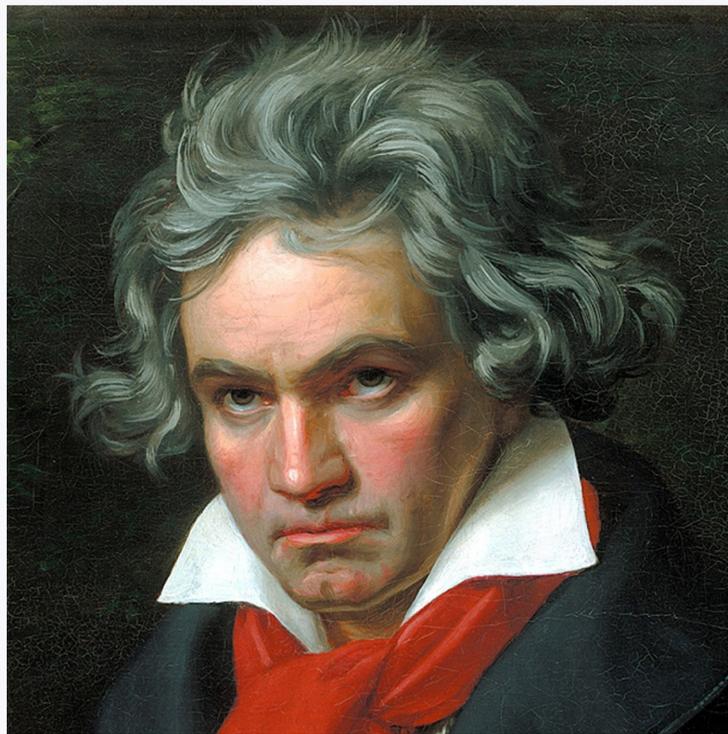




# Classics Concert Insights Lecture

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## BEETHOVEN VIOLIN CONCERTO (1806)



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*“The voice of the violin is the sound of the opening gate of paradise.”* Rumi

## INTRODUCTION:

*“Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, the ‘King of Concertos’, the ne plus ultra of fiddling ambition, occupies a place of such transcendent glory in the musical firmament that its eminence is seldom disputed. It has become customary to accept it as the unparalleled model of concerto construction, the keystone of the violin repertory.”* Lawrence Sommers

Beethoven’s Violin Concerto is the only major Violin Concerto in the current repertoire, composed between Mozart’s five concertos of 1775 and Mendelssohn’s E minor Concerto of 1844.

Yet, after its 1806 premiere, Beethoven’s Violin Concerto fell into obscurity for 38 years, until its re-discovery by a child prodigy violinist in 1844.

## CONCERTO AS A GENRE:

- Definition: Three movement work for solo instrument and orchestra.
- Opera analogy: Orchestra is the chorus, soloist is the diva.
- The balance between orchestra and soloist is paramount to any analysis of concerto.
- Concertos are composed for the following reasons:
  - Composer wishes to display his own skill with the instrument.
  - The work is commissioned by a soloist for him or her to perform.
- In either case, groundbreaking concertos feature novel displays of the range and capabilities of the instrument.

## BEETHOVEN AND THE VIOLIN:

- Beethoven was a pianist. However, as a young man he had studied the violin in Bonn and played as an orchestral violist.
- In the early 1790s Beethoven attempted to write a violin concerto in C minor, but abandoned the work.
- At the turn of the century, he wrote two Romances for violin as well as ten violin sonatas before he wrote the Violin Concerto.

## GENESIS OF THE VIOLIN CONCERTO:

- It was commissioned by violinist Franz Clement (see below).
- Clement was the conductor of Vienna's *Theater an der Wien* (1802-11) when he commissioned Beethoven to write a violin concerto for him.
- Beethoven wrote the piece in cooperation with Clement, and with Clement's skills in mind, "to suit (his) particular neat, elegant and lyrical playing style." (Robin Stowell)
- Clement had written his own violin concerto, also in D major (1804); Beethoven modeled some his after Clement's.
- Beethoven was late in completing the score, only two days before the performance.
- Beethoven placed the following inscription in the score: *Concerto par Clemenza pour Clement, primo Violino e direttore al teatro a vienna Dal L v. Bthvn 1806.*(Concerto with clemency for Clement)
- Referring to this inscription, Donald Tovey says that it is, "a lesson in the correct attitude of a composer towards a player...a vile pun on his 'clemency' toward the poor composer."
- Note that Beethoven did not dedicate the work to Clement, but rather to Stephan von Breuning, a childhood friend.

