

Fritz Reiner was one of the most acclaimed conductors of the 20th century -- noted for the vast range of his repertoire, which included both symphonic and operatic pieces spanning from the traditional canon to contemporary material, he was also an influential educator who counted among his pupils Leonard Bernstein. Reiner was born in Budapest, Hungary, on December 19, 1888; despite earning a law degree from the University of Bucharest, he pursued a career in music, and at age 21 was named chorusmaster of the Budapest Opera. A stint as conductor with the Budapest Volksoper followed before Reiner was chosen in 1914 to serve as principal conductor of the Royal Opera in Dresden, where he collaborated with Richard Strauss on productions of several of the composer's early operas.



In 1922 Reiner left Europe to relocate to America, settling in Cincinnati, OH, and signing on as conductor with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; a decade later he was tapped to head the orchestral and opera departments at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, where his students included Bernstein. After next serving as the music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony between 1938 and 1948, he served five years with the Metropolitan Opera. While Reiner's frequent migration might have been attributed largely to a restless creativity, he was also a notoriously difficult personality who frequently alienated those around him -- many of the musicians under his command openly loathed him, although he inevitably inspired the best work of their careers.

Reiner's own best work was undoubtedly his tenure with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which he elevated into one of the most celebrated ensembles in the world. Moving over to the CSO in 1953, he not only established the orchestra as a top-flight live attraction but also as a popular recording entity -- the countless albums they made for RCA's Living Stereo series during Reiner's decade-long tenure were much acclaimed by collectors for both the power of the performances and the unusually high fidelity of the recordings themselves. Releases like Fritz Reiner Conducts Richard Strauss and Fritz Reiner Conducts Bartók in particular remain definitive interpretations of the composers in question. Health problems forced Reiner to resign his position in 1962, and he died in New York City on November 15 of the following year.

MEMORABLE BETHOVEN



Fritz Reiner conducts the
Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Beethoven worked on the Fifth Symphony for more than four years, completing it in 1808, and introducing it on December 22 of that year at what must have been one of the most extraordinary concerts in history. The marathon program included the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies; the Choral Fantasy, Op. 80; the Fourth Piano Concerto; and parts of the Mass in C. Vienna was in the grip of exceptionally cold weather, the hall was unheated, and the musicians woefully under-prepared. As Schindler noted, "the reception accorded to these works was not as desired, and probably no better than the author himself had expected. The public was not endowed with the necessary degree of comprehension for such extraordinary music, and the performance left a great deal to be desired."

Following early indifference, the public only gradually began to come to terms with the Fifth. One of its earliest proponents, the poet and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote, "How this magnificent composition carries the listener on and on in a continually ascending climax into the ghostly world of infinity!...the human breast, squeezed by monstrous presentiments and destructive powers, seems to gasp for breath; soon a kindly figure approaches full of radiance, and illuminates the depths of terrifying night." In his *Howard's End*, E.M. Forster writes of the work, suggesting that it satisfies "all sort and conditions." The characters of Helen and Tibby know the work well, the latter even describing "the transitional passage on the drum" before the finale. That Forster dwelt at such length on the work shows the extent to which it had become absorbed into the Romantic consciousness.

Hermann Kretzschmar wrote of the "stirring dogged and desperate struggle" of the first movement, one of the most concentrated of all Beethoven's symphonic sonata movements. It is derived almost exclusively from the rhythmic cell of the opening, which is even felt in the accompaniment of the second subject group. There follows a variation movement in which cellos introduce the theme, increasingly elaborated and with shorter note values at every reappearance. A second, hymn-like motif is heard as its counterfoil.

The tripartite scherzo follows; the main idea is based on an ominous arpeggio figure, but we hear also the omnipresent "Fate" rhythm, exactly as it is experienced in the first movement. The central section, which replaces the customary trio, is a pounding fugato beginning in the cellos and basses, and then running through the rest of the orchestra. Of particular structural interest is the inter-linking bridge passage which connects the last two movements. Over the drumbeat referred to by Forster's Tibby, the music climbs inexorably toward the tremendous assertion of C major triumph at the start of the finale. The epic grandeur of the music, now with martial trombones and piccolo added (the Fifth also calls for contrabassoon), has irresistible drive and sweep, though that eventual victory is still some way off is suggested by the return of the ominous scherzo figure during the extended development.

