



# Symphony No. 7 (Beethoven)

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The **Symphony No. 7** in A major, Op. 92, is a symphony in four movements composed by Ludwig van Beethoven between 1811 and 1812, while improving his health in the Bohemian spa town of Teplice. The work is dedicated to Count Moritz von Fries.

At its première, Beethoven was noted as remarking that it was one of his best works. The second movement, *Allegretto*, was the most popular movement and had to be encored. The instant popularity of the *Allegretto* resulted in its frequent performance separate from the complete symphony.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Premiere

The work was premiered with Beethoven himself conducting in Vienna on 8 December 1813 at a charity concert for soldiers wounded in the Battle of Hanau. In Beethoven's address to the participants, the motives are openly named: "We are moved by nothing but pure patriotism and the joyful sacrifice of our powers for those who have sacrificed so much for us."<sup>[2]</sup>

The program also included the patriotic work *Wellington's Victory*, exalting the victory of the British over Napoleon's France. The orchestra was led by Beethoven's friend Ignaz Schuppanzigh and included some of the finest musicians of the day: violinist Louis Spohr,<sup>[3]</sup> composers Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Giacomo Meyerbeer and Antonio Salieri,<sup>[4]</sup> bassoonist Anton Romberg, and the Italian double bass virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti, whom Beethoven described as playing "with great fire and expressive power". The Italian guitar virtuoso Mauro Giuliani played cello at the premiere.<sup>[5]</sup>

The piece was very well received, such that the audience demanded the *Allegretto* movement be encored immediately.<sup>[3]</sup> Spohr made particular mention of Beethoven's antics on the rostrum ("as a *sforzando* occurred, he tore his arms with a great vehemence asunder ... at the entrance of a *forte* he jumped in the air"), and "the friends of Beethoven made arrangements for a repetition of the concert" by which "Beethoven was extricated from his pecuniary difficulties".<sup>[6]</sup>

## Instrumentation

### Symphony in A major

No. 7

by Ludwig van Beethoven



Portrait of the composer by Joseph Willibrord Mähler in 1815, two years after the premiere of the symphony

<b>Catalogue</b>	Op. 92
<b>Style</b>	<u>Classical period</u>
<b>Composed</b>	1811–12: <u>Teplice</u>
<b>Dedication</b>	<u>Count Moritz von Fries</u>
<b>Performed</b>	8 December 1813: Vienna
<b>Movements</b>	Four

The symphony is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in A, 2 bassoons, 2 horns in A (E and D in the inner movements), 2 trumpets in D, timpani, and strings.

# Form

The Seventh Symphony is in four movements:

- I. *Poco sostenuto* – *Vivace* (A major)
- II. *Allegretto* (A minor)
- III. *Presto* – *Assai meno presto* (trio) (F major, Trio in D major)
- IV. *Allegro con brio* (A major)

A typical performance time lasts approximately 40 minutes.

The work as a whole is known for its use of rhythmic devices suggestive of a dance, such as dotted rhythm and repeated rhythmic figures. It is also tonally subtle, making use of the tensions between the key centres of A, C and F. For instance, the first movement is in A major but has repeated episodes in C major and F major. In addition, the second movement is in A minor with episodes in A major, and the third movement, a scherzo, is in F major.

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### **I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace**

The first movement starts with a long, expanded introduction marked *Poco sostenuto* (metronome mark: ♩ = 69) that is noted for its long ascending scales and a cascading series of applied dominants that facilitates modulations to C major and F major. From the last episode in F major, the movement transitions to *Vivace* through a series of no fewer than sixty-one repetitions of the note E.

The *Vivace* (♩ = 104) is in sonata form, and is dominated by lively dance-like rhythms (such as dotted rhythms), sudden dynamic changes, and abrupt modulations. In particular, the development section opens in C major and contains extensive episodes in F major. The movement finishes with a long coda, which starts similarly as the development section. The coda contains a famous twenty-bar passage consisting of a two-bar motif repeated ten times to the background a grinding four octave deep pedal point of an E.



## II. Allegretto

The second movement in *A minor* has a tempo marking of *Allegretto* ("a little lively)", making it slow only in comparison to the other three movements. This movement was encored at the premiere and has remained popular since. Its reliance on the string section makes it a good example of Beethoven's advances in orchestral writing for strings, building on the experimental innovations of Haydn.<sup>[7]</sup>

The movement is structured in a double variation form. It begins with the main melody played by the violas and cellos, an ostinato (repeated rhythmic figure, or ground bass, or passacaglia) of a quarter note, two eighth notes and two quarter notes.



This melody is then played by the second violins while the violas and cellos play a second melody, described by George Grove as "a string of beauties hand-in-hand".<sup>[8]</sup> The first violins then take the first melody while the second violins take the second. This progression culminates with the wind section playing the first melody while the first violin plays the second.

	<u>II. Allegretto</u> <div>11:00</div> <hr/> <hr/>
	<u>IV. Allegro con brio</u> <div>10:05</div> <hr/>

Both performed by John Michel

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After this, the music changes from A minor to A major as the clarinets take a calmer melody to the background of light triplets played by the violins. This section ends thirty-seven bars later with a quick descent of the strings on an A minor scale, and the first melody is resumed and elaborated upon in a strict fugato.

### III. *Presto – Assai meno presto*

The third movement is a scherzo in F major and trio in D major. Here, the trio (based on an Austrian pilgrims' hymn<sup>[9]</sup>) is played twice rather than once. This expansion of the usual A–B–A structure of ternary form into A–B–A–B–A was quite common in other works of Beethoven of this period, such as his Fourth Symphony, Pastoral Symphony, and String Quartet Op. 59 No. 2.