## FRANZ CLEMENT: (1780-1842)

- A child prodigy on the violin, Clement was also a fine pianist and orchestral conductor.
- His musical memory was legendary. He once prepared a piano score of Haydn's *Creation* by ear.
- Beethoven first heard Clement perform in 1794, when Clement was 14 years old. They became friends and colleagues.
- Clement became a champion of Beethoven's music. He was involved in the original production of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* and was concertmaster in the premiere of the Third Symphony.
- When he commissioned the Violin Concerto, Clement, aged 25, was at the height of his career and at the center of Viennese musical life.
- "Clement's playing (was) graceful and lyrical rather than vigorous." (Robin Stowell)
- At the time the more assertive, virtuosic style of Viotti was becoming more popular in Vienna. "(Clement's)... elegant style was somewhat outmoded." (Robin Stowell)
- "Clement could not play loudly." (Patricia Kopatchniskaja) Therefore the concerto has many *p* & *pp* violin passages.
- Clement premiered the work on December 23, 1806 at the *Theater an der Wien*.
- Clement's career eventually faded. He spent his late life as an itinerant musician, out of touch with the trends of the times.
- Beethoven rejected Clement as concertmaster for his Symphony #9 (1824).
- Clement died in poverty in Vienna, in 1842.

### THE PREMIERE AND ITS AFTERMATH:

- The 1806 premiere at the *Theater an der Wien* also included Beethoven's Eroica symphony, led by Beethoven.
- Clement is thought to have sight-read the score, delivered two days earlier.
- The concerto received mixed reviews.
- After the premiere, Clement continued performing the concerto (1807, 1815, 1833).
- Otherwise, the concerto fell into obscurity (1806-1844).
- Other performances during the period of obscurity: Luigi Tomasini Jun 1812, Baillot 1828, Wiele 1829, Vieuxtemps 1824, Barnbeck 1834, Ulrich 1836, Gulomy 1841.
- The concerto was popularized by another child prodigy, violinist Joseph Joachim.
- Joachim gave an influential concert for the London Philharmonic Society on the 27 May 1844, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn. The 13-year-old virtuoso was making his debut there as a soloist.
- By then musical tastes had changed. The concert was wildly successful and this steered Beethoven's Violin Concerto into the musical repertoire.
- Robin Stowell points out that there were other early champions of Concerto besides Joachim: Eugène Ysaÿe, Carl Flesch and Henry Vieuxtemps.

### WHY THE EARLY NEGLECT:

- The Violin Concerto is not the only Beethoven classic to suffer early neglect. Others include: Mass in D, 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony & the late quartets (nicknamed the "crazy quartets" by some contemporary critics.)
- It was misunderstood in Beethoven's lifetime.
- Many violinists considered it unplayable because of its widespread use of a high register.
- Many also considered it "weak" because of its association with Clement who had the same reputation.
- The hasty premiere performance, because of the late score, did not allow for a convincing performance, resulting in mixed reviews.

### THE PIANO VERSION:

- Upon request from Muzio Clementi, in 1807 Beethoven created a piano version of the Violin Concerto. This included a first movement Cadenza written out by Beethoven.
- *"The concerto enjoyed no great success. When it was repeated the following year it was more favorably received, but Beethoven decided to rewrite it as a piano concerto. As such, however, it was totally ignored. Violinists and pianists alike rejected the work as unrewarding. The violinists even complained that it was unplayable, for they shrank from the frequent use of the upper positions."* (Anton Schindler, Beethoven pupil)

### **CAREER OF BEETHOVEN:**

- VIENNESE PERIOD (1792 -1802) – Classical style; Symphonies # 1 & 2; Piano Concertos # 1-3.
- HEROIC PERIOD (1803-1815) – Romantic style; Symphonies # 3-8; Piano Concertos # 4 & 5; Violin Concerto.
- LATE PERIOD (1820 –1826) – Monumental works; Great Fugue, Symphony #9.

### **THE CLASSICAL DOUBLE-EXPOSITION SONATA FORM:**

- ORCHESTRAL EXPOSITION: Theme I (home key), lyrical Theme II (different key), Closing Section.
- SOLO EXPOSITION: Solo instrument may repeat orchestral themes, usually with embellishment, or present its own themes.
- DEVELOPMENT: Orchestra and solo instrument jointly subject the exposition material to musical variation.
- RECAPITULATION: Themes return, all in home key; orchestra and soloist share the section.
- CADENZA: Soloist plays alone, displaying the capabilities of the instrument and/or player.
- CODA: Concluding music, usually brief.

### **VIOLIN CONCERTO:**

- FIRST MOVEMENT: *Allegro ma non troppo*; D major; Double Exposition; 4/4 time.
- SECOND MOVEMENT: *Larghetto*; G major; Theme & Variations; 4/4 time
- THIRD MOVEMENT: *Rondo, allegro*; D major; Rondo Form; 6/8 time.

