

THESIS

THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SUBLIME:
KANTIAN AESTHETICS IN BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONY NO. 6

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68* through the aesthetic philosophy of Immanuel Kant, arguing that the work traces a progression from the Beautiful to the Sublime across its five movements. After outlining Kant's distinction between these categories and situating the symphony within the pastoral tradition and early nineteenth-century Viennese symphonic culture, the study offers close musical analysis of each movement. It demonstrates how Beethoven's use of form, irregular phrasing, and silence shapes a coherent experiential trajectory: the first three movements embody the stability and perceptual harmony of the Beautiful, while the final two movements confront and ultimately reconcile the destabilizing force of the Sublime. By integrating philosophical aesthetics with analytical and interpretive perspectives, this study reframes the *Pastoral* Symphony not simply as program music, but as a work that constructs a large-scale aesthetic experience, offering new insights for both scholarship and performance.

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“Like humans, nature is unbelievably creative and utterly destructive.”

Yo-Yo Ma

INTRODUCTION

Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68*, has long been understood as a work of musical pastoralism, often interpreted primarily through its programmatic associations with nature. Yet such readings risk reducing the symphony to a sequence of descriptive scenes, overlooking the deeper aesthetic logic that shapes its expressive trajectory. This thesis proposes that the *Pastoral* Symphony reveals new depth when approached through the lens of Immanuel Kant's distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime, drawing on these Romantic ideals articulated in his *Critique of Judgment*. By examining how Beethoven constructs experiences of continuity, disruption, and restoration across the five movements, this study argues that the symphony enacts a philosophical journey: from the balanced, harmonious world of the Beautiful to the overwhelming force of the Sublime, and finally toward a transformed reconciliation between humanity and nature.

Structure of the Symphony

Beethoven's Sixth Symphony departs from the traditional four-movement Classical model through its distinctive five-movement design. This expanded structure supports the symphony's programmatic and psychological ambitions by allowing Beethoven to shape a more continuous experiential arc. Rather than presenting isolated formal units, the movements unfold as a sequence of related states, guiding the listener through a gradual progression of perception and emotion. In this way, the five-movement structure reinforces not only the work's descriptive narrative but also a deeper sense of experiential continuity. Table 1 presents the symphony's structural layout alongside the philosophical trajectory that emerges from this reading.

Table 1. Overall Structure and Philosophical Journey of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony

Movement	Instrumentation	Tempo/Name	Key(s)	Form	Philosophical Journey
1	2.2.2.2 – 2.0.0.0 – str.	<i>Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande</i> “Pleasant, Cheerful Feelings that Awaken in People Upon Arrival to the Countryside”: <i>Allegro ma non troppo</i>	F major	Sonata – Allegro	Humans are excited about being in nature.
2	2.2.2.2 – 2.0.0.0 – str.	<i>Szene am Bach</i> “Scene by the Brook”: <i>Andante molto moto</i>	Bb major	Sonata– Allegro	Humans watch nature interact with itself through a snapshot of a brook.
3 <i>attacca</i> to 4	2.2.2.2 – 2.2.0.0 – str.	<i>Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute</i> “A Fun Gathering of Country Folk”: <i>Allegro – a tempo</i> <i>Allegro – Presto</i>	F major	Modified Scherzo and Trio (repeat of trio)	Humans interacting within nature.
4 <i>attacca</i> to 5	3[1.2.pic].2.2.2. – 2.2.2.0 – timp. – str.	<i>Gewitter, Sturm</i> “Thunderstorm”: <i>Allegro</i>	F minor to C major	Unique Binary not based around harmony but around effect	Nature forcefully interacts with humans.

Movement	Instrumentation	Tempo/Name	Key(s)	Form	Philosophical Journey
				(Intensify, Climax, Decay)	
5	2.2.2.2. – 2.2.2.0 – str.	<i>Hirtengesang. Frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm</i> “Sheperd’s Song. Charitable Feelings, Coupled with Gratitude Towards the Deity After the Storm”: <i>Allegretto</i>	C major (first 4 bars) to F major	Sonata – Rondo form	Humans are reconciled with nature and humbled by it.

Three Foundational Paradigms: The Sublime, the Absolute–Programmatic Spectrum, and Evocation versus Description

Three interpretive paradigms provide the conceptual framework for this study. First, sublimity functioned as a widely understood aesthetic category within German Romantic thought at the end of the eighteenth century and circulated across multiple artistic media. Second, music operates along a spectrum between the programmatic and the absolute rather than occupying either extreme. Third, titles may function either as explicit explanations of a work or as evocative

guides that shape the listener's interpretive imagination.¹ Taken together, these premises suggest that Beethoven engaged with this aesthetic framework and employed programmatic devices within the symphonic genre to articulate it. In doing so, he emerges as one of the earliest composers to explore the gradation between absolute and programmatic music, helping to shape how later composers navigated that continuum.

First Paradigm: The Romantic Sublime as a Cross-Medium Aesthetic in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

The concept of the sublime emerged as a shared aesthetic language across multiple artistic media in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, appearing in German visual art, literature, and music. In aesthetic discourse, the Sublime describes a form of greatness that exceeds ordinary limits of measurement, imitation, or comprehension. Derived from the Latin *sublīmis* (“uplifted” or “exalted”), the term has long been used to characterize experiences of overwhelming physical, moral, intellectual, or spiritual magnitude. First discussed in ancient Greek rhetoric and drama, the sublime later developed into a central concept within philosophical aesthetics, literary theory, and art history.² Although Immanuel Kant was not the

¹ In this paper, the term German is used in a cultural rather than strictly political sense, shaped in part by the Austro-Prussian rivalry that defined Central Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During this period, there was no unified German nation-state; instead, the German-speaking world was divided among numerous states, most prominently Austria and Prussia. Despite political fragmentation and competing centers of power, a shared linguistic and intellectual culture linked composers, writers, and artists across these regions. Figures such as Goethe, Schiller, Friedrich, and Beethoven participated in a common German-speaking cultural sphere even while living under different political authorities. Accordingly, German in this paper refers broadly to this interconnected cultural and aesthetic network rather than to a fixed national identity. This usage reflects the historical reality that Romantic artistic and philosophical ideas circulated across a German-speaking world shaped as much by rivalry as by shared cultural foundations. See James J. Sheehan, *German History: 1770–1866* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1989): 11–72.

² Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–24.

first thinker to theorize the sublime, he provided one of its most influential philosophical formulations. Kant reframed the concept through the idea of infinity, describing it as an experience most vividly encountered in nature, where vastness and immeasurability confront human perception and awaken an acute awareness of human limitation.³

Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818; Figure 1) stands as one of the most widely recognized visual embodiments of Romantic sublimity. By positioning the viewer behind a solitary figure who gazes over a vast and obscured landscape, Friedrich constructs an encounter with nature that resists clear perception or measurement. The endless fog and indeterminate depth create a sense of infinity that overwhelms human judgment, emphasizing both the limits of perception and the individual's isolation before the natural world. In this way, the painting presents the sublime as an experience of immeasurable nature encountered through solitude, where the solitary subject confronts an unknowable and seemingly boundless expanse.⁴

³ Patricia García, "Aesthetic Modes of the Infinite: Horror, Sublimity, and Relationality," *Philosophy and Literature* 47, no. 1 (April 2023): 70–74.

⁴ Julian Jason Haladyn, "Friedrich's 'Wanderer': Paradox of the Modern Subject," *Canadian Art Review* 41, no. 1 (2016): 47–50.

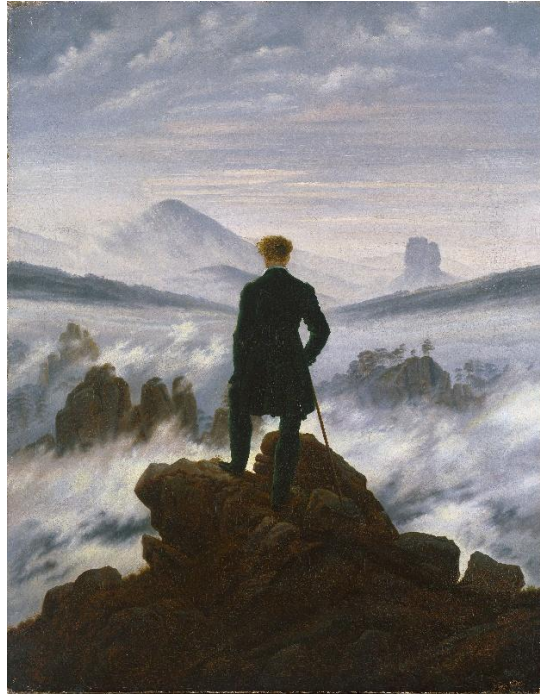


Figure 1. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1817, Kunsthalle Hamburg. The lone figure against the vast expanse.

Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller's ballad *Der Taucher* ("The Diver," 1797) offers a literary embodiment of the Romantic sublime through the image of a diver descending into a violent and unknowable sea at the command of a king:

Thus, the king speaks, and from the top of the cliff, which juts abruptly and steeply into the infinite sea, he hurls the goblet into the howling Charybdis. "Who is there brave enough, I ask once more, to dive down into the abyss?"⁵

The language itself foregrounds the sublime through terms such as *infinite* and *abyss*, framing the ocean as immeasurable and terrifying. Nature appears as a force that overwhelms human control and evokes both awe and dread. This confrontation with destructive vastness exemplifies

⁵ Friedrich Schiller, *The Diver: With Notes*, ed. and trans. by Frederick K. Harford (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 50.

the Romantic sublime, in which the individual stands before forces capable of annihilation yet experiences a heightened awareness of powers that exceed human mastery.⁶

Early nineteenth-century critical reception of Beethoven's music reveals how strongly the concept of the sublime shaped interpretations of musical expression. In his famous 1810 review of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67*—premiered alongside the Sixth Symphony in the celebrated 1808 concert—E. T. A. Hoffmann describes Beethoven's instrumental music in strikingly elevated terms:

Beethoven's instrumental music opens up to us the realm of the monstrous and immeasurable. Burning rays shoot through the deep night of this realm, and we become aware of giant shadows that rise and fall, closing in around us and annihilating everything within us except the pain of infinite longing.⁷

Hoffmann's language draws directly on the vocabulary of the sublime, emphasizing immensity, darkness, and emotional overwhelm. His interpretation not only applies the concept of the Sublime to music but also reshapes the aesthetic status of instrumental music itself. In Hoffmann's view, instrumental music becomes uniquely capable of expressing the sublime, precisely because it operates beyond the limits of language and representation.

The examples of Friedrich, Schiller, and Hoffmann demonstrate that the Romantic sublime functioned not merely as an abstract philosophical idea but as a widely circulating aesthetic paradigm across the arts of Beethoven's cultural moment. Visual art, literature, and early musical criticism all reflect a shared vocabulary for describing encounters with overwhelming magnitude, emotional intensity, and the limits of human perception. Within this context, the sublime emerges as a cultural framework through which artistic experience was

⁶ Ibid, 51.

⁷ Arthur Ware Lock, and E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music: Translated from E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana* with an Introductory Note," in *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1917): 128.

frequently understood. For conductors approaching the *Pastoral Symphony* through a Kantian lens, acknowledging this broader aesthetic environment is essential. The goal is not to claim that Beethoven was directly influenced by Kant's philosophy, but rather to recognize that the discourse of sublimity permeated the artistic and intellectual climate in which he lived and worked. A conductor informed by Kant therefore engages the sublime not as a speculative imposition on the music, but as a historically grounded interpretive lens rooted in Beethoven's cultural world.

Second Paradigm: Programmatic and Absolute Music as a Spectrum

Programmatic and absolute music are often treated as opposing categories, yet they are more productively understood as points along a continuum rather than mutually exclusive types. Recognizing this spectrum clarifies the methodological stance of the present study. Instead of attempting to classify Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* as either programmatic or absolute, the analysis proceeds from the premise that the work occupies a position somewhere along this continuum. The goal, therefore, is not to determine a precise location for the symphony within that spectrum, but to acknowledge the fluid relationship between narrative suggestion and musical autonomy that characterizes the work.

Programmatic Music

Programmatic music refers to instrumental works that evoke or suggest an extra-musical narrative, scene, or sequence of events. Rather than relying solely on musical structure, such works invite listeners to imagine a story, image, or situation that unfolds alongside the music. Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* provides an early and especially clear example of this approach, illustrating how instrumental music can depict specific scenes and ideas through musical gestures associated with an external program.

Programmatic music is generally understood as instrumental music that evokes or represents extra-musical ideas such as narratives, scenes, or natural imagery. *Grove Music Online* defines program music as instrumental music of a narrative or descriptive kind that attempts to represent extra-musical ideas without the use of text.⁸ This definition highlights the intentional relationship between musical structure and an external concept. Rather than functioning as purely abstract form, programmatic works invite listeners to interpret musical gestures as representations of something beyond the music itself.

Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, a set of four violin concerti, stands among the earliest and most widely recognized examples of programmatic music. Published in Amsterdam in 1725 as part of *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* ("The Contest between Harmony and Invention"), the concerti appeared alongside descriptive sonnets outlining the imagery associated with each movement, possibly written by Vivaldi himself. These texts were carefully aligned with specific musical passages, reinforcing the close relationship between poetic imagery and musical gestures. Figure 2 illustrates this relationship through a manuscript copy of the solo violin part from the first movement of the *Violin Concerto in E major No. 1, Op. 8, RV 629* ("Spring"), where lines of the sonnet appear above the staff to correspond directly with the musical material. At rehearsal C, the sonnet reads: "*E i fonti allo spirar de' zeffiretti con dolce mormorio scorrono intanto*" ("And the fountains, at the blowing of the breezes, meanwhile, flow with a sweet murmur."). In the solo violin line, slurred pairs of flowing sixteenth notes create a gently undulating motion that evokes the murmuring movement of water stirred by a light breeze. This passage represents one of several moments in which Vivaldi aligns the poetic text

⁸ Roger Scruton, "Programme Music," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed Feb. 21, 2026, <https://doiorg.ezproxy2.library.colostate.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22394>.

directly with corresponding musical gestures. Although surviving autograph manuscripts are incomplete, the inclusion of the sonnets in early printed sources indicates that the programmatic dimension formed an integral part of the work's original conception and circulation.



Figure 2. A Scan of a Manuscript Copy of the Solo Violin Part from the First Movement of the “Spring” Concerto. Antonio Vivaldi, *Violin Concerto in E major (“Spring”)*, 1725, Henry Watson Music Library. It shows descriptive programmatic markings in the solo violin part.

Absolute Music

The concept of absolute music has long resisted stable definition. Modern musicology frequently acknowledges the term's conceptual instability, noting that it has been shaped by shifting aesthetic debates rather than by a single, clearly defined meaning. The phrase *absolute music* first appears in Richard Wagner's Faust-inspired description of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; written to accompany a performance he conducted in Dresden in 1846. At first glance, this reference might seem to mark the origin of the term. Yet because Wagner used the phrase only once and without explanation, there is little evidence that he intended to introduce a technical concept or establish a new aesthetic category. Instead, the remark appears to refer simply to the instrumental, rather than vocal, portions of the symphony.⁹ The entry for *absolute music* in *Grove Music Online* likewise treats the concept not as a fixed category but as an enduring aesthetic problem shaped by evolving philosophical discourse.¹⁰ Historically, absolute music has often been defined primarily through opposition (to words, drama, and representation) rather than through any intrinsic musical characteristics. This relational definition underscores the extent to which the concept is historically contingent rather than universally stable.¹¹

Johannes Brahms has long been associated with the defense of absolute music, a characterization that has profoundly shaped the scholarly reception of his works. Unlike many Romantic composers, Brahms rarely supplied explicit extra-musical explanations for his instrumental compositions and often gravitated toward classical genres that seemed to resist

⁹ Sanna Pederson, "Defining the Term 'Absolute Music' Historically," *Music & Letters* 90, no. 2 (2009): 240.

¹⁰ Roger Scruton, "Absolute Music," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed Feb. 21, 2026, <https://doiorg.ezproxy2.library.colostate.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.00069>.

¹¹ Pederson, "Defining the Term," 241.

overt programmatic interpretation. For this reason, his music was frequently understood as embodying the ideals of abstract musical form. Closer examination, however, reveals a more complex picture. Although Brahms generally avoided public statements linking his music to specific narratives or images, he occasionally shared suggestive associations (such as poetic mottos or literary references) within private circles.¹² This divergence produced a layered reception history in which the same compositions could be experienced as programmatic by informed listeners while remaining ostensibly abstract to broader audiences. Such ambiguity complicates the conventional binary between absolute and programmatic music, suggesting that Brahms's position within this aesthetic debate was more nuanced than traditional narratives imply.

Even works often regarded as paradigms of “absolute” music can contain stylistic gestures that evoke historical or cultural associations. A well-known example occurs in the fourth movement of Brahms's First Symphony, where the sudden emergence of a brass chorale creates a striking shift in musical character (Figure 3). This passage appears almost without preparation and is marked by modal harmonic language and a broad, homophonic texture reminiscent of an old hymn, often described as invoking the chivalric style.¹³ The chorale-like writing—particularly in the brass—recalls sacred and archaic traditions, evoking associations

¹² Dylan R. Parmer, “Musical Meaning for the Few: Instances of Private Reception in the Music of Brahms,” *Current Musicology*, no. 83 (2007): 109–30.

¹³ The *chivalric style* denotes a nineteenth-century musical idiom that invokes an imagined medieval past through features such as fanfare figures, modal or archaizing harmonic language, and stylistic associations with heroism, nobility, and courtly or knightly traditions. See Jonathan Bellman, “*Aus alten Märchen*: The Chivalric Style of Schumann and Brahms,” *The Journal of Musicology* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 118. Bellman's discussion draws on the framework of topic theory, first articulated by Leonard Ratner, which describes how composers employ recognizable stylistic figures (such as marches, pastoral drones, fanfares, or chorales) to evoke specific cultural associations within instrumental music. See Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York, NY: Schirmer, 1985)

with Lutheran chorales and earlier devotional styles. What makes this moment especially compelling is that it carries clear stylistic and cultural resonance despite the absence of any explicit program. The modal inflections and hymn-like texture suggest historical depth and collective memory, functioning as a symbolic gesture within an otherwise abstract symphonic framework. In this way, the passage demonstrates how music often classified as absolute can still evoke historical styles and shared cultural meanings without relying on overt narrative cues. Such moments further blur the boundary between absolute and programmatic expression.

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in Bb

Bassoon

Contrabassoon

Horn in C

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Tenor Trombone

Bass Trombone

Timpani

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

F: V/vi vi IV bVII IV V(sus⁴) V I V

C: IV

Figure 3. Chivalric Hymn from Movement 4 of *Symphony No. 1 in C major, Op. 21*. Measures 407–16 illustrate the modal chord progression and homophonic texture.