### IV. *Allegro con brio*

The last movement is in sonata form. According to Glenn Stanley, Beethoven "exploited the possibility that a string section can realize both angularity and rhythmic contrast if used as an obbligato-like background",<sup>[7]</sup> particularly in the coda, which contains an example, rare in Beethoven's music, of the dynamic marking *fff*.



In his book *Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies*, Sir George Grove wrote, "The force that reigns throughout this movement is literally prodigious, and reminds one of Carlyle's hero Ram Dass, who has 'fire enough in his belly to burn up the entire world.'" Donald Tovey, writing in his *Essays in Musical Analysis*, commented on this movement's "Bacchic fury" and many other writers have commented on its whirling dance-energy: the main theme is a precise duple time variant of the instrumental ritornello in Beethoven's own arrangement of the Irish folk-song "Save me from the grave and wise", No. 8 of his Twelve Irish Folk Songs, WoO 154.

## Reception

Critics and listeners have often felt stirred or inspired by the Seventh Symphony. For instance, one program-note author writes:<sup>[10]</sup>

... the final movement zips along at an irrepressible pace that threatens to sweep the entire orchestra off its feet and around the theater, caught up in the sheer joy of performing one of the most perfect symphonies ever written.

Composer and music author Antony Hopkins says of the symphony:<sup>[11]</sup>

The Seventh Symphony perhaps more than any of the others gives us a feeling of true spontaneity; the notes seem to fly off the page as we are borne along on a floodtide of inspired invention. Beethoven himself spoke of it fondly as "one of my best works". Who are we to dispute his judgment?

Another admirer, Richard Wagner, referring to the lively rhythms which permeate the work, called it the "apotheosis of the dance".<sup>[8]</sup>

On the other hand, admiration for the work has not been universal. Friedrich Wieck, who was present during rehearsals, said that the consensus, among musicians and laymen alike, was that Beethoven must have composed the symphony in a drunken state;<sup>[12]</sup> and the conductor Thomas Beecham commented on the fourth movement: "What can you do with it? It's like a lot of yaks jumping about."<sup>[13]</sup>

The oft-repeated claim that Carl Maria von Weber considered the chromatic bass line in the coda of the first movement evidence that Beethoven was "ripe for the madhouse", seems to have been the invention of Beethoven's first biographer, Anton Schindler. His possessive adulation of Beethoven is well-known, and he was

criticised by his contemporaries for his obsessive attacks on Weber. According to John Warrack, Weber's biographer, Schindler was characteristically evasive when defending Beethoven, and there is "no shred of concrete evidence" that Weber ever made the remark.<sup>[14]</sup>

## References

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### Notes

1. "Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92" (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5481664>) at NPR (13 June 2006)
2. Original German: „Uns alle erfüllt nichts als das reine Gefühl der Vaterlandsliebe und des freudigen Opfers unserer Kräfte für diejenigen, die uns so viel geopfert haben.“ Quoted in: Harry Goldschmidt. *Beethoven. Werkeinführungen*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1975, p. 49.
3. Steinberg, Michael. *The Symphony: A Listeners Guide*. pp. 38–43. Oxford University Press, 1995.
4. Jan Swafford (2014). *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=CoQSBAAQBAJ&pg=PA615>). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. pp. 615–. ISBN 978-0-618-05474-9.
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6. Spohr, Louis (1865). *Autobiography*. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green. pp. 186–187.
7. Stanley, Glenn (11 May 2000). *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven* ([https://books.google.com/books?id=hdGcne8\\_9XcC&pg=PA181](https://books.google.com/books?id=hdGcne8_9XcC&pg=PA181)). Cambridge University Press. pp. 181ff. ISBN 978-0-521-58934-5.
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9. Grove, 228–271
10. Geoff Kuenning. "Beethoven: Symphony No. 7" (<http://www.lasr.cs.ucla.edu/geoff/prognotes/beethoven/symphony7.html>). (personal web page).
11. Hopkins 1981, 219
12. Meltzer, Ken (17 February 2011). "Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Program Notes" (<http://www.atlantasymphony.org/aso/asoassets/pdf/pnote/PN02-17-11.pdf>) (PDF).
13. Bicknell, David (EMI executive). "Sir Thomas Beecham" (<http://www.classicalrecording.org/zbeecham/index.html>).
14. Warrack, John Hamilton (1976). *Carl Maria von Weber* (reprint, revised ed.). CUP Archive. pp. 98–99. ISBN 0521291216.

### Sources

- Hopkins, Antony (1981). *The Nine Symphonies of Beethoven*. London: Heinemann; Seattle: University of Washington Press. ISBN 978-0-295-95823-1. OCLC 6981522 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/6981522>).

## External links

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- Symphony No. 7: Scores at the [International Music Score Library Project](#)
- [Template:MUSEDATA](#)
- Full Score (<http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/akx3424/large/index.html>) of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony
- Introduction by the conductor of a Philadelphia Orchestra performance (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5481664>)

- Aperçu of Apotheosis (<http://www.nwsinfonietta.com/notes3Oct03.htm>), Program notes on the Seventh Symphony by Ron Drummond
  - Program notes (<http://www.laco.org/performances/146/?program=1>) of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra
  - Peter Gutmann (2013). "Classical Notes: Ludwig Van Beethoven Symphony No. 7 in A-major, Op. 92" (<http://www.classicalnotes.net/classics4/beethovenseventh.html>).
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