### **GENERAL FEATURES OF THE VIOLIN CONCERTO:**

- Adheres to the Classical prescription in its overall plan.
- The first movement however, displays a Romantic Era aesthetic. Beethoven expands its breadth and scope to symphonic proportions.
- It is “*one of the most spacious concertos ever written.*” (Donald Tovey)
- In keeping with Clement’s “*neat, elegant and lyrical*” style, it is not overly virtuosic.
- The solo violin is not a prima donna; it is mostly a commentator or embellisher.
- “*The violin has a leading voice, but it is merely one of the many orchestral voices which make up the whole.*” (Georges Enesco)
- Beethoven scores most thematic passages for woodwinds. This highlights contrast of timbre with the solo violin.
- Beethoven’s frequent use of the high register for the solo violin, allows it to be heard distinct from the string section of the orchestra.

## FIRST MOVEMENT

### ORCHESTRAL EXPOSITION:

- THE TYMPANI MOTIF:
  - The Concerto opens with a most remarkable gesture, five beats on the tympani with a characteristic s-s-s-s-l rhythm.
  - *“The music begins with five soft beats on the kettledrum; how this must have amazed that first audience!”* (Michael Steinberg)
  - NOTE: This Tympani Motif is a unifying element, appearing in melody or accompaniment in more than half of the movement.
  - NOTE: The Tympani Motif imparts a march-like, martial character to what is otherwise a mostly lyrical movement.
- THEME 1 COMPLEX: (D major)
  - A gentle, tranquil melody marked *dolce*, in oboe and clarinet, punctuated by the Tympani Motif.
  - Violins play the Tympani Motif twice, in the oddly distant key of D-sharp. *“Time has blunted the strangeness of those D-sharps.”* (Michael Steinberg)
  - NOTE: These peculiar D-sharps are a preview of a passage that provides a harmonic transition between Theme II and the Closing Theme.
  - A gentle descending passage in strings leads to the Transitional Scale Theme.
- TRANSITIONAL SCALE THEME:
  - Clarinet and bassoon play a rising scale theme, sequenced up three times.
  - NOTE: this Scale Theme is an important feature of the movement and will be greatly elaborated in the Solo Exposition.
  - Music descends in strings.
- MARTIAL OUTBURST:
  - Full orchestra suddenly erupts with a loud, martial gesture, in the distant key of B-flat major.
  - This spawns a loud passage in strings derived from the Tympani Motif.
  - It soon becomes evident that this eruption is there to introduce Theme II.
  - NOTE: This explosive gesture serves an introductory function in the movement. It will introduce Theme II, Development, and Cadenza.
- THEME II:
  - This is the grand, famous melody of the Beethoven Violin Concerto.
  - It is a beautiful, four-square melody, stated twice.
  - Phrase structure: *a-b-a-b'*; *a-b* is an antecedent; *a-b'* is a consequent.
  - It is first stated in D major, by oboe, clarinet and bassoon. The Tympani Motif, in strings, is in steady accompaniment.

- The second statement by the strings, more expansive, is in D minor. This unexpected switch to a minor key reveals a melancholic nature to the otherwise sunny, lyrical theme.
  - NOTE: The Tympani Motif is still there. *“Indeed, as the lyric paragraph expands so astonishingly, the drum rhythm becomes an integral part of the melody itself.”* (Michael Steinberg)
  - The theme ends with a transitional passage of D-sharps playing the Tympani Motif. These allow the harmony to return to the tonic, D-major.
  - NOTES ON THE CHOICE OF KEY AREA:
  - Sonata Form movements in a major key as tonic, usually feature a second theme in the dominant (A major).
  - Beethoven’s unconventional choice of D major- D minor for his grand melody introduces a *“major-minor ambivalence”* (Robin Stowell) that prevails.
  - Beethoven will use the “correct” key, in a manner of speaking, for Theme II in the Solo Exposition.
- CLOSING SECTION: (D major)
- Begins with a slow crescendo in orchestra derived from the Martial Outburst.
  - A noble Closing Theme in strings ends the section. *“The grandest of this great procession of themes.”* (Donald Tovey)
  - It is derived from the first three notes of Theme II, rhythmically altered.
  - The Closing Theme consists of a single phrase stated by first violins and echoed in basses. This is then repeated.
  - The music dies away and gives way to the solo violin.
  - NOTE: Beethoven employs a slick overlap between the orchestra and soloist during this transition as opposed to the *“customary late eighteenth century perfect cadence ‘full-stop’ before the solo entrance.”* (Robin Stowell)
  - The overlap provides a sense of smooth continuity.
  - Beethoven adopted these sorts of overlaps in his later concertos.

#### SOLO EXPOSITION:

- The solo violin enters with a flourish, performing a mini-cadenza that ends in *“a sublime ascent in octaves.”* (Robin Stowell)
- It is finished off by the tympani that provides a codetta, with its 5-beat motif.
- Solo violin embarks upon an ornamented version of Theme I (D major), with wind accompaniment and the ever present Tympani Motif at the end of each phrase.
- *“Soloist and orchestra together (will) work out all the themes seriatim in a remarkable enrichment of the preceding (orchestral exposition).”* (Robin Stowell)
- The D-sharps in first violins reappear, each followed by a rising flourish from the soloist.