For a conductor approaching the *Pastoral Symphony* through a Kantian lens, accepting this paradigm becomes essential. If musical meaning emerges not solely from fixed categories but from the interaction between sound and listener, then the rigid opposition between absolute and programmatic music becomes less useful. A spectrum model instead allows the conductor to approach the work with greater interpretive openness, recognizing that expressive meaning may arise through aesthetic experience rather than categorical classification. In this way, the continuum functions not only as an analytical framework but also as an interpretive one, shaping how the conductor encounters and communicates the music.

Third Paradigm: Evocation versus Description for Movement Titles

Beethoven's own comments on the *Pastoral Symphony* suggest that its movement titles were intended to function evocatively rather than descriptively. In a letter dated March 28, 1809, to his publishers *Breitkopf & Härtel*, Beethoven clarifies the title of the Sixth Symphony: "Pastoral Symphony, or Recollections of Country Life, more an expression of feeling than painting."¹⁴ This statement makes clear that the titles were not meant to serve as literal descriptions but rather as interpretive frames that orient the listener toward a particular aesthetic experience. The pastoral headings point toward moods and associations rather than fixed narrative events, allowing the music to evoke the character of nature without depicting it directly. In this way, the titles operate less as a program to be followed than as an atmosphere to be entered, reinforcing an evocative understanding of the symphony.

¹⁴ Ludwig van Beethoven, *Beethoven's Letters: A Critical Edition with Explanatory Notes*, ed. and comp. by Alfred Christlieb Kalischer, trans. by J. S. Shedlock (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1:158.

A similar understanding of evocative titling appears in the writings of later composers. Discussing his work, *Scheherazade*, composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov explains:

In composing *Scheherazade*, I meant the hints to direct the listener's fancy but slightly on the path which my own fancy had traveled. All I had desired was that the listener should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative and not merely four pieces played one after another.¹⁵

Rimsky-Korsakov's explanation demonstrates that even later Romantic composers did not necessarily conceive of programmatic titles as literal narrative blueprints. Instead, titles could function as imaginative prompts that guide the listener's perception without prescribing a fixed storyline. This perspective places Beethoven within a broader compositional tradition in which evocative titling was not an isolated gesture but a recurring aesthetic approach.

From this perspective, a conductor approaching the *Pastoral Symphony* through a Kantian lens must relinquish the assumption that the movement titles function as direct descriptions. To treat them as literal representations imposes a rigidity that both Beethoven's own statements and broader compositional practice resist. Allowing the titles to remain evocative rather than descriptive permits the music to unfold as an experiential encounter, preserving the openness necessary for aesthetic judgment. In this sense, abandoning descriptive certainty does not diminish interpretive clarity; instead, it deepens the interpretive possibilities available to the performer.

Conclusion Regarding the Three Paradigms:

Taken together, these three paradigms provide both a philosophical and practical foundation for conducting the *Pastoral Symphony* through a Kantian lens. Recognizing the cultural presence of the Romantic sublime, embracing the continuum between absolute and programmatic music, and distinguishing evocation from description all expand the interpretive space in which

¹⁵ Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, ed. by Carl van Vechten, trans. Judah A. Joffe (New York, NY, Tudor Publishing Co., 1923), 309–10.

the symphony may be encountered. For the conductor, this framework encourages a shift away from rigid explanatory models toward a more responsive engagement with the music as lived aesthetic experience. Rather than attempting to define the work through fixed categories, the conductor is invited to shape an encounter that remains open, imaginative, and historically grounded. With these interpretive premises established, the discussion can now turn to how such an approach informs a deeper reading of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*.

Structure of the Paper

The study begins by establishing the philosophical framework, introducing Immanuel Kant's distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime. It then situates Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* within its historical context by examining the pastoral tradition and the state of the symphony in early nineteenth-century Vienna. From there, the discussion turns to close musical analysis, drawing on examples from each movement to demonstrate how Beethoven's use of form, irregular phrasing, and silence reflects Kantian aesthetics. The first three movements are interpreted as embodying the realm of the Beautiful, while the final two movements engage the realm of the Sublime.

The analytical discussion is therefore organized according to this philosophical division: movements one through three are considered through the lens of the Beautiful, and movements four and five through the lens of the Sublime. Each analytical section follows a consistent structure designed to connect philosophical interpretation with practical conducting considerations. The discussion begins by identifying the relevant philosophical framework (the Beautiful or the Sublime), followed by the musical feature under examination (form, irregular phrasing, or the use of space). The movement under discussion is then introduced before turning to interpretive considerations for conductors, concluding with questions intended to guide further

reflection on performance decisions. Figure 4a provides a skeletal outline of how the sections analyzing the Beautiful are structured, while Figure 4b provides a corresponding outline for the sections analyzing the Sublime and both include the formatting of the headings as they appear in the text.

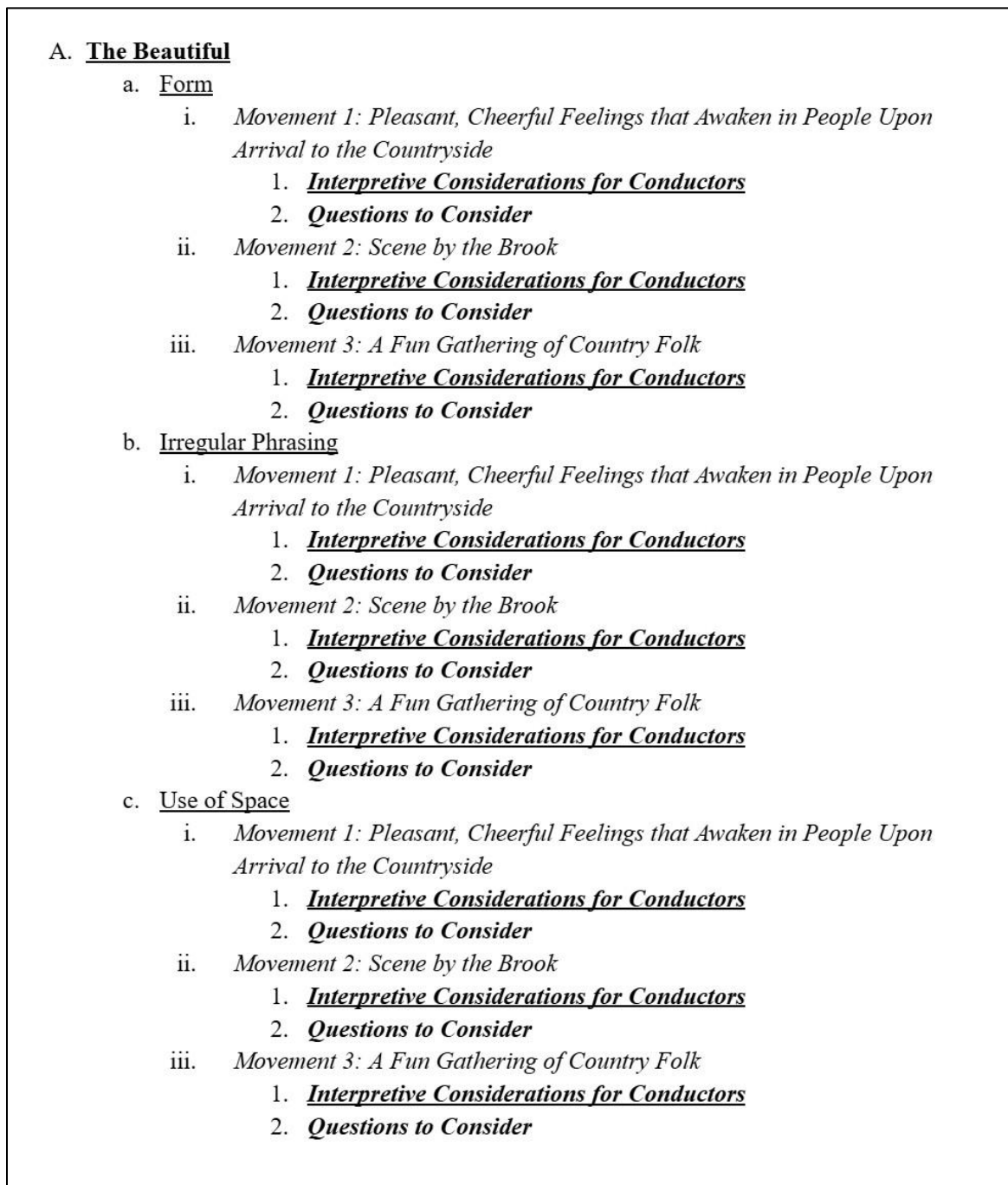


Figure 4a. Skeletal Outline of the Beautiful Analysis

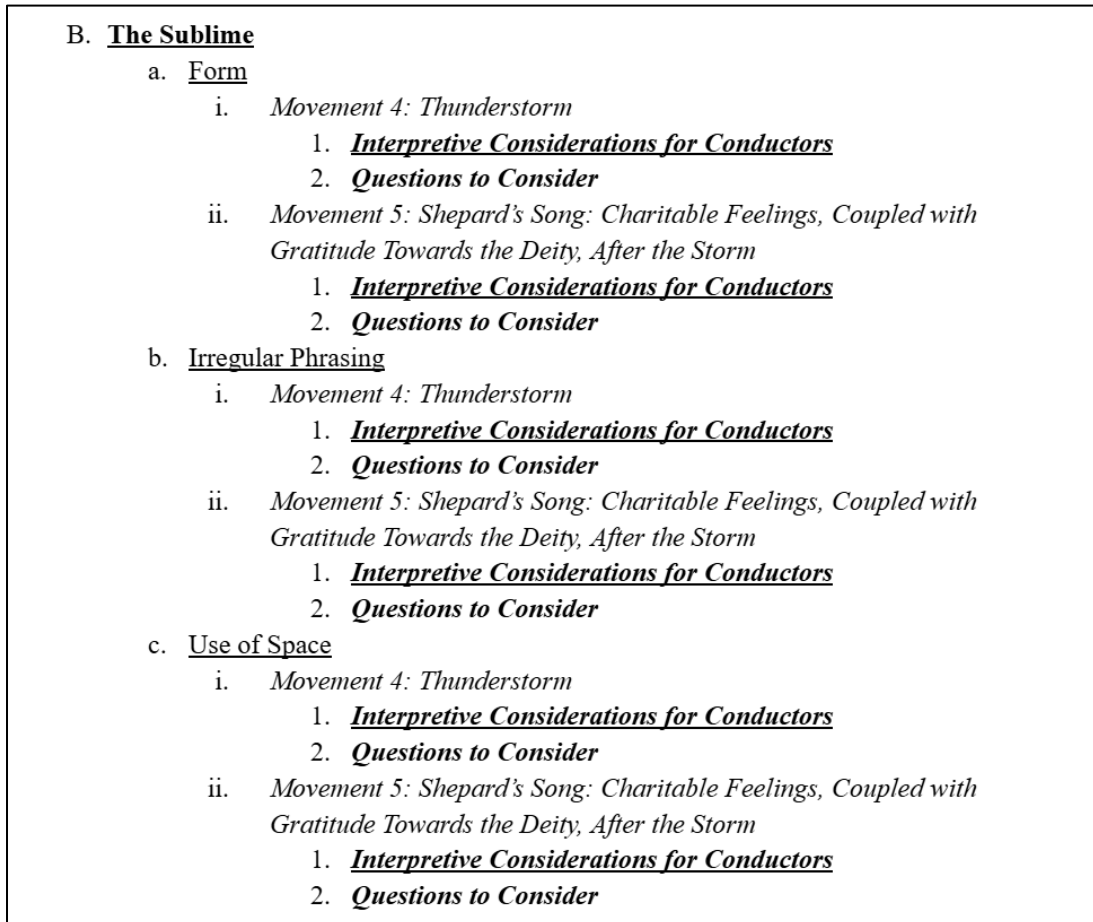


Figure 4b. Skeletal Outline of the Sublime Analysis

Interpreting the *Pastoral Symphony* through Kant's concepts of the Beautiful and the Sublime offers performers a coherent framework for shaping the work's large-scale trajectory. Rather than treating the movements as isolated scenes, this perspective clarifies how continuity, disruption, and restoration unfold across the symphony as a whole. For conductors, such an approach provides a conceptual basis for decisions about pacing, gesture, and contrast, grounding interpretation in an experiential logic that connects musical structure with expressive intent.

KANTIAN AESTHETICS: THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SUBLIME

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) completes his critical philosophical project by addressing the faculty of judgment that mediates between knowledge and morality. The work bridges his earlier investigations of knowledge in *Critique of Pure Reason* and morality in *Critique of Practical Reason* by examining the faculty of judgment that mediates between them. Kant focuses particularly on aesthetic and teleological judgments, exploring how humans experience beauty and the sublime while also considering how we perceive purpose in nature. In doing so, he argues that aesthetic responses are grounded in subjective experience yet carry a claim to universal validity. By connecting art, nature, genius, and morality within a single philosophical framework, the *Critique of Judgment* establishes a foundation that continues to shape modern aesthetic theory.¹⁶

Kant's Influence on German Aesthetic Philosophy in the Late Eighteenth Century

Kant's *Critique of Judgment* quickly became a central reference point in German aesthetic philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century. The early reception of the work demonstrates how rapidly its ideas permeated German intellectual culture. Within just a few years of its publication in 1790, the *Critique of Judgment* was widely discussed across intellectual circles, with both supporters and detractors treating it as a major contribution to debates surrounding aesthetics and moral philosophy. Friedrich Schiller's early aesthetic

¹⁶ Nicholas Walker, Introduction to *Critique of Judgement*, by Immanuel Kant, trans. by James Creed Meredith, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), vii–xxiii.

writings, for example, developed in direct response to Kant's third critique, reflecting the immediacy of its influence on German aesthetic discourse.¹⁷

Contemporary reviewers frequently considered Kant alongside earlier thinkers such as Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and Moses Mendelssohn, indicating that his ideas quickly became central to discussions of beauty, taste, and the relationship between aesthetics and morality. Early Romantic thinkers including Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel likewise interpreted Kant not merely as a critic of existing aesthetic theory but as the philosophical foundation for a new system capable of uniting beauty with moral freedom.¹⁸ In this way, Kant's influence extended well beyond philosophy narrowly defined, shaping the broader German intellectual climate at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Beethoven's engagement with the writings of Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe places him within the broader intellectual tradition shaped by Kantian aesthetic philosophy. Although no evidence suggests that Beethoven read Kant directly, his lifelong engagement with Schiller's *An die Freude* (later used in the final movement of the Ninth Symphony, the famous "Ode to Joy") places him within a Kantian aesthetic lineage, as Schiller's humanistic and universal ideals were deeply shaped by Kant's philosophy.¹⁹ In an October 1797 letter to Lenz von Breuning, Beethoven quotes Schiller's line, "Truth exists for the wise, beauty

¹⁷ Friedrich Schiller engaged directly with Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, but he disagreed with Kant's strict separation between aesthetics and morality. While Kant treated aesthetic experience as separate from ethics, Schiller argued that encounters with beauty help shape a person's moral development, most clearly articulated in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). See Jafari Hamideh, "Schiller's Critique of Kant's Aesthetic Philosophy," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law, and Politics* 3, no. 3 (July 2024): 69.

¹⁸ Alexander Rueger, "The Early Reception of the Third Critique," in *Kant on Pleasure and Judgement: A Developmental and Interpretive Account* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 8–15.

¹⁹ Nicholas Cook, "Schiller's 'An die Freude' and the Ninth Symphony," Appendix I in *Beethoven Symphony No. 9* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 106–09.

for the feeling heart — they belong to one another,” offering early evidence of his affinity for the German aesthetic tradition that mediated Kantian ideas through Schiller’s poetry.²⁰ This connection was not fleeting: in a 1809 letter to the publishers *Breitkopf and Härtel*, Beethoven even requested that they cover the cost of a complete edition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Schiller’s complete works.²¹ Goethe’s engagement with Kant, specifically, further strengthens this intellectual lineage. While Goethe did not adopt Kant’s philosophy systematically, his writings on nature, perception, and artistic experience were deeply shaped by Kantian aesthetics.²² Beethoven’s engagement with Goethe, especially his decision to write incidental music for Goethe’s play *Egmont*, suggests an indirect pathway through which Kantian ideas about freedom, nature, and moral struggle may have entered Beethoven’s musical imagination. Together, these moments suggest that Beethoven’s engagement with German literature was sustained and philosophically meaningful, situating his artistic worldview within the broader intellectual culture shaped by post-Kantian thought.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant establishes a foundational distinction between two principal forms of aesthetic experience: the Beautiful and the Sublime. Both belong to what Kant calls aesthetic reflective judgment, meaning they arise from feeling rather than concepts, and both are experienced with disinterested pleasure; that is, enjoyment free from desire, use, or moral purpose. Yet despite these similarities, the Beautiful and the Sublime differ

²⁰ In the late eighteenth-century German aesthetic tradition, truth and beauty were frequently understood as interconnected, especially in relation to nature. Drawing on Kant’s aesthetics and Schiller’s elaborations, beauty—often encountered most purely in nature—was seen as a perceptible expression of deeper truth, allowing aesthetic experience to bridge the sensory and the philosophical. See Ludwig van Beethoven, *Beethoven’s Letters: A Critical Edition with Explanatory Notes*, ed. and comp. by Alfred Christlieb Kalischer, trans. by J. S. Shedlock (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1:16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 197

²² Friedrich Jodl, “Goethe and Kant,” *The Monist* 11, no. 2 (Jan. 1901): 258–66.

profoundly in the mental faculties they engage and in the kinds of pleasure they produce. Before turning to the specifics, it is helpful to note a key distinction: the Beautiful indulges the imagination in a harmonious and pleasurable way, while the Sublime overwhelms it, pushing the mind beyond what it can comfortably grasp.²³

The Beautiful

For Kant, the Beautiful arises from the mind's experience of harmonious form. A judgment of beauty arises when the mind encounters an object whose appearance produces a harmonious free play between the imagination and understanding. This harmony feels delightful, not because of the object's purpose or utility, but because of the mind's own activity. A key feature of the Beautiful is that it appears purposive without a determinate end, as though an object presents itself as organized or meaningful while serving no specific function. This purposiveness, formal order without utility, allows the imagination and understanding to enter into free play. Another defining characteristic is the Beautiful's claim to universal validity. When someone calls a flower or melody beautiful, they implicitly expect others to agree. This is not because beauty is an objective property, but because the mental faculties involved are shared by all humans. Kant emphasizes that this demand for agreement is subjective yet necessary. Thus, beauty produces a feeling not only of pleasure but of communicability, a sense that this pleasure should be universally appreciable.²⁴

Kant illustrates the experience of natural beauty through the example of birdsong. The sound of a bird's song can appear almost artistic, presenting patterns that seem ordered, playful,

²³ Immanuel Kant, "First Section, Books 1 and 2: Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement," in *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35–75.

