

Beethoven's 5th Symphony (1st Movement)

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Take anybody who has heard of any classical composers at all, and they would almost definitely know the name Beethoven, and if there is any piece of classical symphonic music that is most likely to be recognised immediately it would be the first movement of Beethoven's Symphony No.5 in C minor. So here TG takes the most famous piece of symphonic music by one of the most famous classical composers of all time, and arranges it for the modern day rock guitarist.

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827) is so well known as a great composer and leading figure in classical music that it is easy to think that he has always been part of the musical 'establishment' with an uncontroversial acceptance into the mainstream. However, this is very far from the truth, despite his traditional roots, Beethoven's music was radical and uncompromising, for example his 1st Symphony in C started on a C dominant 7 chord, an unthinkable concept at the time. His constant challenging of the musical status quo, by inventing new structures, his use of expressive melodies, complex harmonies and powerful rhythmic ideas attracted criticism and resistance but ultimately forged a phenomenal musical legacy, which forced the transition of Western Art music from the Classical, to the Romantic era.

Beethoven's influence endures not only because of his extraordinary music, which ranges from relentless driving rhythms to a fragile sensitivity, but also his persona. He was a conflicted and endlessly fascinating individual, and almost everything about him is a contradiction. He was a master of classical music forms but fought against them, at times fiendishly anti-social but also inspired by a philanthropic idealism – his final complete symphony (Symphony No.9 in D minor) includes a triumphant //Ode To A Joy// a rousing call for a global brotherhood of man. Beethoven crafted meticulous compositions over years of hard work but was also able to improvise complete pieces, and although he was filled with a seemingly endless musical imagination he spent his later years tortured by deafness. It is this complex tragic persona that has resonated with so many for almost two centuries, and places him as the rock star of the Classical era, talented, revolutionary, creative, passionate, and troubled in equal measure.

Beethoven's 5th Symphony, composed from 1804-08, is one of the pinnacles of the Classical era and has been performed, recorded, rearranged countless times and has now become an insoluble icon of popular culture. The famous four-note opening motif (made up of only 2 pitches) can be recognised by its rhythm alone, and has been dubbed the //Fate Motif//. These four ominous hits have been said to represent 'Fate knocking at the door'. The suggestion that Beethoven himself described the motif with such profundity is probably apocryphal, and the more likely, but less dramatic, explanation is that he was inspired by the song of a yellow-hammer he heard while on one of his habitual walks. Regardless of its origin, this stark motif with its distinctive rhythm is effective in isolation, but Beethoven's genius is revealed by his ability to use just this small idea to construct not only the first movement, but the entire 4-movement symphony. It acts as a building block – like a musical //Lego// brick – recurring throughout, and integrating the whole symphony lasting well over half an

hour. It is in effect the prototype of the modern-day concept album such as Pink Floyd's //Dark Side Of The Moon// Radiohead's //OK Computer// and Muse's //The Resistance//; a series of works integrated by recurring themes and musical ideas.

The 5th Symphony, and the 1st movement in particular, has become infused in popular culture, appearing in dozens of films and TV such as //The Mentalist// (2011), //Peter Pan// (2003), //Mr. Bean// (2002), //Fantasia 2000// (1999), //The Muppet Show// (1978) //Disturbia// (2007), the 1994 movie dramatization of Beethoven's life //Immortal Beloved// and //Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure// (1990). This latter movie is essential viewing for any electric guitarist, not least to witness Beethoven transported in time to the modern day by two guitar dudes, and let loose on a bank of synthesizers to the music of Extreme. The music has also been significantly reinterpreted in various styles, the 1974 //Saturday Night Fever// hit //A Fifth Of Beethoven// by Walter Murphy and The Big Apple Band uses the melody with a disco groove. This version also appears in the //LittleBigPlanet 2// video game and //Family Guy//, and demonstrates the rhythmic power of the //Fate Motif// even in the comically distant style of 70s Disco.

Perhaps due to the 5th Symphony's dramatic and overt motif, coupled with Beethoven's powerful tragic persona, the piece has become a favourite among electric guitarists. Yngwie Malmsteen, neo-classical virtuoso and champion of many Baroque and Classical works incorporated the melody in his 1985 performance with a remarkable fluency and confidence for a 22-year old. That arrangement had some backing from the band, but it is Danney Alkana's //Beethoven's 5th// (//Rock The Bach// 1999 Four Winds) interpretation with its stately tempo, symphonic accompaniment and backbeat groove, that has formed the blueprint for many subsequent electric guitar versions (many of which may be found on YouTube, but do note that his arrangement is very often mistakenly credited to Steve Vai). The main motifs in Alkana's version are played with a distorted tone with wide vibrato, pinch harmonics and interspersed neo-classical style sweep picking. A recent release by The Great Kat (//Beethoven Shreds// 2011 TPR Music) includes a short arrangement of the tune at a significantly accelerated tempo and is infused with shred heroics and speed-metal accompaniment.

TG's arrangement focuses on the main themes of the piece, reproducing them quite faithfully and provides a rock backbeat with drum and orchestral hits to coordinate with emphatic melodic moments. Although the tempo is a moderate 85bpm, it is still a challenge to play the semiquavers with the rhythmic precision and clarity they require. Much of the piece relies on a secure alternate picking technique with or without palm muting, apart from the C section where a chord-melody approach is taken. Here the attention is on maintaining a smooth melody while allowing the underlying chord tones to ring freely. If you are not switching your amp tone at this point, lighten your attack so there is more clarity than in the other sections, which require a healthy level of distortion. Enjoy, but watch the volume, you wouldn't want to mimic the composer too closely...

Three of a kind: If you like //Beethoven's Fifth Symphony//, try these...

Vivaldi: Spring
Danney Alkana

The //Spring// movement of Vivaldi's //Four Seasons// is another instantly recognisable classical piece and Alkana's amazing lead playing makes this a shred delight.

Bach's Brandenburg Concerto #3

Great Kat

Great Kat provides 100 seconds of utterly mad shred guitar, with multiple lead parts – all played at lightning pace – weaving in and out of each other.

Mozart Symphony No.40

Berliner Philharmoniker

Put down your guitar and check out this symphonic masterpiece from another master of the Classical era (and Beethoven's first teacher), as the composer intended it to be heard.