- The Transitional Scale Theme is now greatly expanded, initially in clarinet & bassoon, then loud and assertive in *tutti*.
- The solo violin takes it up after the orchestral statements and develops it in a lengthy passage of figurations.
- NOTE: This extended transitional theme is the first big departure from the Orchestral Exposition. The next departure is the notable absence of the Martial Outburst. Instead, the solo violin moves straight into Theme II.
  - Theme II: (A major – A minor) The solo violin introduces Theme II with a trill.
  - Clarinet and bassoon state the first phrase of theme (*a-b*), the antecedent, over a continuing trill by solo violin.
  - The solo violin follows with *a-b'*, the consequent phrase.
  - Upper strings play the minor version of the theme (A minor) in its entirety. Solo violin accompanies with triplet dominated figurations.
  - NOTE: The Tympani Motif, so prevalent in the orchestral version of Theme II is surprisingly absent. The effect is a more lyrical statement.
- The D-sharps played by solo violin and strings come next. The soloist embellishes after each set of D-sharps.
- Some passage-work by soloist, “*Majestic arpeggio figurations punctuated by orchestral strings,*” (Robin Stowell) transitions toward the Closing Section.
- Closing Section:
  - The Closing Theme is subdued, stated first in high strings, echoed by basses.
  - The second statement, even softer, is accompanied by figurations from solo violin.
- Solo violin figurations:
  - The Solo Exposition ends with lengthy passage-work by the soloist, giving the violin its first major extended statement:
  - Scale and arpeggio elaborations lead to a more melodic line accentuated by the Tympani Motif in strings.
  - Violin then engages in a long trill in high register, a gesture that implies the end of a major solo section. This leads to anticipation of a new major orchestral passage.
  - Instead Tympani Motifs appear beneath the trill, followed by a lengthy flourish of ascending and descending scales in solo violin, with a woodwind pedal accompaniment.
  - The harmony shifts to F major.
  - This last gesture is the final transition into development.

## NOTES:

- The Solo Exposition is NOT a more ornamented version of the Orchestral Exposition, as many tended to be in the Classical Era.
- Its major departures from the Orchestral Exposition include:
  - The Transitional Scale Theme is expanded to a mini-development.
  - The Martial Outburst is missing.
  - Theme II comes in the “correct” key (A major), but again features a major-minor juxtaposition.
  - The Closing Section, majestic in the Orchestral Expo, is understated in the Solo Expo, outshined by extended passages of solo violin figurations.
- Beethoven gives the solo violin plenty of “stage time” here, in its first appearance.

## DEVELOPMENT:

## PART I: ORCHESTRAL EXPOSITION RETURNS (?)

Beethoven begins the Development with what sounds like a verbatim repeat of the Orchestral Exposition, sans Theme I. It isn't.

- Martial Outburst in orchestra, fortissimo, in the distant key of F major.
- The energy of the outburst dissipates in a transitional passage in first violins, followed by the Tympani Motif also in first violins.
- Theme II, first version (A major), returns, *dolce*, in oboe & clarinet, with first violins beating the Tympani Motif.
- Theme II, second version (A minor), now comes in fortissimo, tragic and more assertive than its prior versions. Amid the louder noise, the Tympani Motif is also loud in bassoon and brass.
- The D-sharps that followed Theme II are also loud, in orchestral unison.
- An abbreviated Closing Theme follows, also fortissimo, its energy soon dissipating into a transitional passage that parallels that of the Exposition.
- NOTE: Part I is NOT a verbatim repetition of the Orchestral Exposition. The key areas are different, so is some of the orchestration. The Closing Section is abbreviated.
- NOTE: This section is interpreted differently by different scholars:
  - Michael Steinberg considers it part of the Exposition. To him, it is as though there is a “triple exposition.”
  - Robert Greenberg considers it an Orchestral Exposition 2, a varied reprise of Orchestral Exposition 1.
  - Robin Stowell considers it the beginning of Development. So does Peter Jaffe.
  - At this phase of his career Beethoven was experimenting with insertion of Exposition material between the true Exposition and Development. Another example can be found in his Symphony #4 (1807), second movement.

## PART II: SOLO VIOLIN ENTRY MIMICS SOLO EXPOSITION

- Solo violin enters as in the Solo Exposition, with a variation of its mini-cadenza, but in C major.
- It then initiates its version of Theme I (B minor) in high register, *espressivo*, mimicking the Solo Exposition.
- The orchestra accompanies with wind figurations and regularly repeating Tympani Motifs played by the strings.
- “*The entry into this theme – the violin by itself on a high F-natural, then joined by cellos and basses on G, four or five octaves lower – is itself one of the most magical moments in Beethoven.*” (Michael Steinberg)
- The Solo violin’s version of Theme I soon moves into a lengthy developmental extension, “*with Clemetian elegance and lightness*” (Steinberg), taking motives of the theme through various different key areas.
- NOTE: This is when it becomes truly apparent that we are in development.
- The solo violin’s development of Theme I ends with a trill accented by a single, soft Tympani Motif in horns.