²⁴ Ibid.

and pleasing despite arising without deliberate rule or intention. Its charm lies in the way it appears purposive without a purpose: the melody feels ordered, playful, and delightful, even though the bird is not following musical laws or aiming at aesthetic effect. Because birdsong engages the imagination freely (without concepts, usefulness, or moral meaning) it exemplifies the disinterested pleasure and free harmony of the faculties that define pure beauty. In this way, birdsong demonstrates how nature can produce forms that feel as if they were art, revealing beauty in its purest and most spontaneous expression.²⁵

The Sublime

In contrast to the Beautiful, which arises from harmonious form, the Sublime emerges when the mind encounters magnitude or power that overwhelms the imagination. Kant states clearly that “The Beautiful in nature is a question of form, whereas the Sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form.”²⁶ Mountains, storms, and infinite expanses evoke the Sublime not because of their appearance, but because they exceed the imagination’s capacity to grasp them as a whole. This produces a unique two-stage emotional response. First, the imagination experiences displeasure, a painful awareness of its own limits. But then reason intervenes. Reason can think ideas (such as infinity or moral freedom) that the imagination cannot present. In this moment, the mind becomes aware of a faculty superior to nature.

A defining feature of the Sublime is what Kant describes as negative pleasure, a complex emotional response that combines awe, fear, and exaltation. Nature’s magnitude or might can humble the imagination, yet the mind is simultaneously ennobled by recognizing its rational capacity for moral law, which remains untouched by natural power. For this reason, the Sublime,

²⁵ Kant, “First Section,” 127–36.

²⁶ Kant, “First Section,” 75.

unlike the Beautiful, carries a distinctly moral tone. Although nature may physically overpower the human body, the experience of the Sublime reveals that human dignity as a rational being is independent of natural forces.²⁷

The Dynamically Sublime arises when the mind encounters the overwhelming power of nature. Kant describes such experiences through images of violent natural forces—thunder cracking overhead, winds tearing across the landscape, or waves crashing with terrifying intensity. These scenes confront the observer with powers capable of destruction, yet the experience typically occurs from a position of safety, allowing fear to transform into awe. In such moments the imagination recoils before nature's might, recognizing its own vulnerability. At the same time, reason asserts a deeper independence from natural force, producing a serious and exalted feeling rather than simple pleasure. The Dynamically Sublime therefore reveals a tension between human physical frailty and the inner strength of the rational mind as it confronts nature's overwhelming power.²⁸

Kant's distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime reveals two fundamentally different modes of aesthetic experience: one grounded in harmony, the other in transcendence. The Beautiful delights the imagination through form and balance, while the Sublime confronts the mind with magnitude or power that exceeds its sensory grasp. Together, these categories illuminate how encounters with nature can both soothe the imagination and challenge it, revealing not only the mind's pleasure in form but also its deeper capacity to rise beyond the limits of sense.

²⁷ Kant, "First Section," 76.

²⁸ Kant, "First Section," 75–165.

PASTORAL TRADITION AND THE SYMPHONIC GENRE IN EARLY-NINETEENTH CENTURY VIENNA

Origin of the Pastoral Style

The pastoral tradition in Western art and music emerges from an idealized vision of rural life that can be traced to classical antiquity, particularly to the bucolic poetry of Theocritus and Virgil. In these works, shepherds function less as realistic figures than as symbols of moral innocence, emotional sincerity, and harmony with nature.²⁹ From its earliest manifestations, the pastoral is closely associated with bodily movement and social ritual, especially through dance, which provided a primary vehicle for expressing simplicity, regularity, and communal pleasure. Early pastoral music is frequently linked to stylized dance types whose repetitive meters and gentle motion reinforce the image of an ordered, untroubled world (slow dances, usually in 6/8 meters).

As the tradition develops, this association with dance remains central, even as pastoral styles are absorbed into courtly and theatrical contexts. The pastoral thus operates as a myth of origins, a projection of a golden age articulated through measured motion and balance, that stands in implicit contrast to urban, political, or courtly complexity. Early modern theorists understood this inheritance clearly: pastoral expression was valued not for ethnographic accuracy but for its capacity to cultivate naturalness, moderation, and affective restraint. This awareness produces a characteristic tension within the tradition, as composers knowingly fashion an

²⁹ Classical pastoral poetry is shaped most decisively by Theocritus and Virgil. Theocritus's *Idylls* establish the pastoral through idealized shepherd figures and stylized rural song, while Virgil's *Eclogues* consciously model themselves on Theocritus, adapting his themes and imagery into a Roman literary context. Together, these works solidified the pastoral as an idealized poetic mode rather than a realistic depiction of rural life. See Thompson Potter Uhlman, "The Pastoral Idylls of Theocritus and the Bucolics of Vergil: A Comparative Study," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1952), 48–111, ProQuest EP60250.

innocent style through highly cultivated means, preserving the appearance of simplicity through artifice.³⁰

In eighteenth-century music, the inherited pastoral myth crystallized into a recognizable network of topical signifiers, most prominently the *musette*. The *musette* is a pastoral dance style that evokes the sound of the bagpipe through drone basses, conjunct melodies, and moderate tempos. Originating in early eighteenth-century French dance and opera, it later appeared in keyboard and orchestral works by composers such as Couperin, Bach, Handel, and Mozart.³¹ An example of a *musette* by Johann Sebastian Bach can be seen in Figure 5.

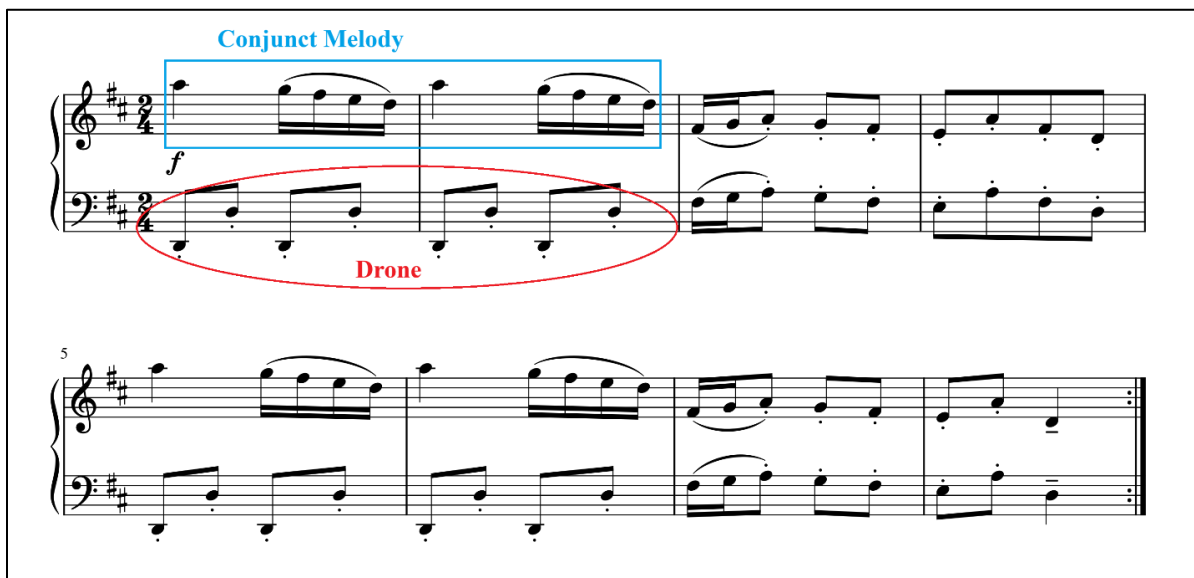


Figure 5. Measures 1–8 of the “Musette in D Major, BWV Anh. 126” from *The Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*, composed by J.S. Bach in 1725. It shows the conjunct melody and drone accompaniment characteristic of the *musette* style.

Eighteenth-century aesthetic writers frequently distinguished between high and low pastoral styles. Contemporary theorists, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau consistently distinguish

³⁰ Andrew Harringer, “Hunt, Military, and Pastoral Topics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 205–08.

³¹ Robert A. Green, Anthony C. Baines, and Meredith Ellis Little, “Musette (i),” in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed Feb. 28, 2026, <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.library.colostate.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19398>.

between high and low pastoral styles, allowing the topic to range from noble Arcadian refinement to deliberately rustic simplicity, while insisting that both remain governed by innocence, moderation, and emotional clarity.³² The *musette*'s drone, for example, reflects its stylized association with the bagpipe, yet its use within courtly music underscores the aristocratic appropriation of rural imagery. What ultimately defines the pastoral, then, is not its proximity to folk practice but its role as a symbolic space—one that mediates nature and culture, simplicity and cultivation, and allows composers to invoke an ethical and aesthetic alternative to heroic, dramatic, or sublime modes of expression.³³

This layered inheritance forms the aesthetic backdrop against which Beethoven engages the pastoral. By the early nineteenth century, the pastoral was already a well-established expressive mode shaped by centuries of literary, musical, and theatrical convention. Beethoven inherits this tradition not as a naïve depiction of rural life but as a symbolic language already saturated with associations of innocence, balance, and idealized nature. In works such as the *Pastoral Symphony*, he draws upon familiar pastoral signifiers (dance rhythms, drones, and stylized evocations of nature) while recontextualizing them within a broader expressive framework that transforms the pastoral from a decorative topic into a medium capable of sustaining deeper reflection on humanity's relationship to the natural world.

³² Eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse frequently distinguishes between high and low pastoral. High pastoral refers to an elevated, Arcadian mode linked with classical antiquity (Arcadian mode refers to an idealized vision of rural life inspired by the mythic region of Arcadia in ancient Greece.), courtly taste, and idealized nature, whereas low pastoral draws on rustic idioms such as drones, folk dances, and humorous rural imagery. Despite these differences, both were understood as expressions of simplicity and emotional transparency. See Daniel Obluda, "Topics in Hollywood Scores: Using Topic Theory to Expand on Recent Neo-Riemannian Analyses of Film Music" (PhD diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2021), 289–292. ProQuest 28415218.

³³ Ibid, 289–309.

Context and Reception of the *Pastoral Symphony*

Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* emerged within the distinctive musical and cultural environment of early nineteenth-century Vienna. The meaning of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony cannot be separated from the institutional and aesthetic conditions of early nineteenth-century Vienna, a city whose musical life was shaped by conservatism, a lack of sustained patronage for symphonic works, and ambivalence toward programmatic instrumental music. Situating the work within this context reveals that the *Pastoral* did not arise in a vacuum but within a complex network of traditions, expectations, and material limitations. Understanding these conditions clarifies not only how the symphony was created and received, but also why its pastoral vision carried such interpretive weight within its original milieu.

Early nineteenth-century Vienna provided a musical environment that was both culturally prestigious and strikingly conservative. As Sigrid Weismann observes, the city remained a bastion of traditional taste, largely resistant to the philosophical and literary currents shaping early Romantic thought elsewhere in Europe.³⁴ Viennese audiences were slow to embrace programmatic or philosophical interpretations of instrumental music, even as critics such as E.T.A. Hoffmann (writing from Berlin) were already framing Beethoven's works in metaphysical and imaginative terms. Hoffmann famously wrote that "Beethoven's music stirs the mist of fear, of horror, of terror, of grief, and awakens that endless longing which is the very essence of romanticism."³⁵

³⁴ Sigrid Weismann, "Vienna: Bastion of Conservatism," In *The Early Romantic Era*, ed. by Alexander Ringer, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 104–05.

³⁵ Arthur Ware Lock, and E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music: Translated from E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana* with an Introductory Note," in *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1917): 128.

Within Vienna itself, however, programmatic interpretations of instrumental music found little immediate acceptance. Orchestral concerts were irregular, often under-rehearsed, and frequently overshadowed by opera, which dominated public taste well into the nineteenth century. Public concert life also lacked the institutional infrastructure that had already begun to develop in cities such as Paris and London; Vienna did not build a dedicated concert hall until 1870, decades after Beethoven's symphonies had premiered.³⁶

This cultural conservatism reframes the *Pastoral Symphony* as more than a neutral evocation of nature. Rather than emerging within an audience prepared for philosophical or programmatic listening, the work entered a musical culture that was largely resistant to such interpretations. Recognizing this tension helps explain why the symphony's reflective and descriptive dimensions would have carried a different interpretive weight for its original Viennese listeners than they might for modern audiences.

The performance culture of early nineteenth-century Vienna was marked by instability, shaping both the creation and early reception of Beethoven's symphonic works. Orchestras were frequently under-rehearsed, and musicians lacked the institutional support or stability needed to meet the demands of large, complex symphonic works.³⁷ Financial collapse during the Napoleonic occupation weakened Vienna's musical institutions further, causing composers and performers to lose cultural influence.

Even as Beethoven's music began to gain recognition, it did so gradually within a musical environment that lacked the structural foundations of modern concert life. Regular orchestral programs, highly trained ensembles, and a broad public engagement with symphonic

³⁶ Weismann, "Vienna: Bastion," 90–91.

³⁷ David Wyn Jones, *The Symphony in Beethoven's Vienna*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 169.

music emerged only slowly from Viennese conditions during the first decades of the nineteenth century.³⁸ As a result, the *Pastoral Symphony* was not initially heard under the stable and carefully rehearsed conditions often associated with the modern symphonic tradition.

Recognizing this instability complicates modern assumptions about the symphony's original sound and reception. The *Pastoral* first appeared within a performance culture whose material limitations inevitably shaped both its execution and its perception. Understanding these conditions encourages a more historically grounded interpretation of the work as something that, in many respects, exceeded the circumstances of its initial performance environment.

Despite Vienna's cultural conservatism, the city inherited a rich Classical symphonic tradition from Haydn and Mozart. That tradition included pastoral topics, rustic dances, and idyllic scenes, which frequently appeared in earlier works through simple rhythms, drones, and diatonic folk-like melodies.³⁹ Pastoral gestures had long been woven into the symphonic language: tuneful Ländler, bagpipe drones, musette textures, and storm depictions appeared in eighteenth-century *Characteristic Symphonies*, a genre that assigned extra-musical topics (storms, battles, or national scenes) to instrumental movements.⁴⁰

³⁸ Weismann, "Vienna: Bastion," 92.

³⁹ A. Peter Brown, *The First Golden Age of the Viennese Symphony: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert*, vol. 2, *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002): 493.

⁴⁰ The Ländler, a rustic Austrian triple-meter dance characterized by heavy accents and folk-like melodic turns, became a common pastoral signifier in late Classical music, appearing in stylized form in works such as W.A. Mozart's *3 German Dances*, K. 605. In these pieces, Mozart adapts vernacular dance idioms for aristocratic settings, preserving their rustic rhythmic profile while smoothing their rougher edges through balanced phrasing and refined orchestration. This process exemplifies how folk-derived materials were absorbed into cultivated musical language, allowing pastoral associations to persist even within courtly contexts. See Mosco Carner, "Ländler (Ger.)," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001–), accessed Feb. 28, 2026, <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.library.colostate.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.15945>.

As Richard Will observes, these works often combined objective representations of nature with the subjective emotional states they evoke, suggesting that pastoral topics carried moral and affective significance rather than functioning as purely pictorial devices.⁴¹ Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, therefore, stands within a pre-existing lineage rather than representing the invention of descriptive orchestral music. Recognizing this lineage challenges the notion that the Pastoral marks a sudden break with tradition. Instead, the symphony emerges as a transformation of inherited pastoral conventions. Interpreted within this continuum, Beethoven appears less as the originator of musical pastoralism than as a composer who deepens and reconfigures an existing expressive language.

Pastoral narratives of the late eighteenth century frequently revolved around the image of a threatened paradise—an idyllic landscape disrupted by human or natural forces.⁴² This narrative pattern, often unfolding through stages of calm, community, disruption, and restoration, was widely recognizable across literature, theater, and instrumental music.⁴³ Within this cultural context, Beethoven's decision to compose a symphony structured around rural scenes, a violent storm, and a concluding hymn of thanksgiving would not have appeared unprecedented, even if the work's scope and psychological depth were distinctive.

⁴¹ Richard Will, "Introduction," in *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 1–28.

⁴² Arcadian landscapes threatened by natural forces also appear in late eighteenth-century German painting. Johann Nepomuk Schödlberger's *Arcadian Landscape with Gathering Storm* (1816), for example, depicts an idealized rural setting overshadowed by an approaching storm, visually capturing the tension between pastoral harmony and impending disruption.

⁴³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* (1797) presents a rural idyll disrupted by the upheavals of war, exemplifying the late eighteenth-century tendency to frame pastoral life as fragile rather than timeless. One of W.A. Mozart's early operas, *Bastien und Bastienne*, K. 50 (1768), is a pastoral Singspiel derived from Rousseau that depicts a rural idyll briefly unsettled by emotional conflict before harmony is restored, reflecting the late eighteenth-century pattern of threatened and renewed pastoral innocence.

Recognizing this broader pastoral narrative tradition clarifies that the structural design of the *Pastoral Symphony* participates in an established cultural pattern rather than emerging as a purely idiosyncratic invention. What distinguishes Beethoven's treatment is therefore not the presence of disruption and restoration themselves, but the scale and psychological intensity with which these elements are realized. Viewed in this way, the symphony balances continuity with innovation, transforming familiar pastoral conventions into a more expansive expressive framework.

Despite the pastoral tradition's long history, Vienna's musical culture remained deeply suspicious of explicit programs in instrumental music. As David Wyn Jones notes, at the time Beethoven composed the *Pastoral Symphony*, no major composer in Vienna was writing overtly programmatic works, and symphonies with descriptive titles were often regarded as intellectually less serious.⁴⁴ Within this aesthetic climate, Beethoven's decision to frame the symphony through pastoral scenes may have appeared unusual, even provocative.

This conservatism helps explain the mixed reception of the *Pastoral* after its premiere and why it became one of the least frequently performed of Beethoven's symphonies by major Viennese institutions in the decades that followed. Audiences accustomed to valuing abstract symphonic discourse over descriptive framing may have perceived the work's programmatic elements as aesthetically ambiguous. Interpreting the symphony within this climate of suspicion highlights how its pastoral imagery could have been experienced as both innovative and problematic for contemporary listeners.