Ludwig van Beethoven completed this work in 1812, but withheld the first performance until December 8, 1813, in Vienna. It is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, plus timpani and string choir.

1812 was an eventful year for the very famous, seriously deafened Beethoven. July was especially noteworthy. At Teplitz he finally met Goethe (1749-1832), but was disappointed to find (he felt) an aging courtier who was no longer a firebrand or kindred democrat; worse yet, a musical dilettante. A week before that only meeting of German giants, Beethoven had written the letter to his mysterious "immortal beloved" that was discovered posthumously in a secret drawer. Then, toward the end of the year, he meddled unbidden in the affairs of his youngest brother, Johann, who was cohabiting contentedly with a housekeeper. Somehow, he found time to compose the last of his ten sonatas for violin and piano and to complete a new pair of symphonies -- the Seventh and Eighth -- both begun in 1809. He introduced the Seventh at a charity concert for wounded soldiers, and repeated it four nights later by popular demand.

Richard Wagner called Symphony No. 7 "the apotheosis of the dance," meaning of course to praise its Dionysian spirit. But this oxymoron stuck like feathers to hot tar, encouraging irrelevant and awkward choreography (by Isadore Duncan and Léonide Massine among others) and licensing the music appreciation racket to misinterpret Beethoven's intent as well as his content. Wholly abstract and utterly symphonic, the Seventh was his definitive break with stylistic conventions practiced by Mozart, Haydn, and a legion of lesser mortals who copied them. He stretched harmonic rules, and gave breadth to symphonic forms that Haydn and Mozart anticipated. If, in his orchestral music, Beethoven was the last Austro-German Classicist, he did point those who followed him to the path of Romanticism.

While the poco sostenuto introduction begins by observing time-honored rules of harmony, within 62 measures it modulates from A major to the alien keys of C and F major, then back again! The transition from solemn 4/4 meter to 6/8 for the balance of an evergreen vivace movement (in sonata form) further exemplifies Beethoven's conceptual stretch.

Coming from the 20-minute funeral march of his earlier Eroica Symphony, Beethoven created an allegretto "slow" movement. He established a funerary mood (without its being specifically elegiac) through the repetition of a 2/4 rhythmic motif in A minor, the most somber key of the tempered scale. A minor serves more than an expressive function, moreover; it readies us for the reappearance of F major in a tumultuous five-part Scherzo marked Presto. Two trios go slower (*assai meno presto*), in D major -- a long distance harmonically in 1812 from the work's A major tonic. The beginning of a third trio turns into a short coda capped by five fortissimo chords.

A major finally returns in the final movement. Here more than anywhere else in his orchestral music, Beethoven became a race-car driver. As in the "slow" movement, the rhythm is 2/4, but sonata-form replaces ABA. And there's a grand coda longer than the exposition, the development, or the reprise, which, furthermore, begins in B minor! But modulations bring it back to A major in time for a heart-pounding final lap with the accelerator pressed to the floor.

Beethoven Symphonies No. 5 & 7

Fidelio Overture

Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Symphony No. 5 In C Minor, Op. 67

- 1 1st Movement: Allegro Con Brio 7:31
 - 2 2nd Movement: Andante Con Moto 10:04
 - 3 3rd Movement: Allegro 5:27
 - 4 4th Movement: Allegro 7:59
- Time: 31:01

Symphony No.7 In A, Op.92

- 5 1st Movement: Poco Sostenuto: Vivace 11:33
 - 6 2nd Movement: Allegretto 8:54
 - 7 3rd Movement: Presto: Presto Meno Assai: Presto 6:55
 - 8 4th Movement: Allegro Con Brio 6:48
- Time: 34:10
- 9 **Fidelio Overture, Op. 72b** 6:30

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape
Symphony No. 7 & Fidelio Overture released 1957 by RCA
Symphony No. 5 released 1959 by RCA
Engineer - Lewis Layton Producer - Richard Mohr

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