## PART III: THE G-MINOR EPISODE

- The solo violin now plays a gorgeous, melancholic melody in G minor.
- “*The violin sings an impassioned plea.*” (Michael Steinberg)
- “*The violin has an entirely new cantabile...of the tenderest pathos.*” (Donald Tovey)
- Initially the accompaniment is string figurations & the Tympani Motif, soft in horn or bassoon.
- Solo violin extends the melody and develops it (E-flat major). The accompanying Tympani Motif is now more easily heard, in trombone & tympani.

## PART IV: TRIPLET LADEN TRANSITION

- The solo violin plays a lengthy series of chromatically rising triplets with pedal accompaniment in strings.
- The music sounds transitional.
- Toward the end of this passage the Tympani Motif, in *pizz* strings, begins accenting the triplets.
- A brief crescendo and fortissimo, *tutti* statement of the Tympani Motif ushers in the Recapitulation.

## RECAPITULATION:

- The Tympani Motif, *tutti & fortissimo*, ushers in a loud, assertive return of Theme I (D major) and the D-sharps.
- The quiet, gentle theme has been transformed to a glorious, heroic one. “*Quite a transformation from the serene mood of the opening.*” (Robin Stowell)
- The Transitional Scale Theme is briefly stated, loud in orchestra. Solo violin takes up this theme and extends it.
- A lengthy section of violin figurations follows.
- A sustained trill in solo violin ushers in Theme II, *a-b* phrase in winds. Solo violin completes the theme with its version of the *a-b*’ phrase, with a pedal in winds.
- This first version of Theme II is in D major.
- Strings state the melancholic version of Theme II in D minor. The solo violin accompanies with triplet figurations. It ends with the D-sharp passage.
- NOTE: So far all versions of Theme II have been in orchestra or shared between orchestra and solo violin. The solo violin has not “owned” Theme II.
- A transitional passage, first with Tympani Motifs, then with solo violin figurations.
- The Closing Theme (D major), in strings, is brief and subdued. Solo violin accompanies.
- Another lengthy section of solo violin figurations ends in a series of trills accompanied by Tympani Motifs in strings. The music sounds anticipatory, as if something important will happen.
- Solo violin vigorously runs through rising and falling scales with a pedal accompaniment in winds. It then rises in a crescendo towards the coming orchestral crash.
- The Martial Outburst (B-flat major) comes crashing in, *tutti and fortissimo*, and ends with a loud introductory gesture, a 6/4 chord.
- This is the third and last appearance of the Martial Outburst, introducing the Cadenza.
- NOTES:
  - The Recapitulation follows the Classical prescription, with all major themes returning to the home key of D-major, with the exception of the second version of Theme II that maintains its minor key version.
  - The soloist and orchestra share the Recap more or less equally, the solo violin getting multiple opportunities for passage work.

## CADENZA:

- Beethoven did not write a Cadenza for the Violin Concerto.
- There are over 30 Cadenzas written by others. “*More cadenzas have been published for this than for any other violin concerto.*” (Robin Stowell)
- The most commonly performed ones are by Joachim, Auer and Kreisler.
- Beethoven *did* write a Cadenza for the piano version of the concerto and this, adapted to the violin, is another popular Cadenza used by soloists.

- Cadenzas usually end with a trill, a signal for the conductor to engage the orchestra.
- Beethoven requires that the Cadenza end quietly.

#### CODA:

- To the listener, the beginning of the Coda may feel like the continuation of the Cadenza.
- PART I:
  - For the first and only time in the movement, Solo Violin quietly states Theme II (D major) in full, *dolce*, with sparse *pizz* string accompaniment.
  - “...one of the most magical moments of all.” (Robin Stowell)
  - Steinberg: This is a version of Theme II, “*in its simplest form...Also, in this piece so given to high-altitude flight, we now hear it for the first time low, settled, and gentle on the D and G strings.*”
  - At the end of this passage oboe & horns quietly intone the Tympani Motif.
  - The solo violin finishes with a brief codetta that rises a couple of octaves.
- PART II:
  - A reference is made to the Closing Theme in a “*hushed duet*” (Stowell) between solo violin and bassoon.
  - Bassoon plays a Closing Theme motive; violin provides figurations.
  - “*The sublime calm of the first movement of the concerto reaches its serenest height when the last theme is given out quietly by the bassoon, and is answered in its highest regions by the solo violin.*” (Donald Tovey)
- PART III:
  - The hushed tone of the Coda ends in a “*terse crescendo*” (both Tovey & Stowell) in which the violin weaves figurations that rise several octaves, strings accenting the passage.
  - Loud concluding *tutti* chords.