Aristocratic patronage played a decisive role in shaping the material conditions that made Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* possible. Vienna's unstable financial and institutional structures

⁴⁴ Jones, *The Symphony*, 174–185.

meant that large-scale orchestral works depended heavily on private support rather than public concert institutions. Beethoven therefore relied extensively on aristocratic patrons, most notably Prince Lobkowitz, whose private orchestra and *Liebhaber Concerte* provided crucial venues for the performance of Beethoven's early symphonies. As David Wyn Jones notes, Lobkowitz hosted the first private performance of the *Pastoral*, and manuscript parts were prepared specifically for his court musicians. Lobkowitz's patronage provided the financial backing, rehearsal forces, and performance opportunities that Vienna's underdeveloped public concert culture could not reliably supply. His support allowed Beethoven to mount orchestral works that would otherwise have been difficult, if not impossible, to realize through ticketed public concerts alone. Yet this system was also fragile. By the late 1810s, Lobkowitz faced significant financial strain, limiting Beethoven's ability to secure adequate rehearsal resources and public performances.⁴⁵ The Sixth Symphony thus marks the end of a period in which such patronage made large-scale symphonic composition feasible.

Recognizing these conditions reveals that the *Pastoral Symphony* was not only an artistic achievement but also a product of the precarious support networks that sustained orchestral music in early nineteenth-century Vienna. The work's existence is therefore intertwined with the fragile institutional structures that determined what music could be performed—and even written—within the city's musical life. Situating the symphony within this context highlights the intersection of artistic vision and historical contingency that shaped Beethoven's pastoral project.

The musical culture of early nineteenth-century Vienna provides essential context for understanding the significance of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. A conservative concert culture, the scarcity of well-rehearsed orchestral performances, and a prevailing suspicion toward

⁴⁵ David Wyn Jones, *The Life of Beethoven* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 46–80.

programmatic instrumental music all highlight how unusual the Sixth Symphony was within its original environment. In composing the *Pastoral*, Beethoven expanded the expressive possibilities of the symphony at a time when Viennese audiences continued to favor vocal genres, familiar Classical forms, and instrumental works without explicit descriptive framing. Rather than representing an inevitable step in symphonic development, the work emerged as a bold intervention within a musical culture not fully prepared to receive it. Its descriptive titles heightened emotional rhetoric, and five-movement design challenged listeners who were not yet accustomed to thinking of the symphony as a vehicle for philosophical or poetic reflection.

ANALYTICAL EXPLORATION OF BEETHOVEN'S *PASTORAL* SYMPHONY

The following musical analysis is based on the Jonathan Del Mar critical edition of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, published by *Bärenreiter* in 1998, which serves as the primary source for all musical examples and measure references. This edition is widely regarded for its careful evaluation of sources and editorial transparency, making it a reliable foundation for analytical work. All citations and musical excerpts in the following discussion refer to this score unless otherwise noted. All musical examples have been transcribed using MuseScore 4.

The Beautiful:

Form

The first three movements of the symphony are examined through a combination of formal analysis and focused study of key motives and melodies. Situating these musical ideas within their broader formal contexts reveals how Beethoven shapes continuity and contrast across the movements. These analytical observations are then related to Kantian aesthetic concepts. Each movement concludes with interpretive reflections and questions for conductors, connecting analytical insight with practical performance considerations.

Movement 1: Pleasant, Cheerful Feelings that Awaken in People Upon Arrival to the Countryside

Table 2 outlines the formal design of the first movement ("Pleasant, Cheerful Feelings that Awaken in People Upon Arrival to the Countryside") and reveals a striking commitment to tonal stability and surface clarity. The movement's harmonic language contributes significantly to this effect. Unlike many large-scale sonata movements of the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries, it avoids excursions into minor-mode regions altogether.⁴⁶ Likewise, diminished chords and strongly destabilizing dissonances are largely absent until the final coda, where brief suspensions appear but resolve quickly. All tonal excursions remain within the major mode, creating a harmonic landscape that feels expansive yet consistently stable. This absence of minor inflection reinforces the movement's atmosphere of ease, openness, and continuity, aligning closely with its pastoral character. The third section of the development is particularly striking. Beginning in measure 275, Beethoven introduces a false retransition in B-flat major that leads into a false recapitulation in F major.

⁴⁶ In contrast to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (premiered on the same concert in 1808), the *Pastoral* Symphony deemphasizes teleological development. While both works traverse mediantly related tonal regions, the Fifth frequently moves through minor-mode areas such as B-flat minor, D-flat major, and F-sharp minor, preserving a sense of dramatic harmonic trajectory. The *Pastoral*, by contrast, remains largely within major-mode regions, unfolding through repetition and the recurrence of pastoral figures such as the gallop and calling motives, creating a less goal-directed tonal trajectory.

Table 2. Formal Analysis of Movement One (Sonata–Allegro Form)

Section	Measures	Key Area(s)	Function
Introduction	1–36	F major	Introduces “Gallop” and “Calling” motives. See Figures 6 and 7. ⁴⁷
Exposition	Theme 1: 37–42	F major	Introduce primary thematic material.
	Theme 2: 67–92	C major	
Development	Part 1: 139–243	Bb major, D major, G major, and E major	Expansion of the “Gallop” motive.
	Part 2: 243–274	A major, D major, G major, and C major	Expansion of the “Calling” motive.
	Part 3: 275 - 311	Bb major, F major, and C major	Fake retransition, fake recap, true retransition.
Recapitulation	Theme 1: 312–327	F major	Structurally, almost an exact copy of the exposition.
	Theme 2: 346–371		
Coda	418–end	Bb major to F major	Expanded closing section that confirms the tonic.

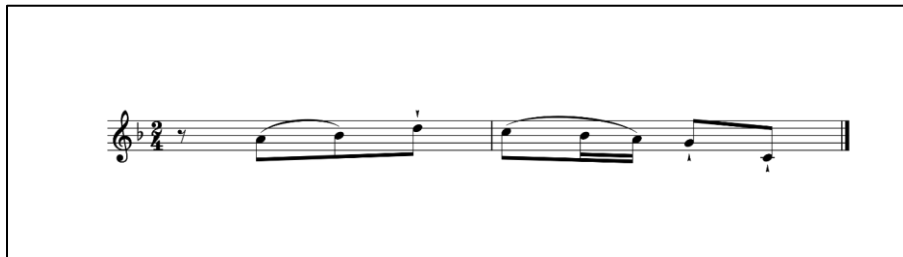


Figure 6. Gallop Motive in Movement 1.

⁴⁷ The terms *gallop* and *calling* motives are adopted in this study. The designation *gallop* motive refers to the recurring eighth–sixteenth rhythmic pattern, which evokes the galloping rhythm commonly associated with the *chivalric style* (see page 13 for a discussion of the *chivalric style*). The term *calling* motive derives from the melodic contour of the figure: the first two measures form an arched gesture (rising then falling), while the final measure functions essentially as an *appoggiatura*, a gesture often associated with a sighing or calling inflection.

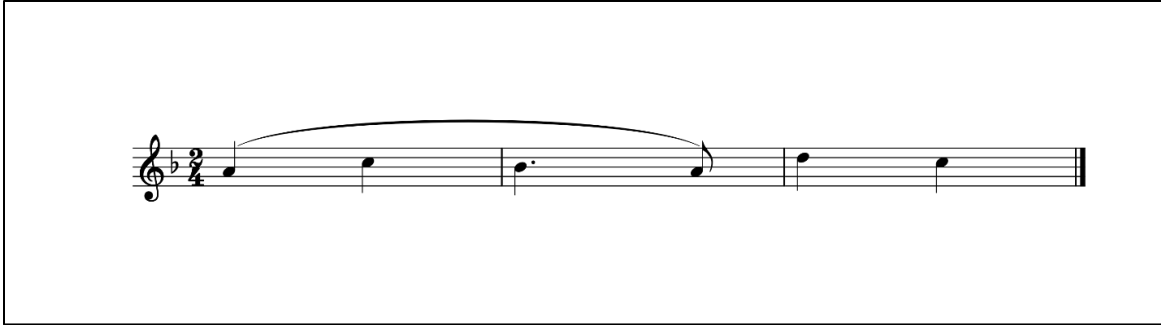


Figure 7. Calling Motive in Movement 1.

The tonal and formal restraint of the first movement can be productively understood through Immanuel Kant's conception of the Beautiful, as articulated in the *Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment*. Kant defines the Beautiful as that which pleases disinterestedly, apart from concepts or utility, through the perception of purposiveness without a purpose, a sense that an object's form is ordered and meaningful without serving an external end.⁴⁸ Beethoven's exclusive reliance on major-mode tonal areas and his avoidance of dramatic disruption cultivate precisely this experience. The movement unfolds with a clarity that feels intentional yet unforced, inviting the listener into a state of ease rather than demanding resolution of conflict. Musical motion is governed not by opposition or crisis, but by the repetition and gentle expansion of the gallop and calling motives, whose recurrence across different major key areas sustains a feeling of coherence without teleological urgency.

In Kantian terms, this formal design encourages the free play of imagination and understanding. Because the music presents no conceptual puzzle to be solved (no minor-mode threat and no destabilizing rupture), the listener is not driven toward analytical judgment or emotional agitation. Instead, the imagination is allowed to wander freely within a stable formal framework that the understanding nonetheless perceives as proportionate and ordered. Even

⁴⁸ Kant, "First Section," 127–36.

moments of apparent formal ambiguity, such as the false retransition and false recapitulation in the development, function less as dramatic surprises than as gentle deferrals of expectation. Their effect resolves not through confrontation but through the quiet confirmation of tonal and formal balance at the true return of Theme 1 in measure 312. The pleasure of this moment arises not from shock or novelty, but from the recognition that the music has unfolded naturally, in a way that feels both inevitable and freely given. In this sense, the passage appeals to shared human capacities for perceiving harmony, proportion, and calm purposiveness.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

A restrained interpretive approach in the third part of the development can be understood through theories of conducting as a cross-modal communicative system. As Globerson, Flash, and Eitan argue, effective conducting relies on motion that is perceptually coherent and kinetically economical, favoring smoothness and continuity over abrupt or exaggerated gestures.⁴⁹ In the passage surrounding the false retransition and false recapitulation, the music introduces no new thematic material and avoids dramatic harmonic rupture; instead, it generates momentary ambiguity through tonal function alone. An overly emphatic conducting gesture in measures 275–279 would therefore risk suggesting a sense of arrival even though the music has not yet reached structural resolution.

Within the framework outlined by Globerson and colleagues, such exaggeration would violate the principle of motion smoothness and disrupt the cross-modal relationship between gesture and sound. Because musicians interpret variations in gesture amplitude, velocity, and jerk as indicators of expressive activation, a restrained physical approach more accurately

⁴⁹ Eitan Globerson, Tamar Flash, and Zohar Eitan, “Space, Time and Expression in Orchestral Conducting,” in *Space-Time Geometries for Motion and Perception in the Brain and the Arts* (Berlin, Ger: Ringer Nature, 2021), 203.

reflects the music's formal status. The conductor's task, therefore, is to preserve perceptual stability so that the eventual retransition and the true return of Theme 1 at measure 312 register clearly through functional contrast rather than through the force of gesture.

Gestural restraint in this passage can be realized through conducting techniques that prioritize continuity of motion across the entire movement. Diane Wittry, drawing on the pedagogical lineage of Iyla Musin, advocates approaches that maintain fluidity without sacrificing clarity. In passages that are fast but not rhythmically aggressive, the Musin technique emphasizes rounded, continuous motion rather than angular articulation, allowing the conductor to sustain momentum while avoiding the perceptual sharpness associated with heightened expressive activation.⁵⁰ Applied to the false retransition and false recapitulation, such an approach preserves kinetic smoothness while maintaining structural clarity, aligning physical gesture with the music's restrained formal function.

Another important gestural consideration involves the role of the left hand. While Richard Strauss famously dismissed its importance, later conductors such as Hermann Scherchen emphasized its expressive potential when used independently rather than merely duplicating the right hand.⁵¹ Within this framework, the left hand functions not as a redundant timekeeper but as a subtle agent of refinement, shaping dynamics, phrasing, and nuance. In the context of the false retransition and recapitulation, this distinction becomes particularly significant: excessive bilateral motion could signal heightened expressive activation, whereas a restrained and

⁵⁰ Dianne Wittry, *Baton Basics: Communicating Music Through Gestures* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 84. A video sample of the Hideo Saito technique can be found here: <https://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780199354160/sec3/3.13/>.

⁵¹ Raymond Holden, "The Technique of Conducting," in *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, ed. José Antonio Bowen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10–12.

selectively deployed left hand supports the perceptual stability necessary for the passage to unfold without premature emphasis.

Interpretive restraint allows Beethoven's first movement to cultivate expectation without relying on dramatic disruption. As Globerson and colleagues observe, experienced conductors often minimize physical intervention when the musical structure is already perceptually clear, allowing the ensemble to respond to subtle shifts rather than overt commands. In this movement, the relative stability of the motivic material encourages performers and listeners alike to attend more closely to tonal placement. By maintaining smooth, proportionate gesture through the false recapitulation, the conductor allows the key area itself to function as the expressive event. The return of Theme 1 therefore emerges not through heightened gesture, but through the alignment of motion, harmony, and expectation—an embodiment of formal rightness rather than dramatic revelation.

Questions to Consider

1. Throughout the symphony, the conductor might continually ask: Does this moment call for intervention or restraint?
2. Will a heightened gesture clarify the structure or falsely imply arrival?
3. Given the title of the movement, what kind of experience/feeling is this passage meant to create?

Movement 2: Scene by the Brook

The second movement adopts a sonata-allegro design, though its formal logic differs significantly from that of the opening movement (see Table 3). As in the first movement, no minor key governs any of the major formal sections. However, this movement incorporates more frequent minor and diminished inflections, giving the harmonic surface a darker and more fluid

character. The development section is particularly revealing in this respect: it focuses almost exclusively on Theme 1, which undergoes continuous variation across multiple key areas, while Theme 2 is notably absent from developmental treatment. This imbalance shifts the movement away from dialogic contrast and toward a more contemplative form of expansion.

Table 3. Formal Analysis of Movement Two (Sonata–Allegro Form)

Section	Measures	Key Area(s)	Function
Exposition	Theme 1: 1–28	Bb major	Three repeats of theme 1 that go directly to theme 2. See Figures 8 and 9.
	Theme 2: 29–49	F major	Expected Tonic Dominant Relationship.
Development	Part 1: 58–68	G major	Variations on theme 1 and cadence theme.
	Part 2: 69–78	Eb major	More variations on theme 1 and cadence theme.
	Part 3: 79 - 90	Gb major to F major	Variations on theme 1 and retransition in F major.
Recapitulation	Theme 1: 91–96	Bb major	More emphasis on theme 2 and harmonic ambiguity between F major and Bb major.
	Theme 2: 104–121		
Coda	129–end	Bb major	Bird songs: Nightingale, Quail, and Cuckoo. See Figure 10.



Figure 8. Theme 1, Measures 1–7, in Movement 2.

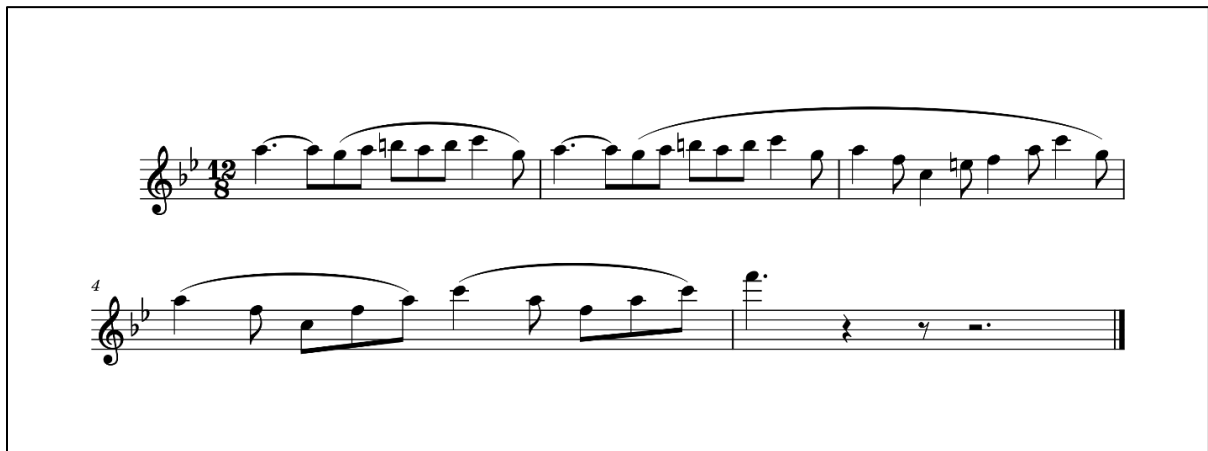


Figure 9. Theme 2, Measures 41–45 in Movement 2.

A recurring motivic figure in the development foreshadows the movement's later bird imagery and carries important interpretive implications. In the first part of the development, an arpeggiated figure appears prominently in the flute line (see Figure 11), adding lightness and surface motion to the texture. In the second part of the development, the same figure is transferred to the viola line (see Figure 12), subtly darkening the timbral palette while preserving motivic continuity. This detail connects to the movement's coda, where Beethoven provides explicit programmatic instructions assigning bird calls to specific instruments: the flute as the nightingale, the oboe as the quail, and the clarinet as the cuckoo. These markings represent the

only instance in the symphony in which Beethoven labels individual instrumental lines with descriptive imagery (see Figure 10).

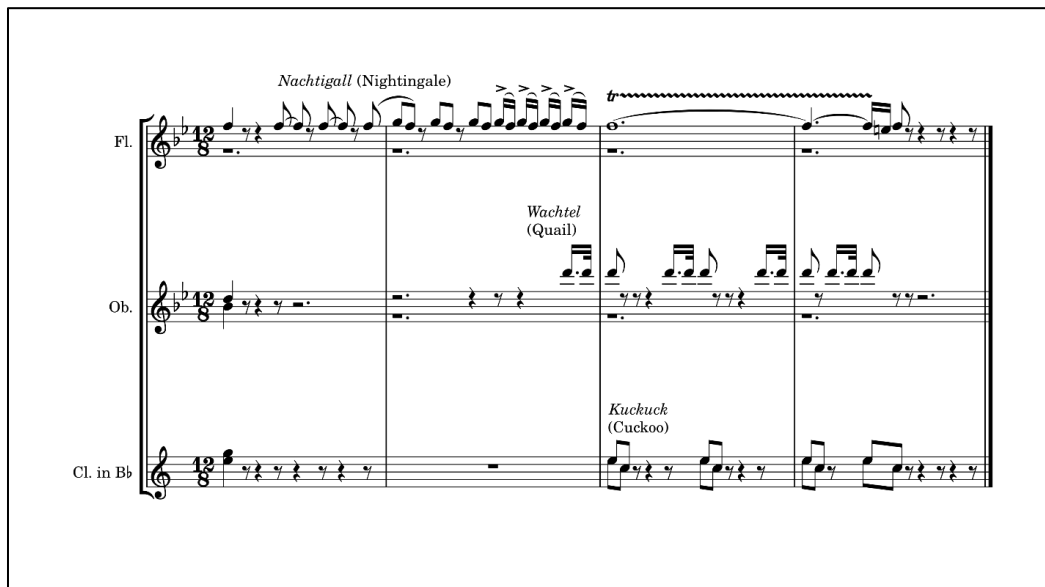


Figure 10. Bird Calls at the start of the Coda in Movement 2. Measures 129–32.

