethoven's music associate the word "heroic" with his Third Symphony, nicknamed "Eroica." But Beethoven's lesser-known Second Symphony displays a personal heroism: the strength and determination of its composer. Beethoven brought this exuberant symphony to life while battling depression and thoughts of suicide.

Upon the advice of his doctor, Beethoven spent six months in the summer and fall of 1802 in Heiligenstadt, a village outside Vienna. Beethoven's doctor believed the quiet life of the village and surrounding countryside would spare Beethoven's hearing, which was rapidly deteriorating. Unfortunately, this enforced isolation plunged Beethoven into even greater despair, as he realized his hearing might never improve. On October 6, 1802, unable to contain his anguish any longer, Beethoven wrote a letter, known today as the Heiligenstadt Testament, to his brothers Carl and Johann:

"... For six years now I have been hopelessly afflicted, made worse by senseless physicians, from year to year deceived with hopes of improvement, finally compelled to face the prospect of a *lasting malady* (whose cure will take years or, perhaps, be impossible) ... If at times I tried to forget all this, oh how harshly was I flung back by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing. Yet it was impossible for me to say to people, 'Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf.' Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the *one sense* that ought to be more perfect in me than in others? ... If I approach near to people a hot terror seizes upon me, and I fear being exposed to the danger that my condition might be noticed ... Such incidents drove me almost to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life — it was only *my art* that held me back. It seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt was within me."

Beethoven never sent the letter, which was discovered in his papers after his death in 1827.

The massive slow introduction to the first movement transitions in an instant to an intensely vibrant and almost aggressively cheerful Allegro, as if Beethoven were determined to shake off his dark state of mind. In the Larghetto, Beethoven treats the audience to a series of expressive melodies. The serenity in this music captures the beauty of the Viennese countryside and Beethoven's abiding love of nature. The offbeat rhythms, fragmented melodies, surprises and humor of the Scherzo and its accompanying trio might have scandalized the Viennese audiences of Beethoven's time, while today's listeners know them as some of Beethoven's most characteristic musical signatures. The sassy opening gesture of the Allegro molto, which serves as the thematic basis for the whole movement, is almost shockingly insolent, perhaps a reflection of Beethoven's rebellion against his deafness. The surge of energy generated by this movement suggests a defiant reaffirmation of will, a determination to continue to "produce all that I felt was within me."

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

### Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Opus 67



**COMPOSER:** Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany; died March 26, 1827, Vienna  
**WORK COMPOSED:** 1804-1808, commissioned by Count Franz von Oppersdorff for 500 florins. Beethoven eventually dedicated the Fifth to Prince Franz Joseph Lobkowitz and Count Andreas Kyrillovitsch Razumovsky.

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Beethoven conducted the premiere on December 22, 1808, in a subscription concert that also included his Sixth Symphony and the Piano Concerto No. 4, in the Theater-an-der-Wien.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 36 minutes

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

*"This symphony invariably wields its power over men of every age like those great phenomena of nature ...[it] ... will be heard in future centuries, as long as music and the world exist."*

*– Robert Schumann on Beethoven's Fifth Symphony*

Ludwig van Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is arguably one of the most iconic pieces of classical music ever composed, as well as one of the most iconoclastic. It has also come to represent the very essence of classical music itself. Music lovers know it backwards and forwards, and even those who have never attended an orchestra concert nonetheless recognize the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth, as it is informally known, immediately.

Since the Fifth's premiere on a cold December night in Vienna, it has become a lens through which we have viewed music, society, and culture. Early audiences heard in its notes an exhortation of victory and triumph, whether literal or of a more internal, personal kind. As the 19th century progressed, Beethoven's music, particularly the symphonies, became the standard against which every subsequent composer's music was measured. During WWII, the Allies used the famous four-note opening as a signal in radio broadcasts of victory over the Axis powers. The Fifth Symphony also became an unforgettable part of the 1970s with Walter Murphy and the Big Apple Band's disco version, *A Fifth of Beethoven*.

Beethoven supposedly likened the four opening notes to the hand of Fate knocking at the door. In all likelihood, this description was probably fabricated by Anton Schindler, one of Beethoven's early biographers, known both for his poor memory and his penchant for invention. These four notes are the rhythmic seed from which the rest of the symphony develops, and the short da-da-da-DA fragment recurs in each movement as a unifying device. Beethoven, who left few clues as to his compositional process for the Fifth Symphony, did mention the creation of a theme that "begins in my head the working-out in breadth, height, and depth. Since I am aware of what I want, the fundamental idea never leaves me. It mounts, it grows. I see before my mind the picture in its whole extent, as if in a single grasp."

Beethoven conducted the Fifth's premiere as part of a massive all-Beethoven concert that also included the Sixth Symphony and the Piano Concerto No. 4. At the premiere, in addition to the two symphonies and the piano concerto, Beethoven also presented his *Choral Fantasy*, plus the concert aria "Ah, perfido," and the "Gloria" and "Sanctus" sections from his Mass in C major. This four-hour concert challenged the endurance of even the most ardent Beethoven fans. To make matters worse, the orchestra was badly under-rehearsed and the hall spottily heated. Composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who attended

the premiere, later wrote, “There we sat from 6:30 till 10:30, in the most bitter cold, and found by experience that one might have too much even of a good thing.”

The Fifth Symphony generated little comment at its premiere, but 18 months later, composer and critic E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote a lengthy review, which resonates more strongly today than it did 200 years ago. He described the Fifth Symphony as “one of the most important works of the master whose stature as a first-rate instrumental composer probably no one will now dispute ... the instrumental music of Beethoven open[s] the realm of the colossal and the immeasurable for us.”

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