#### COMMENTS:

- A symphonic first movement:
  - Beethoven expands the Classical model to symphonic proportions, most evident in early Development where the Solo Exposition seemingly returns.
  - The overall running time of the movement, in the vicinity of 20 minutes, is longer than many entire Classical Era concertos.
- Theme II is special:
  - Among the numerous musical ideas presented, Theme II is clearly the Queen of the movement, its dramatic focus.
  - Theme II has a unique double nature. It is always stated in a major key followed by a dark hued version in a minor key.

- The solo violin does not seem to own Theme II. It is fully or partly stated by the orchestra, the violin at most providing the consequent phrase on occasion.
  - In a stroke of dramatic genius, at the very end of the movement, Beethoven assigns a sweet, quiet version of the full Theme II to the soloist.
  - This final version of Theme II is its only statement solely in a major key.
  - Steinberg refers to this passage as, *“something we have, perhaps unconsciously waited for.”*
- About the Tympani Motif:
- Rhythmic saturation with repeated notes occurred frequently in Beethoven’s music of the time: Appassionata and Waldstein Piano Sonatas, Piano Concerto #4, Symphonies # 5 & 6, and F major Quartet.
  - Beethoven elevated the tympani from a mere drum to a musical instrument of importance, giving it significant roles in, for example his 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Symphonies, as well as in this Concerto.
  - Violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja points out that the tympani originally came to the West from Turkish military music and *“until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was considered as being threatening and aggressive. Considering this, the initial tympani beats of the first movement can be felt as quite menacing, a striking contrast to the idyllic melodies.”*
- About the role of the solo violin:
- *“The function of the violin ... is to be decorative, fanciful, capricious, more often a commentator on than an initiator of ideas. This has everything to do with the kind of player Franz Clement was... a violinist with a light hand, one of indescribable delicacy, neatness and elegance, an extremely delightful tenderness and purity.”* (Michael Steinberg)
  - *“The idea of embedding, as it were, the solo part into the orchestral texture was novel and alien to the virtuoso concept of the nineteenth century.”* (Boris Schwarz)
  - The solo violin versus the orchestral strings: If a solo phrase is repeated by the orchestral strings it can have an unintended comic effect, as if the orchestra is stating how the phrase should really sound. *“The Beethoven concerto is a sublime object lesson on this point inasmuch as that contingency never happens.”* (Donald Tovey)

## SECOND MOVEMENT:

### PRELIMINARY COMMENTS:

- *“The slow movement is the concerto’s still point...The orchestral strings are muted and the motion of the harmonies minimal...there being no departure at all from G major.”* (Michael Steinberg)
- Its structure does not conform to any known forms. Various scholars have interpreted it differently.
- It is loosely based on the idea of Theme and Variations. The first half of the movement conforms to it. The second half of the movement is somewhat akin to Rondo, with different recurring themes.

### FIRST HALF, THEME A & VARIATIONS:

#### THEME A: (G major)

- The theme is stated by muted violins with string accompaniment.
- It is a lyrical theme, stately in its dotted rhythms and pauses.
- Phrases: Antecedent: *a-a-b*; Consequent: *a'-a'-c-d*.
- The theme is stated in 10 measures. Michael Steinberg call it *“an eight measure theme rounded off with a two-measure benediction.”* Phrase *d* is the *benediction*.

#### THEME A; VARIATION 1:

- The melody stated by horns and clarinet while the solo violin provides decorative accompaniment and fills in the pauses. It also plays the final *c-d* phrases of the consequent.
- *“The stratospheric violin has an ethereal, almost other worldly quality...imbuing the theme with a less regal, more mystical mood.”* (Robert Greenberg)

#### THEME A; VARIATION 2:

- Similar to Variation 1, except it is mainly a duet between bassoon & solo violin.
- Solo violin provides more florid decoration. It also bridges the two phrases with an elaborate mini-cadenza.
- A *“spectacular three octave ascent”* (Greenberg) by solo violin provides a codetta.

#### THEME A; VARIATION 3:

- This variation belongs to the orchestra. The solo violin is silent.
- It is a stately *tutti* climax on Theme A, the phrases punctuated by dotted rhythms in winds. It acts cadentially, bringing the first half to a close.

## SOLO VIOLIN INTERLUDE

- A series of rising scales by solo violin, “*dreamy arabesques*” (Tovey), *dolce*, lightly accented by clarinet & bassoon, acts as an interlude between the two parts of the movement.

## SECOND HALF, VARIATIONS ON THEMES A, B & C

### THEME B: (G major)

- Solo violin starts a pretty new melody, *cantabile*. Accompaniment is in strings.
- The melody ends in a cadential trill repeated an octave higher.

### THEME A; VARIATION 4:

- Solo violin plays another variation of Theme A with *pizz* strings in accompaniment.
- Greenberg says, “*this is the most languid and flexible of the variations thus far.*”
- It is as if the stiff formality of the earlier variations is lightened up
- “*The sparse, almost chamber-like ... orchestration creates a marvelous delicacy and intimacy.*” (Robert Greenberg)

### THEME C:

- A brief solo violin interlude on a melody derived from the first 3 notes of Theme A.
- Quiet transitional passage leads to reprise of Theme B.