In his biography of Beethoven, Anton Schindler recounts conversations suggesting that the flute and viola figures earlier in the development likewise imitate the call of the yellowhammer, a bird Beethoven reportedly associated with the melodic material of the second movement. Schindler claims that Beethoven remarked, “It is the little lady up there [the yellowhammer] that composed that,” adding that “those other [bird] songs are merely meant for a joke.” While Schindler’s reliability as a source has often been questioned, the anecdote nevertheless reinforces the playful character of the movement’s closing bird calls.⁵²

From an interpretive perspective, these markings suggest that the coda’s bird calls should be projected with a degree of playful exaggeration. Although they remain grounded in the movement’s broader pastoral aesthetic of beauty and natural imitation, their explicit labeling and

⁵² Anton Schindler, *Beethoven as I Knew Him*, trans. by Ignaz Moscheles (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 144.

isolation invite a more overt, almost caricatured presentation that distinguishes them from the subtler avian gestures heard earlier in the movement.

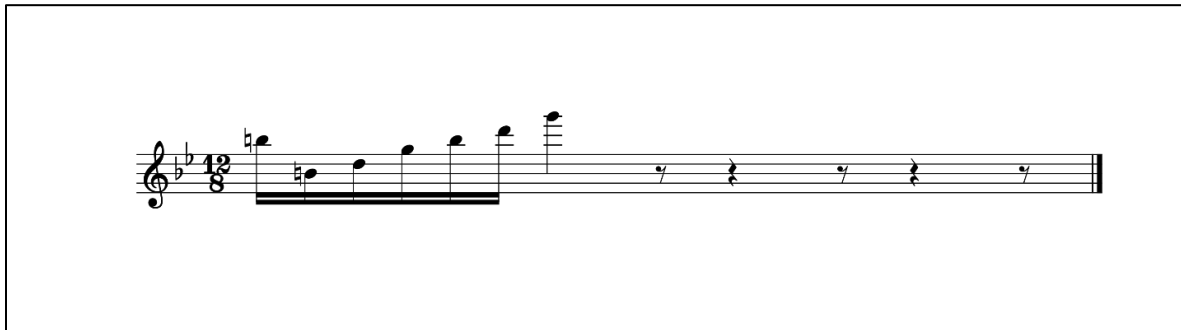


Figure 11. The Yellow-Hammer's Song in the Flute. Measure 58 of Movement 2.

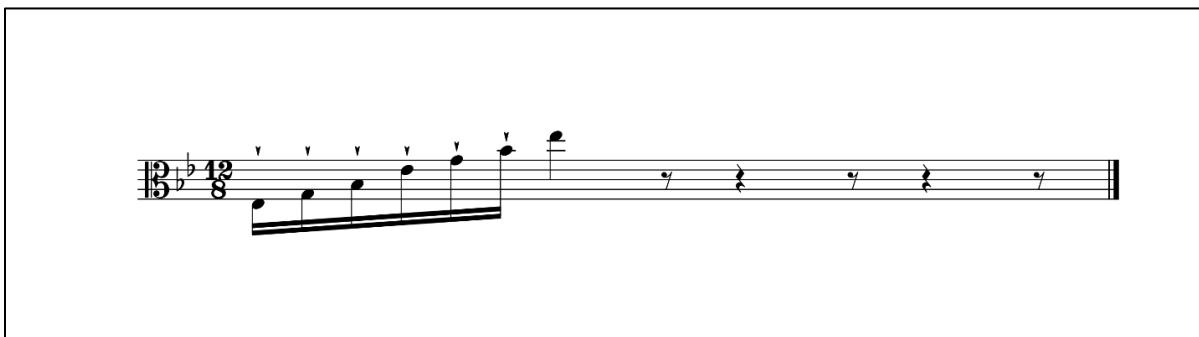


Figure 12. Variation of the Yellow-Hammer's Song in Viola.
Measure 69 of Movement 2.

The tonal centers and harmonic regions explored in the development of the second movement establish a clear structural connection to the first movement. Although both movements begin with relatively conventional I–V tonal frameworks in their expositions, their development sections soon depart from strict functional expectations and instead explore mediant relationships. These shifts frequently occur through pivot-based voice leading rather than through traditional dominant preparation, allowing remote tonal areas to emerge through linear motion. A move from G major to E-flat major, for instance, can be achieved through semitonal adjustments in individual voices, maintaining continuity without relying on conventional functional progression. In this way, the harmonic language foregrounds coloristic

transformation over teleological drive, creating a shared tonal logic that links the two movements beneath their contrasting surfaces.

Beethoven's use of birdsong in the second movement aligns closely with Kant's understanding of natural beauty. By drawing on sounds that are widely recognizable and experientially familiar, Beethoven appeals to a shared human sensitivity to nature rather than to culturally specific musical knowledge. The pleasure elicited by these bird calls does not depend on an understanding of sonata form, thematic development, or harmonic function; instead, it arises immediately through perception. In this sense, the bird calls exemplify Kant's claim that the Beautiful pleases apart from concepts yet carries a sense of universal communicability. Allowing these gestures to sound slightly exaggerated in performance can help clarify their natural and spontaneous character, reinforcing their function as universally accessible sonic images.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

The principal interpretive challenge of the development section lies in sustaining musical interest despite its repeated statements of Theme 1. Because the section unfolds through continual restatement rather than dramatic thematic contrast, there is a risk that the music may sound monotonous if treated as static repetition. Instead, the conductor must foreground the evolving orchestral color and internal detail that Beethoven introduces with each iteration. By shaping these subtle shifts in texture, balance, and instrumental emphasis, the conductor allows repetition to function as organic expansion rather than redundancy. This sensitivity to coloristic nuance also informs the treatment of the bird imagery, ensuring that each gesture contributes to a gradually unfolding sonic landscape rather than merely repeating familiar material.

Tempo elasticity offers conductors a subtle interpretive tool in shaping the second movement. Because the movement presents nature as a self-interacting system, interpretive decisions should emphasize organic unfolding rather than imposed dramatic direction. Within this framework, the use of rubato becomes a nuanced consideration. Although the movement resists overt tempo manipulation, excessive rigidity can cause its repeated figures to sound mechanical rather than organic. At the same time, expressive flexibility must preserve the illusion of underlying steadiness, allowing musical motion to feel continuous rather than fragmented. As conductor William Fried notes, rubato is most effective when it clarifies musical hierarchy without disrupting structural coherence, creating expressive nuance while maintaining the listener's sense of continuity.⁵³ Gentle, nearly imperceptible inflections, such as small breaths between iterations or slight expansions at moments of timbral change, can sustain a sense of living continuity without undermining the movement's pastoral character. In this way, tempo elasticity allows repetition to unfold organically while avoiding teleological drive, reinforcing the movement's atmosphere of purposiveness without overt goal-directed motion.

A clear example of effective rubato occurs in the passage shown in Figure 13. In the penultimate bar (measure 46), performance practice often introduces a slight yielding on the final subdivision of the measure. This approach can be heard, for example, in a recording by Gustavo Dudamel and the *Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar*.⁵⁴ For the conductor, realizing this effect may involve subtly subdividing the final beat, allowing a momentary relaxation without disrupting the broader sense of continuity. Beethoven reinforces this localized elasticity through

⁵³ William Fried, "On Rubato and Expressive Confusion," *American Music Teacher* 74, no. 5 (May 2025): 26.

⁵⁴ Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 - Mvmt 2," Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar, Gustavo Dudamel, 2017, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICjF-SdSw7U&list=RDICjF-SdSw7U&start_radio=1.

articulation: the short note values and pizzicato writing in the cellos and basses encourage a light, articulated release rather than a broad *ritardando*. These details suggest that any temporal flexibility should remain subtle and texturally grounded, allowing the phrase to breathe while preserving the movement's underlying stability.

The image displays a musical score for measures 45-47 of Measure 2. The score is written for a full orchestra, including Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Horn in Bb, Violins 1 & 2, Violas, Violoncello soli, and Violoncello e Contrabasses. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 12/8. The score features various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *p* (piano), *sf* (sforzando), and *pizz.* (pizzicato). There are also articulation marks like *tr* (trill) and *pizz.* (pizzicato) in the lower strings. The score is presented in a standard musical notation format with staves for each instrument.

Figure 13. Measures 45-47 of Measure 2. A possible passage for the use of *rubato*.

These interpretive strategies suggest that the movement rewards sensitivity to continuity rather than overt intervention. Repetition, birdsong, and carefully controlled tempo elasticity encourage an approach grounded in organic unfolding rather than teleological shaping. When handled with restraint, these elements allow the music to maintain a sense of purposiveness without overt goal direction, aligning performance with the movement's aesthetic of natural, self-sustaining motion.

Questions to Consider

1. Where can the conductor apply rubato to support a more organic sense of unfolding, as in moments like measure 46?
2. Should each recurrence of this figure receive the same treatment, or should elasticity vary according to context?
3. How can repetition be interpreted as unfolding rather than redundancy?

Movement 3: A Fun Gathering of Country Folk

The third movement adopts a modified *scherzo–trio* design. Both the *scherzo* and the trio are repeated in full before a transitional passage leads directly into the fourth movement, “Thunderstorm” (see Table 4). This expanded layout recalls Beethoven’s use of a similar formal strategy in the Fifth Symphony and serves a comparable structural function: rather than providing closure, the movement deliberately withholds resolution in preparation for what

follows.⁵⁵ Throughout the *scherzo*, trio, and their repetitions, F major remains the primary tonal center, reinforcing a sense of stability and pastoral continuity. Even moments of contrast (such as the raucous, dance-like character of the trio and its plagal cadences) do not destabilize the tonal frame but instead enrich it through rhythmic and textural variety.

Table 4. Formal Analysis of Movement Three (Modified *Scherzo* and Trio)

Section	Measures	Key Area(s)	Function
Scherzo	1–164	F major and D major	Introduces <i>staccato</i> versus <i>legato</i> melodies. See Figures 14 and 15.
Trio	165–204	F major and C major	Raucous dance with plagal cadences.
Exact repeat of the <i>Scherzo</i> section			
Exact repeat of Trio section			
Link to 4th Movement	205–end	F major with brief visit to D minor	Transition to movement 4.

⁵⁵ In the Sixth Symphony, the link serves primarily as an experiential device rather than a teleological one, preserving atmospheric continuity as the rustic dance gives way to the storm. The effect is deliberately naturalistic: the storm interrupts the human sphere rather than resolving it, creating a sense of intrusion rather than transformation. This structure allows the storm to begin and dissipate organically, mirroring the way a real storm emerges and recedes without formal closure. In the Fifth Symphony, however, the *scherzo–finale* link participates in a teleological transformation, carrying the C minor tension of the *scherzo* into the triumphant C major of the finale and reinforcing a narrative of goal-directed resolution.

Figure 14. *Staccato* Melody in Measures 1–8 of Movement 3.

Figure 15. *Legato* Melody in Measures 9–16 of Movement 3.

The concluding link to the fourth movement plays a crucial structural role. Rather than functioning as a conventional ending, it gradually dissipates the vitality of the *scherzo* and redirects the music toward the impending storm. In this way, the third movement functions less as an autonomous formal unit than as a threshold, sustaining the pastoral sound world while

subtly preparing its disruption. The persistence of F major throughout the movement heightens the dramatic impact of the storm's arrival: the listener experiences the break not as a gradual transformation, but as a sudden rupture within an otherwise continuous and familiar landscape.

The *scherzo* opens with two contrasting melodic ideas that establish the movement's expressive character. A sharply articulated *staccato* melody (Figure 14) is set against a more *legato* second idea (Figure 15). The first theme's detached articulation emphasizes rhythmic vitality and rustic physicality, while the second introduces smoother phrasing and a more flowing pastoral character. This contrast broadens the expressive palette of the movement, balancing dance-like energy with lyrical warmth. The two melodies are linked through a chromatic mediant relationship: the *staccato* theme appears in F major, while the *legato* melody emerges in D major.

The third movement highlights a central premise of the *Pastoral Symphony*: that human beings experience nature not as distant observers but as active participants within it. Rather than serving merely as a lighthearted interlude, the *scherzo* situates human activity (communal dance, physical movement, and social celebration) squarely within the pastoral landscape. In doing so, Beethoven makes explicit what remains implicit in the earlier movements: nature is not something contemplated from afar, but something lived in, shared, and experienced collectively.

From a purely formal or programmatic standpoint, Beethoven could theoretically have proceeded directly from the second movement to the storm of the fourth. Such a sequence would have emphasized nature as an external, pictorial force acting upon the listener. Yet this is not the symphony's central concern. The *Pastoral* is less about depicting nature itself than about articulating how nature is felt and experienced by human beings. The inclusion of the third movement is therefore crucial. By presenting a scene of human festivity within nature,

Beethoven establishes a point of identification: the listener is invited to inhabit the pastoral world before it is disrupted. This narrative placement profoundly shapes the meaning of the storm. Because the listener has first encountered nature as a space of human joy and embodied presence, the sudden eruption of the fourth movement is experienced not as abstract tone painting but as the interruption of lived experience. Seen in this light, the third movement becomes structurally and philosophically indispensable. Without it, the symphony risks collapsing into a sequence of picturesque scenes; with it, Beethoven constructs a trajectory that foregrounds human embeddedness in nature through celebration and then disruption.

The relevance of Immanuel Kant to this movement lies not in programmatic depiction but in aesthetic perception itself. Kant locates aesthetic experience in the subject's encounter with the world, arguing that judgments of beauty arise from how phenomena are felt rather than from what they objectively are. In this sense, Beethoven's *scherzo* aligns with Kant's view that nature becomes aesthetically meaningful only through human perception, linking the movement's rhythmic vitality to an experiential—rather than purely pictorial—conception of the pastoral.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

This human-centered reading of the third movement carries clear implications for conducting interpretation. Most importantly, all written repeats should be observed. The repeated *scherzo* and trio are not formal redundancies but expressive necessities: they allow the listener to remain within the human scene long enough for it to feel inhabited rather than merely suggested. Omitting the repeats would compress the movement into a purely transitional function and weaken its role as the symphony's moment of human presence. By observing every repeat, the conductor affirms that this movement is not simply a prelude to the storm but a fully lived moment within the pastoral world.

Tempo becomes a central interpretive consideration in the third movement because of Beethoven's contrasting tempo indications. The *scherzo* is marked dotted half note equals 108, while the trio is marked quarter note equals 132. Although these markings may initially appear to suggest a slowing of tempo, the musical effect is quite the opposite. By shifting the beat unit from the dotted half note to the quarter note, Beethoven redirects the listener's sense of pulse toward a smaller metric division, increasing the perceived rhythmic activity and surface motion. His request for an *accelerando* into the trio therefore reflects not a literal increase in absolute speed but a transition into a more animated and kinetically energized metric framework. Interpreted musically rather than through strict numerical calculation, the trio should feel lighter, quicker, and more energetic than the *scherzo*.

The interpretive character of the two melodies is shaped as much by their dynamic treatment as by their articulation. The opening *staccato* melody should not grow louder as it unfolds, despite the thickening texture. Beethoven marks *pianissimo* when the cellos and basses enter in the latter half of the phrase, suggesting that the addition of lower voices will naturally increase perceived weight without requiring additional volume. By contrast, the second, *legato* melody is marked *dolce*, indicating a more shaped and expressive approach. Its slurred figures invite gentle dynamic contour, with each successive gesture subtly blooming rather than remaining static. In this way, the two themes differentiate not only through articulation but

through fundamentally different dynamic behaviors: the first restrained and texturally balanced, the second expressive and vocally shaped.⁵⁶

Another passage worth considering appears in the B section of the *scherzo* (measures 87–164), where Beethoven reduces the texture to a small ensemble of winds and upper strings (Figure 16). In this passage, the clarinet introduces a melody that begins jagged and syncopated before resolving into a more lyrical contour. The bassoon enters briefly several measures later only to drop out again, creating a slightly awkward interruption, while the clarinet concludes with a light ornamental flourish. Anton Schindler, a pupil of Beethoven, claimed that this section was inspired by a band of seven instrumentalists performing at *The Three Ravens* inn near Mödling.⁵⁷

From an interpretive perspective, this passage benefits from embracing its stylized roughness rather than smoothing it into symphonic polish. The oboe articulations may be slightly exaggerated, the bassoon's low entries given a percussive weight, and the clarinet allowed a degree of independence in color and presence. Notably, the absence of a specific dynamic marking for the clarinet may encourage a subtly intrusive quality, reinforcing the impression of a loosely coordinated folk ensemble rather than a tightly unified orchestral texture.

⁵⁶ All but one of Beethoven's symphonies with a *scherzo* movement begin with an anacrusis, creating an immediate sense of lift and forward propulsion rather than grounded stability; a notable exception is the Ninth Symphony, whose *scherzo* begins on the downbeat. Symphonies 3, 5, and 6 also share the characteristic of extremely soft openings, reinforcing a sense of mystery or excitement rather than declaration. Within this group, however, the Fifth and Sixth diverge in thematic design: the Fifth Symphony's *scherzo* begins with a *legato* idea that gives way to more articulated material, whereas the Sixth reverses this trajectory, opening with a *staccato* theme before introducing a more *legato* second melody.

⁵⁷ David Wyn Jones, "Technique and Image," in *Beethoven: Pastoral Symphony* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 68–69.

The musical score is for measures 107-114 of Movement 3, B Section. It is written for Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Violin 1, and Violin 2. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 3/4. The Oboe part features a syncopated melody starting in measure 107, marked *pp*. The Clarinet in Bb part is mostly silent, with a few notes in measure 114, also marked *pp*. The Bassoon part has a few notes in measures 108 and 109, marked *pp*. Violin 1 and Violin 2 play a steady eighth-note accompaniment, marked *pp*.

Figure 16. B Section Melody in Measures in 107–14 of Movement 3. It shows the syncopated melody, clarinet line, and unexpected bassoon entrance.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the contrast between the restrained *staccato* opening and the more shaped dolce melody clarify expressive character without relying on dynamic inflation?
2. To what extent should the B section of the *scherzo* embrace stylized rustic roughness rather than symphonic polish?
3. How does the upbeat opening inform the movement's sense of lift, and how might emphasizing buoyancy over weight shape the *scherzo*'s overall character?

Irregular Phrasing

Irregular phrasing plays a crucial expressive role across the *Pastoral Symphony*, functioning not as a structural anomaly but as a perceptual catalyst that reshapes the listener's experience of musical form. Rather than serving purely formal ends, Beethoven deploys asymmetrical phrase structures to influence how continuity, arrival, and expectation are perceived in real time. Across the first three movements, this irregularity operates in distinct but related ways: in the first movement, elision softens teleological closure; in the second, asymmetry encourages a sense of wandering continuity; and in the third, disruption introduces perceptual instability that anticipates the storm. Viewed through a Kantian lens, these moments demonstrate how formal imbalance can generate meaningful aesthetic experience without relying on overt programmatic depiction. Irregular phrasing therefore emerges as a central expressive device in the symphony, mediating the listener's progression from the stability of the Beautiful toward the threshold of the Sublime.

Movement 1: Pleasant, Cheerful Feelings that Awaken in People Upon Arrival to the Countryside

Beethoven uses elision in this passage to resist teleological closure, allowing cadence to function as continuation rather than arrival.⁵⁸ Figure 17 illustrates how irregular phrase structure, created through overlapping cadential elision, operates as an expressive device rather than a structural anomaly. The example consists of two seven-bar phrases, each divided into a four-measure idea followed by a three-measure continuation, with the phrases linked through

⁵⁸ Elision is when the end of one phrase overlaps with the beginning of the next, so a single note or chord functions as both a cadence and a new starting point. See "The Elision" Robert Hutchinson in *Music Theory for the 21st-Century Classroom*, published in 2017, <https://musictheory.pugetsound.edu/mt21c/Elision.html>.

cadential overlap. This unevenness, appearing immediately after the presentation of Theme 2 in C major, allows cadential energy to spill forward rather than settle.

The elision into a strong plagal motion (C major to F major) further blurs the listener's sense of arrival, as the cadence functions simultaneously as both ending and continuation. Beethoven thus re-centers the music toward F not through dominant pressure but through a gentler, almost spiritual plagal pull. The repeated *forte* re-articulation at each pre-dominant cadence reinforces this effect, making each cadence feel less like a point of arrival and more like a grounding gesture than a teleological projection. In this way, the passage embodies a sense of purposiveness without goal-directed resolution, aligning structural design with experiential continuity.

7 Measure Elided Phrase

4 Measure Idea
3 Measure Idea

7 Measure Elided Phrase

4 Measure Idea
3 Measure Idea

Figure 17. Cadential Material in the Exposition of Movement One. Measures 93–106. It illustrates two elided seven-measure phrases.

This passage can be understood through Kant's concept of the Beautiful. The use of phrase elision resists goal-directed closure, allowing the music to unfold as something experienced rather than driven toward resolution. In Kantian terms, this reflects purposiveness without purpose: the form feels coherent and meaningful without pressing toward a definitive endpoint. The plagal relationship, often associated with affirmation rather than tension, reinforces this aesthetic by re-centering the music without dramatic striving. In this way, the music does not depict nature as something to be conquered or resolved but as a space to be inhabited.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

Dynamic shaping plays a central role in determining how phrase arrivals are perceived in this passage. Each of the two seven-bar phrases begins at a different dynamic level: the first at *forte* and the second at *fortissimo*. This contrast should remain clearly perceptible, as it shapes the expressive trajectory of the phrase pair. Beethoven further reinforces the dynamic articulation by reasserting the *forte* marking at the end of the four-bar unit, landing on an eighth-note arrival. Rather than striking this chord aggressively, a balanced approach may be most effectively emphasizing the arrival while avoiding both percussive attack and excessive brevity. This raises the question of how the orchestra should approach the *forte* rearticulation: should the arrival feel tapered and *subito*, or shaped through a gradual *crescendo*? The musical context suggests the latter. Active motion in the horns, whether in eighth-note figures or triplet patterns leading into the arrival, supports a sense of gathering momentum rather than sudden interruption. A subtle *crescendo* into the downbeat therefore preserves the phrase's forward energy while still avoiding percussive emphasis. In this way, the arrival emerges as organically prepared rather than abruptly imposed.

Orchestration plays an important role in shaping the interpretive character of the second phrase. Here Beethoven introduces several subtle timbral details. The bassoon and oboe enter together, producing a blended onset of color, while the horn sustains a soft C drone during the three-bar *piano* continuation. This underlying pedal should remain supportive rather than prominent, functioning as a grounding presence that stabilizes the phrase without drawing attention away from the melodic activity in the winds.

Questions for Consideration

1. How can the conductor differentiate the dynamic identities of the two phrases?
2. Should the *forte* arrivals feel prepared or sudden, and what in the texture suggests the answer?
3. How can the horn's pedal tone remain supportive without overshadowing the melodic line?

Movement 2: Scene by the Brook

Figures 18a and 18b show the opening portion of the development as a nine-bar phrase composed of five uneven measure groups that resist periodic symmetry. Measures 58–61 present a four-measure idea recalling Theme 1 in the oboe, now varied by the flute's addition of the Yellowhammer's song (Figure 18a). Although the V7 harmony in m. 61 might suggest an imperfect authentic cadence on the downbeat of measure 62 (I6), the sense of arrival is weakened by both the inverted tonic and the restless accompanimental figuration in Violin II and the cello soli. Rather than closing with a cadence, the four-measure opening idea dissolves into continuation. The flute's varied Yellowhammer figure in measure 62 is immediately echoed by the oboe in measure 63, forming a two-measure unit shaped by imitation rather than harmonic arrival (Figure 18b).

NC = No cadence (the phrase continues)
PAC = Perfect Authentic Cadence

Yellow Hammer Call

Theme 1

Water Motive

GM: 1

(NC) 4

V⁷

The musical score is for measures 58-61 of Movement 2. It features a nine-measure elided passage. The instruments listed are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in Bb (Cl. in Bb), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn in Bb (Hn. in Bb), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello solo (Vc. soli), and Violoncello/Contrabass (Vcl./Cb.). The key signature is Bb major (two flats). The time signature is 12/8. The passage begins with a 'p' (piano) dynamic and a 'solo' marking for the Flute. The first four measures are highlighted with yellow boxes and labeled 'Yellow Hammer Call'. The next four measures are highlighted with green boxes and labeled 'Theme 1'. The final measure is marked with a red line and labeled '(NC) 4', indicating a No Cadence. The passage ends with a V⁷ chord.

Figure 18a. Measures 58–61 of Movement 2. First four measure group of the nine-measure elided passage.

Figure 18b. Measures 62–67 of Movement 2. The last four groups of measures that create the nine-measure elided passage.

Measure 64 forms a self-contained one-measure unit. Although the downbeat carries a faint plagal implication (following IV), the I6 harmony projects continuation rather than repose, reinforced by duetting fragments in the flute and oboe. The rapid harmonic motion that follows (I6–V7/V–V7–I) implies cadence but the tonic chord occurs on beat four, the weakest metrical position, undermining any sense of cadential closure. Measure 65 functions as its own one-measure unit. The arrival on IV at the downbeat privileges plagal color over dominant-driven resolution, as the harmony is prolonged largely within the orbit of C major. The appearance of the first diminished sonority in the symphony (functioning as a secondary seventh chord on beat 12) heightens tension without forcing immediate closure. This moment of harmonic intensification could disrupt the prevailing flow, but a subtle ritardando may help bring the sonority into relief without undermining the passage’s continuity. Measure 66 brings a partial return of Theme 1 within the final self-contained one-measure unit, leading directly into the downbeat of measure 67, where Beethoven finally grants a fully satisfying perfect authentic cadence. The asymmetry of this nine-bar phrase (4+2+1+1+1), with its elisions, delayed arrivals, and harmonic detours, contributes to a feeling of gentle wandering—less a goal-oriented development than a musical analogue to roaming attention, in which ideas emerge, overlap, and recede like impressions encountered while moving through nature itself.

From a Kantian perspective, this asymmetrical stretch of the development exemplifies, once again, purposiveness without purpose: the music feels ordered and meaningful without confirming that order through stable or predictable cadential form. The repeated deferral of closure through I6 arrivals, rapid harmonic motion, and elided phrase boundaries, maintains a state of what Kant describes as the free play between imagination and understanding. A sense of coherence emerges without being reducible to a rule or formal schema within the passage. This

quality distinguishes the Beautiful from the merely agreeable or the good. The passage does not gratify through clear functional goals, nor does it instruct through conceptual clarity. Instead, its pleasure arises from the experience of motion itself, as Theme 1 becomes a generative force that continually produces new melodic material. In this way, the listener is invited into a form of disinterested engagement with musical unfolding rather than a focus on cadential arrival.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

Interpretively, emphasis should fall within the line rather than at its endpoints. The flute and oboe exchanges may be shaped as conversational gestures, with forward motion maintained through the I6 harmonies and the plagal implications allowed to register as color rather than arrival. A further interpretive decision arises in measure 64, where Beethoven introduces a brief *crescendo* that resolves immediately back to *piano* in measure 65. Rendering this return as a clear *subito piano* sharpens the expressive contour without implying cadential closure. The contrast allows the *crescendo* to function as a localized coloristic event rather than as a structural buildup. In Kantian terms, this effect preserves purposiveness without teleology: the listener perceives expressive shaping without associating it with goal-directed motion.

Beyond dynamics and articulation, phrasing presents another crucial interpretive dimension. Because the passage unfolds through asymmetrical groupings rather than balanced periods, strict metric regularity can obscure its expressive logic. Conductors may instead shape the line according to breath-like units that follow imitation and melodic contour rather than barlines. Allowing the phrase to breathe in this way preserves the sense of unfolding continuity that defines the passage's character. From a Kantian perspective, this approach supports the experience of free play, in which coherence is perceived without reliance on predictable formal symmetry.

A related question concerns how clearly the internal groupings of the nine-bar span should be articulated. Although the passage can be analytically divided into smaller units, overemphasizing these boundaries risks fragmenting what is fundamentally a continuous gesture. Treating the phrase as a single evolving arc allows its asymmetry to function perceptually rather than analytically, sustaining the impression of gentle wandering rather than sectional development. In performance, the goal is therefore less to delineate formal divisions than to maintain a living continuity in which ideas seem to emerge and recede organically.

Questions to Consider

1. Should the passage be shaped as a continuous unfolding line, or should its internal groupings be articulated?
2. Should dynamics, phrasing, and timing reinforce conversational flow (winds, I6 motion, plagal color), or highlight cadential events that the music itself resists?
3. How can localized contrasts (such as the measure 64 *crescendo* and *subito piano*) enhance perceptual vitality without introducing goal-directed teleology?

Movement 3: A Fun Gathering of Country Folk

The nine-bar phrase in measures 41–25 destabilizes the otherwise stable pastoral dance texture of the third movement. Throughout the movement, Beethoven maintains regular phrasing, tonal consistency, and dance-like continuity in F major. The sudden emergence of irregular phrasing—combined with the movement’s first minor inflection (D minor) and an unresolved arrival on a highly charged V7 in F major—disrupts this continuity at a perceptual level. Importantly, this disruption occurs before the storm itself, functioning not as depiction but as anticipation.

This passage marks the first moment in the symphony where the listener's experience begins to shift from the stability of the Beautiful toward the threshold of the Sublime. Interpreted through Immanuel Kant's aesthetic framework, the disruption arises not from dramatic force but from the breakdown of formal balance. Kant describes the Beautiful as grounded in proportion, regularity, and the free play of imagination within a stable framework. The irregular nine-bar phrase interrupts that equilibrium: imagination continues forward, but understanding can no longer comfortably organize what it hears. The resulting tension emerges not from volume or violence but from formal asymmetry and harmonic instability, which unsettle expectation without yet overwhelming perception. Crucially, this instability is experienced as unease rather than fear. In Kantian terms, the listener senses a loss of perceptual control before reason intervenes. The unresolved dominant and minor inflection do not yet confront the listener with nature's overwhelming power; instead, they introduce the awareness that such power exists and may soon intrude.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

The passage invites an interpretive response that heightens its growing instability through subtle forward momentum. A gentle, unmarked *accelerando* across the nine-bar phrase can intensify the listener's sense of unease without resorting to overt dramatic emphasis. Given the irregular hypermeter, the symphony's first minor inflection, and the mounting harmonic tension culminating in an unresolved V7, a slight increase in forward motion reinforces the passage's perceptual instability. Such an *accelerando* need not be overt; rather, it operates as a perceptual tightening of time, mirroring the sensation of momentum gathering beneath an otherwise familiar surface.

This interpretive possibility finds support in performance practice. In his recording with the Philharmonia Zürich, Jukka-Pekka Saraste introduces a *poco accelerando* across this nine-bar passage.⁵⁹ In this way, Beethoven again prioritizes human experience over pictorial depiction. The music does not imitate thunder or wind; instead, it conveys the sensation of sensing an approaching disturbance—an intuitive recognition that the natural world is no longer entirely benign. This anticipatory tension prepares the listener for the storm not as spectacle but as experiential inevitability. The passage thus marks the symphony’s first moment of existential tension, where the pastoral stability of the Beautiful begins to yield to the Sublime.

Questions to Consider

1. Should the nine-bar span remain metrically stable, or can a subtle, unmarked *accelerando* heighten the listener’s sense of gathering unease without sounding overtly dramatic?
2. If an *accelerando* is used, how gradual should it be, and where should it begin so that the change is felt rather than overtly heard?
3. How can the conductor coordinate ensemble awareness of the irregular hypermeter, so the phrase retains cohesion even as forward momentum increases?

Use of Space

Silence plays a crucial expressive role throughout Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*, shaping the listener’s perception of musical time as powerfully as sound itself. Moments of rest, pause, and suspension do not simply interrupt motion; rather, they heighten awareness of the unfolding present and frame the musical events that follow. In each of the first three movements, Beethoven employs silence in distinct ways: as a perceptual hinge that intensifies expectation, as

⁵⁹ Ludwig van Beethoven, “Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 Pastoral,” Philharmonia Zürich, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, 2019, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whEDL_PLIbY.

a suspension that allows natural imagery to emerge with clarity, and as a temporal space that prepares the listener for structural return. Examined through the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, these moments of silence reveal how musical meaning can arise not only from harmonic progression or thematic development but also from the listener's temporal experience of form itself. For the conductor, such passages demand careful consideration of pacing, gesture, and temporal flexibility, since the shaping of silence directly influences how the music is perceived and understood.

Movement 1: Pleasant, Cheerful Feelings that Awaken in People Upon Arrival to the Countryside

Silence plays a crucial expressive role in this passage, intensifying the perceptual effect of Beethoven's irregular phrasing. Returning to Figure 17, the irregular phrase structure has already been discussed, but Beethoven's use of silence further heightens the passage's expressive weight. At the end of the four bar units in measures 96 and 103, Beethoven inserts an additional beat and a half of rest, momentarily suspending forward motion before an arrival on a IV harmony. Importantly, this arrival should not be understood as harmonic tension or cadential resolution. Although the harmony that follows the silence is IV, it does not function cadentially: there is no dominant resolution and no sense of closure or repose. Instead, the IV chord operates as a coloristic point of arrival, affirming presence rather than resolution. The silence generates anticipation without instability by sharpening the listener's attention, while the forte marking argues against any sense of tapering or relaxation. Sound returns with emphasis, not release, reinforcing continuity rather than finality

From a Kantian perspective, the inserted silence reshapes how musical form is perceived in time. By momentarily interrupting forward motion without disrupting structural continuity, the pause alters the listener's experience of the passage. Understanding remains oriented within the

broader harmonic framework, while imagination lingers on the present moment. In this way, the silence reinforces the experience of beauty as something apprehended through temporal awareness rather than through harmonic function alone.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

This passage suggests an interpretive approach that preserves forward motion rather than emphasizing cadential arrival. Conductors should therefore resist broadening into the rests or treating the return as a point of resolution. Doing so would imply closure where Beethoven instead maintains continuity. The silence functions as a perceptual hinge: it heightens awareness of the present moment without threatening tonal stability. In this way, Beethoven demonstrates how expectation can arise through interruption alone, allowing anticipation to emerge without reliance on harmonic tension.

Another interpretive dimension lies in the character of the material that follows the silence. Because the arrival is marked *fortissimo* yet remains non-cadential, the contrast should not be created through sharper articulation. Instead, the difference in dynamic weight can emerge through breadth of sound and collective resonance rather than accent. Musicians might think in terms of expansion rather than impact, allowing the *fortissimo* to bloom out of the silence without sounding declarative.

Gesturally, the conductor plays a crucial role in shaping this effect. A spacious, grounded preparatory motion can encourage fullness of sound while avoiding any sense of vertical emphasis. In particular, the gesture should discourage striking the final eighth note, ensuring that the dynamic growth feels sustained rather than punctuated. In this way, the return carries presence without implying structural arrival, preserving continuity while still intensifying the expressive field.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the orchestra create a clear *fortissimo* contrast after the silence without changing articulation or introducing vertical emphasis?
2. What gestural approach can help the sound expand out of the silence with breadth and resonance rather than impact?
3. How can the conductor shape the preparation and release so the final eighth note is sustained rather than struck, preserving continuity instead of implying arrival?

Movement 2: Scene by the Brook

Silence becomes a central expressive device at the opening of the coda in the second movement. As shown in Figure 20, Beethoven introduces the movement's first grand pause, writing rests for the entire orchestra across beats 3–5 and allowing the texture to empty completely before the flute enters on beat 6. This moment functions less as a measured silence than as a suspension of musical time, clearing space for the first explicit bird call to emerge in isolation. Interpretively, this invites a degree of flexibility: allowing the silence to linger slightly beyond its notated value can heighten the sense of stillness and attentiveness, granting the solo flute a feeling of spontaneous emergence rather than metric obligation. When the bird calls are repeated in the following phrase (measure 132), Beethoven alters the effect by reintroducing the flute immediately on beat 3, directly after a perfect authentic cadence on beats 1–2. Here, silence no longer suspends time but instead articulates structure.

The image displays a musical score for measures 129-33 of Movement Two. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in Bb (Cl. in Bb), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn in Bb (Hn. in Bb), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello solo (Vc. soli), and Violoncello/Double Bass (Vcl. e Cb.). The second system includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in Bb (Cl. in Bb), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn in Bb (Hn. in Bb), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello solo (Vc. soli), and Violoncello/Double Bass (Vcl. e Cb.). The score features bird call motifs labeled 'Wachtel (Quail)' and 'Kuckuck (Cuckoo)'. A red circle highlights a specific note in the first system, and a blue oval and a red oval highlight specific passages in the second system.