### THEME B REPRISÉ:

- Solo violin reprises Theme B in a more embellished version.
- Sparse, slow moving accompaniment in winds.
- It ends with the same cadential trills in solo violin.

### THEME C REPRISÉ:

- This is a modified, shortened version of Theme C in solo violin.

### CODA:

- Begins with solo violin figurations; muted horns then intone Theme A.
- “*The scene is set for one Beethoven’s most dramatic gestures.*” (Stowell)
- A sudden jolt! Strings are unleashed in a fortissimo statement of Theme A motive.
- The harmony shifts to D major.
- This is a brief, loud passage that announces a cadenza.
- NOTE: This jolting gesture is akin to the Martial Outburst of Movement 1, the last one of which served the same mission of announcing a cadenza.

**CADENZA & SEGWAY:**

A brief solo cadenza is followed by a one bar gesture that segways into the third movement.

**NOTES:**

- The first half of the movement belongs to the orchestra, the second half to the solo violin.
- Overall the music is static, remaining mostly in the same key, G major.
- “*In the slow movement we have one of three cases of sublime inaction achieved by Beethoven, and by no one else.*” (Donald Tovey)
- The other two are the slow movement of the Appassionata Sonata and Trio in B flat.
- Segways: At this point in his career Beethoven was experimenting with segways between movements. They can also be found in his Symphonies # 5 & 6 (1808), Piano Concertos #4 (1808) & #5 (1809), and Triple Concerto (1804).

**THIRD MOVEMENT:****PRELIMINARY COMMENTS:**

- The movement is in Rondo form with two recurring themes and one dramatic diversion.

**A1: MAIN RONDO THEME (D major)**

- **VERSION 1:**
  - Solo violin begins the main Rondo Theme, in the G string, in low register, with sparse cello accompaniment.
  - It is a lively, rustic, dance-like melody, “*the sort of melody one would expect to hear in a pub or out in the countryside.*” (Robert Greenberg)
  - Phrasing is simple: *a-b*, antecedent-consequent.
  - A single measure “*appendage*”, phrase *c* is a rising, inquiring melody. It receives a brief orchestral response, phrase *c*’.
- **VERSION 2:**
  - Solo violin repeats the theme two octaves higher, *delicatamente*.
  - Phrases *c-c*’are in horns and orchestra respectively.
- **VERSION 3: TUTTI**
  - Full orchestra bursts out with a fortissimo restatement of the theme.
  - An extension follows, with a highly accented melody full of dotted rhythms.
  - Clock-like, ticking transitional music.
- **SOLO TRANSITION: D major**
  - Picking its cue from the ticking transition, solo violin embarks on a transitional passage in high register.

**B1: SECOND RONDO THEME (A major – A minor)**

- This is a vigorous conversation between orchestra and solo violin.
- The melody bursts in *tutti*. It is a brief rising-falling idea derived from phrase *c* of A1, an inversion. Solo violin answers.
- The first orchestra-violin exchange is in A major.
- The exchange is repeated in A minor.
- NOTE: This passage is reminiscent of the major-minor dichotomy of Theme II in the first movement.
- Solo violin embarks upon lengthy virtuosic passage-work with quiet orchestral accompaniment. This ends in a trill that transitions to a reprise of the main Rondo Theme.

**A2: MAIN RONDO THEME REPRISED (D major)**

- Solo violin reprises the main Rondo Theme, Versions 1 & 2, verbatim.
- The *tutti* version in orchestra is different than the original. It is a truncated passage that lacks the extension. Instead, it is developmental, taking a motive of the theme through various keys.
- Brief transition by solo violin on the same motive.

**C: THE G MINOR EPISODE**

*“In the midst of the merriment, Beethoven sets an episode in G minor, both the key and the prominence of the bassoon being designed to remind us of the first movement’s development.”*  
(Michael Steinberg)

- Solo violin embarks upon a wistful melody in G minor, accompanied by sustained strings.
- Bassoon repeats the melody in variation with solo violin providing embroidery.
- Solo violin states an antecedent-consequent phrase based on the new melody.
- Bassoon repeats in variation with solo violin providing embroidery.
- Transitional passage in solo violin and strings is followed by a crescendo on the opening notes of the main Rondo Theme (A1) leading the way into another reprise.

**A3: MAIN RONDO THEME REPRISED (D major)**

- This is a verbatim reprise of A1 with one tiny difference: after the *tutti* Version 3, the soloist enters its transition *pizzicato*, and an octave lower.
- *“Great moments-we-must-live-for: solo violin plays the first two notes...pizzicato, virtually the only time it plays pizz. the entire concerto! Gotta love it!”* (Robert Greenberg)

**B2: SECOND RONDO THEME REPRISED (D major – D minor)**

- The melodies are the same as in the original, B1 episode.
- The major-minor dichotomy is still there, but now in the tonic key of D.
- Extended virtuosic solo passage similar to the original, with slight differences in accompaniment and harmony.
- The passage ends in a *tutti* crescendo that climaxes in an introductory 6/4 D chord and pause, announcing the Cadenza.