Figure 20. Measures 129–33 of Movement Two illustrate the difference in silence between the two groups of bird calls in the coda.

Kant's discussion of birdsong as a model of natural beauty sheds light on the interpretive contrast between the two flute entrances in this passage. Kant observes that a bird's song, which follows no deliberate musical rule or compositional intention, often appears freer and more delightful than human singing bound by convention. Heard in this light, the first flute entrance after the grand pause may be understood as deliberately unmetered in character: allowing the silence to linger enables the bird call to emerge as something seemingly natural rather than strictly organized, aligning with Kant's idea of beauty arising from freedom rather than rule. By contrast, the second entrance—placed precisely within the metric framework—reasserts human musical order, clarifying Beethoven's distinction between nature's spontaneous voice and its subsequent integration into structured musical time.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

The contrasting silences in measures 129 and 132 require distinct interpretive treatment in performance. Because the two moments serve different expressive functions, the conductor must reclaim metric control after the first silence to ensure a clear and coordinated entrance that reaffirms the underlying pulse. Treating both pauses identically would obscure Beethoven's distinction between free emergence and measured continuation. A recording by Paavo Järvi with the *Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen* exemplifies this approach: the initial silence is allowed to linger expressively, while the second entrance adheres closely to Beethoven's notation, preserving clarity and forward motion.⁶⁰ In this way, temporal flexibility becomes an expressive tool rather than a general license, reinforcing Beethoven's careful differentiation between moments of contemplation and moments of continuity.

⁶⁰ Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven: Symphony No. 6, 2nd movement," *Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen*, Paavo Järvi, 2019, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiONuZmUp8E>.

A further interpretive question arises at m. 132 (circled in blue): should any natural space be allowed before the entrance of the first violins? Beethoven places the entrance precisely on beat six, leaving no written gap between the end of the bird calls and the return of the strings. In performance, however, approaches vary. Some conductors introduce a slight temporal space at this juncture. In the recording mentioned above, Paavo Järvi allows a brief suspension before the violins re-enter, creating a moment of perceptual release. By contrast, other recordings adhere strictly to the notation. Herbert von Karajan's 1963 recording with the *Berliner Philharmoniker*, for instance, maintains strict metric continuity, allowing the entrance to emerge directly from the preceding texture.⁶¹

From a Kantian perspective, the more flexible approach can be especially compelling. Allowing a subtle breath before the entrance reinforces the sense of reflective listening cultivated by the preceding bird calls, preserving the listener's experience of temporal awareness rather than reasserting strict structural control. The added space does not undermine continuity so much as heighten perception, allowing the listener to linger momentarily in a state of contemplative stillness before motion resumes. In this way, the slight suspension aligns with an aesthetic of purposiveness without rigid teleology: time remains meaningful without becoming mechanically regulated. The entrance that follows can then feel like a reawakening of motion rather than a purely metric obligation.

Questions to Consider

1. Should extra space be added at the start of the coda in measure 129?

⁶¹ Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 "Pastoral": II. *Szene am Bach*. Andante molto mosso," *Berliner Philharmoniker*, Herbert von Karajan, 1963, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiAUnRlc6yI&list=RDfiAUnRlc6yI&start_radio=1.

2. Should the entrance of the first violins in measure 132 occur strictly on beat six, or should a slight temporal space be allowed?
3. Should the flute entrance in measure 133 remain strictly in time, or can a similar flexibility be introduced?

Movement 3: A Fun Gathering of Country Folk

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

The two fermata chords on C major at the close of the trio (measure 204; see Fig. 21) create a moment of temporal indeterminacy that invites interpretive shaping by the conductor. By suspending musical motion just before the return of the *scherzo*, Beethoven leaves unresolved how the surrounding time should unfold in performance. The passage therefore raises two closely related interpretive questions: how long each fermata should be sustained and how much temporal space should separate the second fermata from the *scherzo*'s re-entry.

Although the score does not notate an additional measure, performance practice consistently introduces a brief expansion of silence at this juncture. Recordings by Daniel Barenboim with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Manfred Honeck with the Verbier Festival Orchestra, Sylvain Cambreling with the *Kammerorchester Basel*, Frans Brüggen with the Orchestra of the 18th Century, and Christian Thielemann with the *Wiener Philharmoniker* all

insert what amounts to an extra bar of silence between the trio and the *scherzo*.⁶² The remarkable consistency across these interpretations suggests that the added space is not simply the result of inherited tradition or stylistic convention. Rather, the silence following the fermatas appears to demand expansion for the formal return of the *scherzo* to register perceptually. In this sense, the interpretive impulse to create additional temporal space seems less like a discretionary choice and more like a response compelled by the listener's experience of form itself.

⁶² Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven - Symphony No. 6 (Proms 2012)," West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Daniel Barenboim, 2012, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW-7CqxhnAQ>; Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 Pastoral," Verbier Festival Orchestra, Manfred Honeck, 2008, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQcJLE57w0U>; Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 Pastoral," *Kammerorchester Basel*, Sylvain Cambreling, 2021, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRt24rQ2hJM>; Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven - 6th Symphony 'Pastoral'," Orchestra of the 18th Century, Frans Brüggen, 2011, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbfa86bTD34>; Ludwig van Beethoven, "Symphony no. 6 in F major, 'Pastoral'," *Wiener Philharmoniker*, Christian Thielemann, 2011, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT1kV2Ga3oA>.

The image displays a musical score for measures 132-133 of Movement Three. The score is arranged in a system with ten staves, each representing a different instrument or section. The instruments are: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. in Bb), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn in F (Hn. in F), Trumpet in C (Tpt. in C), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello and Contrabass (Vc. e Cb.). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked 'sempre più forte' (always getting stronger). The dynamics are marked 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'p' (piano). The score shows a series of notes and rests, with fermatas at the end of the measures. Red circles highlight the fermatas in the Tpt. in C and Vln. 1 staves, indicating a specific interpretive implication for timing before the scherzo's return.

Figure 21. Measures 132–133 of Movement Three, showing the fermatas at the end of the trio and their interpretive implications for timing before the *scherzo*'s return.

Interpreted through the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, this convergence among conductors can be understood as an instance of subjective universality. Kant argues that

judgments of beauty arise from individual sensation yet implicitly claim the assent of others. In this case, conductors independently arrive at similar temporal solutions not because such space is explicitly prescribed, but because the musical situation invites a shared perceptual response. The silence following the fermatas is not calculated according to a fixed metric value; rather, it is experienced as necessary. Allowing additional space therefore reflects not arbitrary interpretive freedom but a decision aligned with how listeners perceptually organize musical form over time. Kant's philosophy of time offers an additional lens through which this moment can be understood. For Kant, time is not a property inherent in external objects but a fundamental form of human sensibility, the mental framework through which experiences are ordered and perceived. Kant understood time as not a property of things but a property of the instrument by which we view things.⁶³ Time therefore acts as the framework that allows sensations and events to unfold in an understandable sequence. Without this sense of temporal order, our experiences would not form a coherent perception.

The silence between the fermatas and the return of the *scherzo* therefore functions as more than a dramatic pause. It provides the listener with enough temporal distance to reorganize the unfolding musical form. The brief suspension allows the trio to recede into the past while preparing the perceptual frame for the *scherzo*'s return. In this way, the silence operates not merely as an expressive gesture but as a structural one: it helps the listener register the transition between sections as a meaningful shift in musical time.

This interpretive practice also finds support in nineteenth-century accounts of Beethoven's performance style. Carl Czerny, one of Beethoven's most important students, noted that fermatas in Beethoven's music should generally be approached by a slight broadening of

⁶³ Lewis Rowell, "Time in the Romantic Philosophies of Music," *Indiana Theory Review* 25 (Fall 2004): 139–75.

tempo, suggesting that moments of suspension were intended to emerge through an expansion of musical time rather than through abrupt interruption.⁶⁴

The consistency among conductors therefore reflects more than stylistic convention. It reveals a shared response to the temporal conditions under which musical form becomes intelligible to listeners. By allowing additional space after the fermatas, the conductor gives the listener's perception time to complete one structural unit before encountering the next. In this way, the interpretive choice aligns with the fundamental role that time plays in organizing human experience, enabling the transition between trio and *scherzo* to register clearly within the listener's perception of musical succession.

The Sublime:

Form

Movement 4: Thunderstorm

The fourth movement, "Thunderstorm", confronts the listener with a form that appears deliberately unstable and resistant to Classical formal expectations. The apparent formlessness of the movement has long been noted by musicologists, though opinions diverge on how—or whether—it should be understood structurally. David Wyn Jones proposes that the movement

⁶⁴ Czerny's suggestion that fermatas in Beethoven's music should be approached through a slight broadening of tempo should be treated with some caution. While his accounts provide valuable insight into nineteenth-century performance practice, there are notable passages in Beethoven's repertoire where such a treatment may not align with the musical character of the passage. One frequently cited example is the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, where a pronounced *ritardando* into the fermatas of the opening gesture could undermine the aggressive and propulsive character of the motif. As with many aspects of performance practice, the application of tempo modification before fermatas ultimately remains a matter of interpretive judgment for the conductor and performer. The question of how broadly Czerny's recommendation should be applied across Beethoven's repertoire could easily warrant a much more extensive study in its own right. See Carl Czerny, *On the Proper Performance of all Beethoven's Works for the Piano*, ed. and trans. by Paul Badura-Skoda (Vienna, Austria: Universal Edition AG, 1970), 32.

unfolds through a succession of roughly equal paragraphs, each approximately ten measures in length, suggesting a loose but perceptible internal articulation.⁶⁵ By contrast, Richard Will argues that the storm's resistance to traditional formal categories undermines its place within the Classical symphonic framework altogether.⁶⁶

Despite its apparent resistance to traditional formal categories, the fourth movement retains a perceptible structural logic. While Hector Berlioz later emphasized the primacy of pictorial effect in such movements (suggesting that formal analysis is beside the point) it can be argued that Beethoven does not abandon structure altogether.⁶⁷ Rather than being organized according to inherited symphonic forms, the fourth movement is structured according to the natural phenomenology of a storm itself. Its musical trajectory traces three experiential stages: anticipation, arrival, and decay. As shown in Table 5, the fourth movement may be understood as a modified binary form, though one organized by effect rather than by harmonic or thematic design.

Table 5. Formal Analysis of Movement Four (Modified)

Section	Measures	Key Area(s)	Function
Anticipation	1–20	Written in F minor but no longer establishing key areas	Introducing the “Rain” motif. See Figure 22.
Arrival	21–40		Frightened by Thunder and Lightning.
Decay	41–61		Has the worst of the

⁶⁵ David Wyn Jones, *Beethoven, Pastoral Symphony* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75.

⁶⁶ Richard Will, “Time, Morality, and Humanity in Beethoven's ‘Pastoral’ Symphony,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 277–79.

⁶⁷ Hector Berlioz, “Symphony No. 6 in F (the ‘Pastoral’),” in *A Critical Study of Beethoven's Nine Symphonies*, trans. by Edwin Evans (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000): 75.

			storm passed?
2nd Anticipation	62–77		Shorter than first intensify. The storm is not done. Return of the “Rain” motive.
2nd Arrival	78–118		Longer than the first climax section. The worst of it is here.
Final Decay	119–End	Starts in F major, more diminished chromaticism, ends in C major.	Transition to the 5th movement.

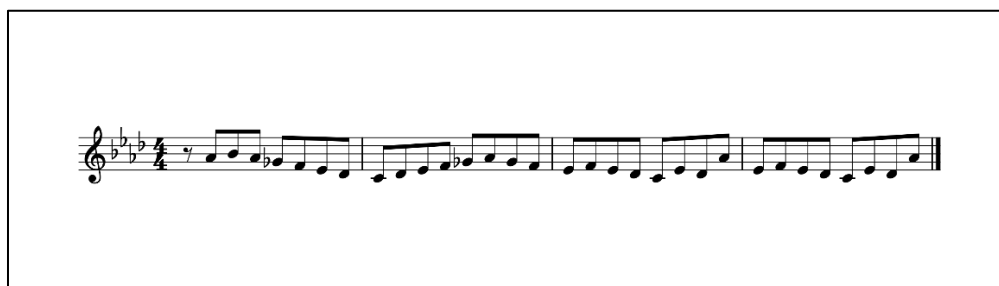


Figure 22. Rain Motif in Movement Four.

Figure 23 and Table 6, drawn from the analysis of David Wyn Jones, provide a clear overview of how dynamics and motivic deployment articulate the structure of the fourth movement. The passages highlighted in red trace a recurring pattern of anticipation, arrival, and decay, revealing a consistent internal logic beneath the movement’s apparent formlessness. Both anticipation sections begin *pianissimo* and introduce motive a, establishing an atmosphere of gathering energy rather than harmonic direction. In each case, this buildup leads to an arrival marked by *fortissimo* dynamics and the entrance of motive e, signaling the storm’s full force through sheer sonic impact rather than formal cadence. Likewise, both decay sections subside into *pianissimo*, featuring motives f and d, which function to dissipate energy and gradually restore perceptual calm.



Figure 23. Motives in *Thunderstorm*. David Wyn Jones, *Beethoven: Pastoral Symphony* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 74, example 12.

Table 6. Dynamic and Motivic Function in *Thunderstorm*. David Wyn Jones, *Beethoven: Pastoral Symphony* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75, Table 3.

Table 3					
	Anticipation	Arrival		Decay	
<i>Bar</i>	1–20	21–33	33–40	41–48	49–55
<i>Key</i>	D $\flat$ maj→	F min→	B $\flat$ min→	D $\flat$ maj→	C min→
<i>Motif</i>	a, b	c	d, e	f, d	f, d
<i>Dynamic</i>	pp, cresc	ff	ff + sf	pp, f, sf, pp	p, cresc, f
	Anticipation	Arrival		Decay	
<i>Bar</i>	56–61	62–67	68–77	78–88	89–94
<i>Key</i>	A maj→	D maj→	→	C min→	D $\flat$ maj→
<i>Motif</i>	a	f, a, b	a	g	e
<i>Dynamic</i>	p	pp	pp, cresc	ff, sf	ff, sf
	Anticipation	Arrival		Decay	
<i>Bar</i>	95–118	119–35		136–55	
<i>Key</i>	chromatic	B $\flat$ min, C min, D $\flat$ maj→		V/F maj	
<i>Motif</i>	h	g		f, d, i	
<i>Dynamic</i>	p, cresc, f, ff, sf	ff, dim		pp	

Dynamic trajectory and motivic deployment provide the primary means through which the fourth movement's structure becomes perceptible. Figure 23 and Table 6, adapted from the analysis of David Wyn Jones, offer a clear overview of how these elements articulate the movement's internal organization. The passages highlighted in red trace a recurring pattern of anticipation, arrival, and decay, revealing a consistent logic beneath the movement's apparent formlessness. Both anticipation sections begin *pianissimo* and introduce motive *a*, establishing an atmosphere of gathering energy rather than harmonic direction. In each case, this buildup leads to an arrival marked by *fortissimo* dynamics and the entrance of motive *e*, signaling the storm's full force through sheer sonic impact rather than through formal cadence. Likewise, both decay sections subside into *pianissimo*, featuring motives *f* and *d*, which dissipate energy and gradually restore perceptual calm.

The fourth movement derives its structural coherence not from tonal architecture but from the recurrence of experiential states shaped through motive and dynamic trajectory. These recurring correspondences suggest that Beethoven organizes the movement through the

repetition of anticipation, arrival, and decay rather than through conventional harmonic or thematic processes. Coherence thus emerges through effect: the listener recognizes form through the return of characteristic gestures rather than through thematic recapitulation or tonal symmetry.

Despite these motivic and dynamic correspondences, however, the movement retains a palpable sense of formlessness. This impression arises largely from the instability of its harmonic language. Tonal centers are suggested but rarely sustained, and the music resists settling in any single key for more than a fleeting moment. As a result, harmonic function fails to provide a stable framework through which the listener can orient the musical flow. The movement therefore remains perceptually unsettled even as patterns recur, reinforcing the sense that Beethoven is less concerned with formal clarity than with conveying the volatile, ungraspable character of the storm itself.

The harmonic instability of the fourth movement closely mirrors Kant's concept of the Dynamically Sublime. In Kant's philosophy, the Dynamically Sublime arises from encounters with overwhelming natural forces (storms, floods, or other displays of immense power) that threaten the senses without physically endangering the observer. Crucially, the Sublime does not emerge from form or beauty but from the imagination's inability to fully organize what it perceives, followed by reason's recognition that the self ultimately remains secure. In this framework, instability and excess are not flaws but necessary conditions for the experience of the Sublime.⁶⁸ The harmonic behavior of the fourth movement reflects this model with striking clarity. Although motivic and dynamic patterns recur, harmony never settles long enough to provide perceptual grounding. Tonal centers are suggested only to dissolve almost immediately,

⁶⁸ Kant, "First Section," 77–78.

preventing the listener from forming a stable mental map of the musical terrain. This absence of harmonic rest sustains a sense of perceptual disorientation even as the music unfolds through recognizable waves of intensification and decay.

At this moment, the listener's experience moves decisively beyond the Beautiful and into the realm of the Dynamically Sublime. The imagination attempts to grasp form through harmony, motive, and dynamic shape, yet repeatedly fails to organize these elements into a stable perceptual framework. The storm is therefore apprehended not as a structured musical object but as an overwhelming force in motion. Significantly, Beethoven does not resolve this instability within the movement itself. Instead, the restoration of order is deferred to the fifth movement, where calm and tonal clarity return. This structural design closely mirrors Kant's account of the sublime, in which the mind ultimately asserts its resilience only after confronting a power that exceeds the imagination's capacity for sensory organization.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

Interpretively, contrast becomes the conductor's most powerful tool in shaping the fourth movement. Because the storm unfolds within the realm of the Dynamically Sublime, its effect depends not on continuous intensity but on the sharp opposition of emotional and sonic states. Moments of gathering tension, explosive arrival, and gradual dissipation must remain clearly differentiated if the storm is to feel overwhelming rather than merely loud. Once a tempo is established, it must not be allowed to slow. Any relaxation risks domesticating the storm, transforming overwhelming force into something manageable and undermining the movement's cumulative momentum. Instead, the conductor must sustain relentless forward motion, allowing the music's waves of energy to build and break without artificial restraint. The size of the conductor's gesture can also play a crucial role in making this structure perceptible. Because the

storm's form is articulated primarily through waves of intensification and release rather than traditional harmonic landmarks, variations in gesture amplitude can help both orchestra and audience perceive these shifts in energy. Smaller, more contained motions during moments of anticipation allow tension to accumulate, while broader gestures at climactic arrivals visually and kinetically project the storm's overwhelming force. In this way, gesture becomes not merely a means of coordination but a communicative tool that helps reveal the movement's experiential form, allowing the audience to sense the storm's unfolding power even before it is fully realized in sound.