#### CADENZA:

- Beethoven did not write a cadenza for this movement.

#### CODA: DEVELOPMENT OF MAIN RONDO THEME (A4) – CONCLUSION

Beethoven devised a lengthy Coda for the movement that serves a developmental function before concluding the work.

- PART 1:
  - The Cadenza ends in an extended solo violin trill on E.
  - Under the trill, cellos and basses enter with motives of the main theme.
  - Solo violin changes its continuing trill to E-flat. With that, orchestral violins enter, playing the main theme motive (A1).
- PART 2:
  - Solo violin plays the main Rondo Theme (A1) with orchestral violin accompaniment, but in the very distant key of A-flat major.
  - Solo violin embarks on a development of the theme in a modulatory passage.
  - The passage ends with a solo trill followed by a *diminuendo* transitional passage toward D major.
- PART 3:
  - The main Rondo Theme is back in D major, in a delightful dialogue between oboe and solo violin.
  - Dialogue repeated between solo violin and horn.
- PART 4:
  - In the glorious finale the solo violin and orchestra alternate.
  - Solo violin engages in rapid scales and arpeggios. Orchestra interrupts with bursts of theme motives.
  - *“Solo violin shows its supremacy over the whole orchestra by peppering its pertinent outbursts with arpeggios and scales.”* (Stowell)
  - The orchestral bursts on theme motive get louder and syncopated. The solo violin remains vigorous in between.
  - *“The mood becomes more unruly with orchestral syncopations...but the soloist’s fortissimo arpeggio and piano scale formula keep the orchestra in check.”* (Stowell)

- The final twelve measures are mainly based on the D major triad.
  - The orchestra's final outburst on the triad fizzles in a diminuendo passage.
  - *The soloist takes advantage of the orchestra's sudden diminuendo by offering a last quiet, unaccompanied version of the dance-like theme.* (Stowell)
  - Two crashing orchestral D major chords end the movement.
- NOTE: The solo violin began the concerto mostly playing second fiddle to the orchestra (pun intended). Eventually, the two elements find a balance with each other through much of the second and third movements. But here in the finale, Beethoven devises a dramatic confrontation between an assertive orchestra and a soloist that matches and surpasses it.

#### COMMENTS ON THE RONDO:

- This is mostly a light hearted, rustic Rondo, its mood fairly typical of the Classical Era.
- *"This is now a time for relaxation – for the listener, not for the soloist."* (Steinberg)
- NOTE that the major-minor dichotomy introduced in the first movement is also prevalent in this movement:
  - Theme B1, A major-A minor phrases.
  - The G minor episode in the midst of a movement in D major.
  - Theme B2, the D major-D minor phrases.

#### FINAL COMMENTS:

Patricia Kopatchinskaja, professional violinist who plays the concerto as a soloist says: *"In this concerto I often feel like a small bird flying over a majestic landscape. I take my twists and turns and sometimes even disappear between clouds. In fact, this concerto is a symphony for orchestra and improvising violin."*

Boris Schwartz: *"Despite its unique beauty, The Violin Concerto of Beethoven suffers from the disparity between a towering musical concept and a comparatively unidiomatic treatment of the solo instrument...When the concerto is considered as a whole one must admit that...in the end his genius was bound to relegate violinistic shortcomings into the background...One is not aware of them unless deliberately scanning the work from this point of view."*

*"In the end, Beethoven's concerto is a masterpiece like no other...The unique Olympian serenity the work radiates is all Beethoven, as are the dramatic outbursts that temporarily cloud the atmosphere."* (Peter Laki)

## A HUMOUROUS ANECDOTE FROM JAMES M. KELLER

### **Who's in charge?**

In his delightful book *Musical Blunders* (1996) the late flutist and raconteur Fritz Spiegel tells how, during World War II, many top notch British musicians joined the Central Band of the Royal Air Force and pressed the bandmaster to include some “real” symphonic pieces in the band’s repertoire. The bandmaster, it seems, “was a little out of his depth in the classical repertoire” and when the Beethoven Violin Concerto showed up on the music stands he clearly had not studied the score, let alone recordings of the work .

Spiegel continues:

He began the first movement under the impression that it started with the oboes and bassoons in the second bar – having failed to spot the opening solo timpani notes whose rhythm pervades the whole of the first movement. He bought down his stick for the oboes but instead the tympani went “boom-boom-boom- boom,” just as Beethoven had indicated. On hearing the drumbeats he rapped on his desk and called to the timpanist. “Thank you very much, but I don’t need you to give me the tempo.”