Questions for Consideration

1. How can the conductor maintain a steady tempo throughout the movement so that the storm continues driving forward without losing energy?
2. How can dynamics and articulation be shaped so that moments of tension, climactic outbursts, and dissipation remain clearly distinct rather than blending into a single loud texture?
3. How can the conductor's physical gesture (particularly the size and clarity of the beat) help the orchestra anticipate shifts in intensity and coordinate the storm's sudden arrivals and releases?

Movement 5: Shepherd's Song: Charitable Feelings, Coupled with Gratitude Towards the Deity, After the Storm

The fifth movement restores stability after the storm through the reassuring repetition of its rondo design. As shown in Table 7, the movement is cast in rondo form, a structure that allows recurring material to function as a vehicle for reassurance and familiarity following the violence of the storm. The repeated return of the shepherd's theme provides the listener with a

stable point of orientation, gradually re-establishing tonal clarity and emotional grounding after the dynamically sublime experience of the fourth movement.

Table 7. Formal Analysis of Movement Five (Rondo Form)

Section	Measures	Key Area(s)	Function
Intro	1–8	C major to F major	Introduce <i>Ranz des Vaches</i> (work song played on horn that emotes nostalgia). See Figure 26.
A	9–31	F major	Three repeats of the “Shepherd’s Hymn.” See Figure 27.
Transition	32–39	F major to C major	New transition theme first introduced in viola and cellos. See Figure 24.
B	40–63	C major	Imitation of motives moving down the string section.
A’	64–79	F major	Return of the Shepherd’s Theme but only repeated twice.
C	80–116	Bb major to C major	Introduction of a Croatian folk song in clarinet and bassoon. See Figure 25.
A’’	117–139	F major	Variation of Shepherd’s Theme.
Transition	140–147	F major	Return of transition theme.
B’	148–163	F major	Return of Imitation of motives moving down the string section.

Section	Measures	Key Area(s)	Function
Coda	Part One: 164–176	F major	Variation of <i>Ranz des Vaches</i> .
	Part Two: 177–189		Sheperd's Theme with variants.
	Part Three: 190–195		Sheperd's Theme fragments. The first encounter of Sublime feelings.
	Part Four: 196–205		Variation of <i>Ranz des Vaches</i> .
	Part Five: 206–218		Sheperd's Theme variant.
	Part Six: 219–236		Sheperd's Theme fragments. The climax of the whole symphony. Sublime feelings.
	Part 7: 237–257		Hymn of Grace with fragments repeated.
	Part 8: 258–end		Last repetition of the <i>Ranz des Vaches</i> in horn. Ultimate peace.

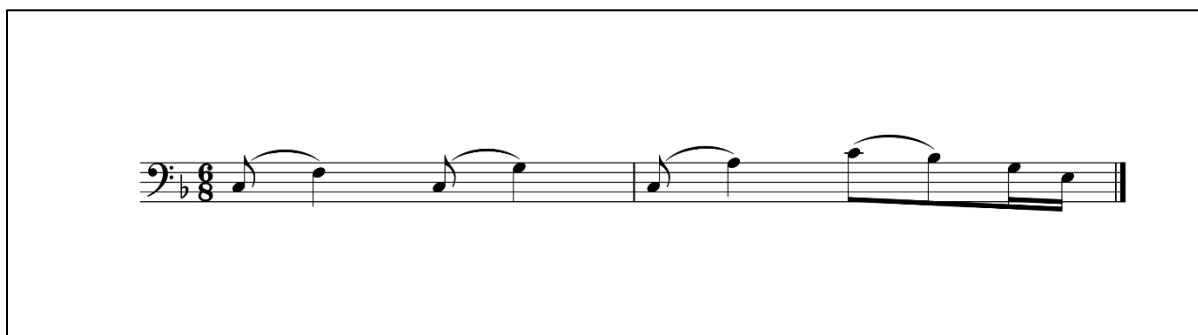


Figure 24. Transition Theme in Movement 5.

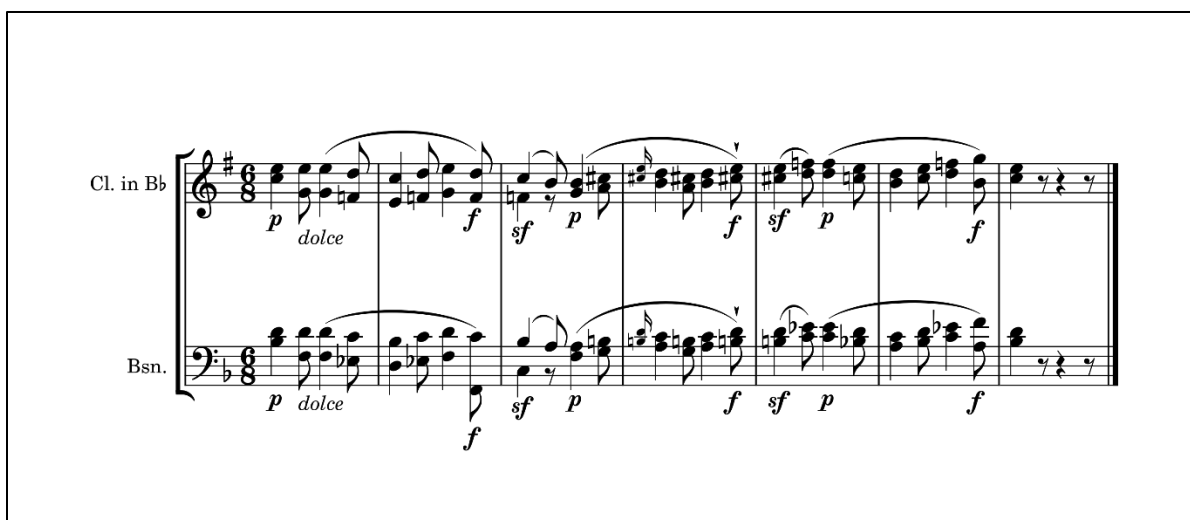


Figure 25. Croatian Folk Song in Movement 5.

The final movement begins by re-establishing the pastoral landscape through the horn's presentation of a *Ranz des Vaches*. Introduced in measures 1–8 (see Figure 26), the *Ranz des Vaches* is a traditional alpine herdsman's call, historically played on a horn or sung and closely associated with pastoral life. The melody was widely recognized in the eighteenth century as a sonic emblem of rural simplicity, often linked with nostalgia, homesickness, and the vocal inflections of yodeling. Beethoven's decision to open the movement with this gesture is therefore deeply symbolic: before the shepherd's communal song begins, the music first reasserts a sense of place

Fl.

Ob.

Cl. in Bb

Bsn.

Hn. in F

Vln. 1

Vla.

Vc.

Solo dolce

Solo p

sf

pp

sf

sf

Figure 26. *Ranz des Vaches* in the First 8 Measure of Movement Five.

The shepherd's theme establishes the movement's sense of stability through its consistent harmonic structure. Entering in measure 9 (Figure 27), the principal theme functions as the rondo

refrain and provides the movement's central point of return. Strikingly, each recurrence of the theme preserves the same harmonic framework, reinforcing familiarity and tonal stability. Rather than introducing harmonic variation, Beethoven sustains interest through rhythmic, textural, and instrumental changes, allowing the theme to sound renewed without compromising its harmonic identity. This restraint stands in sharp contrast to the harmonic volatility of the storm, underscoring the movement's restorative role within the symphony.

The musical score for 'Shepherd's Theme' in mm. 9–16 of Movement 5 is presented for six instruments: Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Horn in F, Violin 1, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p dolce*, *p*, *pp*, and *pizz.*. The harmonic analysis at the bottom identifies the following chords: FM: I, IV⁶, V⁶, V₃⁶, V, I, vi, ii₃⁶, V, I.

Figure 27. Shepherd's Theme in mm. 9–16 of Movement 5

The most striking structural feature of the movement is its unusually extended coda, which occupies nearly a third of the entire movement. Rather than offering a brief closing affirmation, Beethoven unfolds the coda in multiple stages, alternating between variants of the *Ranz des Vaches*, transformations of the shepherd's theme, and increasingly fragmented motivic material. Most remarkable is that the shepherd's theme never returns in its complete form during the coda. Instead, it appears only in partial statements and fragments, gradually dissolving into the simple hymn that emerges in part 7 of the development.

Read through a Kantian lens, this evolving treatment of the theme reflects the philosophical aftermath of the Dynamically Sublime. Although calm is restored after the storm, the listener's perception has been fundamentally altered by the experience of overwhelming natural power. The shepherd's theme therefore does not simply repeat; it acquires new expressive weight with each return. The rondo form thus becomes more than a structural device: it allows Beethoven to demonstrate how the same musical material can be heard differently once the imagination has confronted forces that exceed its capacity for immediate understanding. In performance, shaping these subtle transformations helps reveal the movement's deeper narrative of restoration, gratitude, and reflective peace.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

The rondo design of the fifth movement also creates an important interpretive opportunity for the conductor. Although the shepherd's theme returns several times throughout the movement, Beethoven preserves its harmonic structure with striking consistency. This stability invites conductors to shape each recurrence not through harmonic alteration, but through subtle differences in phrasing, color, and expressive weight. The refrain should therefore not sound

mechanically identical with each appearance. Instead, its meaning evolves according to its musical surroundings and the listener's growing awareness of the storm that has preceded it.

The first statement of the shepherd's theme establishes the movement's pastoral foundation. Emerging immediately after the storm, it should convey a sense of grounded simplicity and calm restoration. The phrasing may remain balanced and flowing, allowing the melody to unfold naturally without exaggerated dynamic shaping. Emphasis should fall within the line rather than at its endpoints, preserving the sense that the melody is sung rather than declared. In this first appearance, the theme functions primarily as a stabilizing presence, reorienting the listener within a landscape that has only just regained equilibrium.

As the theme returns later in the movement, however, its expressive character can gradually broaden. Because the listener now recognizes the melody, the conductor may allow slightly fuller orchestral resonance and greater warmth of sound. The emphasis can shift subtly toward phrase peaks and moments of harmonic grounding, giving the music a more communal character. What initially appeared as a solitary pastoral gesture begins to feel like a shared expression of relief and renewal.

In later returns, the theme may take on an even more reflective quality. The phrasing can become slightly more spacious, with gentle attention given to breathing points within the melodic line. Rather than projecting forward with the same innocence heard at its first appearance, the theme now carries the memory of what has occurred. The storm has altered the listener's perception of the pastoral world, and the music may acknowledge this change through a quieter, more contemplative tone.

The extended coda intensifies this transformation. As the shepherd's theme fragments and gradually dissolves into the concluding hymn, the conductor can shape the music as a

process of emotional settling rather than triumphant proclamation. Gestures may become broader and calmer, orchestral textures more transparent, and phrasing increasingly spacious. In this way, the rondo refrain no longer functions as a simple return of familiar material but as a melody whose meaning deepens with each recurrence.

Questions for Consideration

1. How might subtle differences in color, phrasing, and dynamic breadth shape each return of the shepherd's theme after the storm?
2. Where should the primary emphasis of the shepherd's theme fall—on phrase endings that suggest closure, or within the melodic line itself to preserve the sense of pastoral continuity and calm restoration?
3. In the extended coda, should the conductor shape the gradual fragmentation of the shepherd's theme as a triumphant affirmation of order, or as a quieter process of emotional settling that reflects gratitude and reflection after the experience of the Sublime?

Irregular Phrasing

Movement 4: Thunderstorm

In the fourth movement, Beethoven transforms irregular phrasing into a vehicle for metrical disorientation. As shown in Figure 28, this passage exploits metrical distortion as a primary expressive device. The repeated emphasis on beat two destabilizes the listener's sense of pulse, while the arrival on the massive F-sharp fully diminished chord on beat four of measure 106 feels violently disjunct. Although the notation itself remains metrically regular, the listener's internal sense of time begins to collapse: strong beats no longer function predictably, and moments of arrival are severed from their expected preparation. The resulting effect is not rhythmic complexity but perceptual disorientation

The image displays a page of a musical score for an orchestra, covering measures 103 through 107. The score is written for various instruments: Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in Bb (Cl. in Bb), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn in F (Hrn. in F), Trumpet in Eb (Tpt. in Eb), Trombone (Tbn.), Timpani (Timp.), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Ve.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The key signature is three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab) and the time signature is 4/4. A red vertical line is drawn through the score at the beginning of measure 106, specifically on the fourth beat, which is marked with a red "4". This line indicates a sudden fortissimo (ff) entrance. The dynamics for many instruments are marked as *f* (forte) or *sempre più forte* (always getting stronger) leading up to the *ff* (fortissimo) at the red line. The Piccolo part has a *ff* marking starting at measure 106. The Timpani part has a *ff* marking at the start of measure 106. The Violin 1 and 2 parts have *ff* markings at the start of measure 106. The Viola part has a *ff* marking at the start of measure 106. The Cello and Double Bass parts have *f* markings at the start of measure 106. The Horn in F part has a *f* marking at the start of measure 106. The Trumpet in Eb part has a *ff* marking at the start of measure 106. The Trombone part has a *ff* marking at the start of measure 106. The Flute part has a *ff* marking at the start of measure 106. The Oboe part has a *ff* marking at the start of measure 106. The Clarinet in Bb part has a *f* marking at the start of measure 106. The Bassoon part has a *f* marking at the start of measure 106. The Piccolo part has a *ff* marking at the start of measure 106.

Figure 28. Measures 103–07 of Movement 4, illustrating the sudden fortissimo entrance on beat four of m. 106.

The metrical disorientation in this passage closely parallels Kant's description of the sublime as an encounter with formlessness that overwhelms the imagination. Kant argues that,

unlike beauty (which depends on form and proportion) the Sublime may arise from objects that appear devoid of form, moments when the imagination can no longer organize what it perceives. Beethoven's distortion of metrical hierarchy, combined with the abrupt arrival of the F-sharp fully diminished seventh chord, produces precisely such a perceptual rupture. Although the music continues to move forward, the listener can no longer reliably determine where strong beats lie or how moments of arrival relate to preparation. In this sense, the experience of time itself becomes unstable. Crucially, Kant maintains that the sublime does not reside in the object itself but in the mental conflict it produces. In this passage, the persistence of underlying motion prevents the music from dissolving into chaos, keeping perception engaged even as orientation falters. This tension between continuity and disorientation mirrors Kant's description of the sublime as a momentary check to the vital forces, followed by the mind's awareness of a higher organizing capacity beyond immediate sensation.⁶⁹

Interpretive Decisions for Conductors

Accents on the upbeat in the first violins, bassoon, oboe, and flute are essential in this passage, as the sixteenth-note motor in the second violins and violas continues to provide a persistence of meter. Beethoven thus creates a layered effect in which the pulse is still felt but no longer trusted. The listener senses forward motion without reliable points of orientation, intensifying the passage's instability. Interpretively, this balance must be carefully preserved: the accents must be sufficiently clear to disrupt the listener's metrical expectations, yet not so exaggerated that they obscure the underlying momentum. If the accents become too heavy, the passage risks sounding rhythmically fragmented; if they are too subtle, the destabilizing effect

⁶⁹ Kant, "First Section," 75–77.

disappears entirely. The goal is a storm that feels relentless yet disorienting rather than chaotic or uncontrolled.

From the conductor's perspective, this layered instability also has gestural implications. Because the sixteenth-note motion maintains the underlying pulse, the conducting pattern should continue to articulate a clear beat structure rather than mirror the displaced accents. Over-emphasizing the off-beat accents in the gesture risks visually reinforcing the distortion rather than allowing the orchestra's internal layers to create the effect organically. Instead, the conductor's role is to maintain a steady kinetic framework while allowing the orchestral texture itself to produce the metrical tension. In this way, the ensemble experiences both stability and disruption simultaneously: the beat remains grounded even as the surface rhythm destabilizes the listener's perception.

Equally important is the sense of directional energy beginning at measure 103 and driving toward the arrival on beat four of measure 106. Beethoven's marking *sempre più forte* implies not merely an increase in volume but a continual intensification of momentum and pressure. The crescendo should therefore function as a trajectory rather than a static dynamic swell. If the dynamic growth plateaus too early, the arrival loses its force; if the crescendo accelerates too abruptly, the buildup feels artificially imposed. Instead, the orchestra must sustain a continuous accumulation of energy so that the F-sharp fully diminished seventh chord arrives as an inevitable rupture rather than a sudden shock.

Questions for Consideration

1. How do the off-beat accents in the first violins, bassoon, oboe, and flute interact with the continuous sixteenth-note motion in the second violins and violas to destabilize the listener's perception of meter while still preserving forward momentum?

2. From a conducting perspective, what strategies can maintain a clear underlying pulse while allowing Beethoven's displaced accents to create metrical tension organically within the orchestra rather than through exaggerated gesture?
3. How should the crescendo beginning in measure 103 be shaped so that the arrival on the F-sharp fully diminished seventh chord in measure 106 feels like an inevitable culmination of accumulated energy rather than a sudden dynamic shock?

Movement Five: Sheperd's Song: Charitable Feelings, Coupled with Gratitude Towards the Deity, After the Storm

The final measures of the fifth movement present a striking instance of structural ambiguity. Figures 29a and 29b show the closing phrases of the movement, while Figure 30 reproduces the autograph score of the opening portion of this ending (measures 254–259). What is particularly perplexing about measures 258–259 is not simply that Beethoven added them late, but how he incorporated them into the manuscript. As the autograph reveals, Beethoven typically prepared his manuscript paper in advance, dividing each page into three large systems using a ruler. In this instance, however, the final two bars appear hastily inserted, written on newly added staff lines rather than integrated into the existing layout. Beethoven also avoids splitting these concluding sonorities across pages, further isolating them visually and structurally. The result is a moment of genuine ambiguity: it remains unclear whether these bars complete the preceding phrase, initiate a new one, or stand outside conventional phrase structure altogether.

Figure 29a. Measures 253–59 of Movement 5, illustrating the elided passage near the close of the movement.

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in Bb (Cl. in Bb), and Bassoon (Bsn.). The second system includes Horn 1 with a mute (Horn 1, con sordino), Trumpet in C (Tpt. in C), and Trombone (Tbn.). The third system includes Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello/Double Bass (Vc. e Cb.).

Measures 260-264 are marked with measure numbers above the staves. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) and *ff* (fortissimo). The woodwinds and strings play sustained notes or chords, while the brass instruments (Horn 1, Tpt. in C, and Tbn.) play a melodic line starting in measure 263. The strings (Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., and Vc. e Cb.) play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Figure 29b. Measures 260–end of Movement 5, showing the second part of the elided passage and the final six measures of the movement.

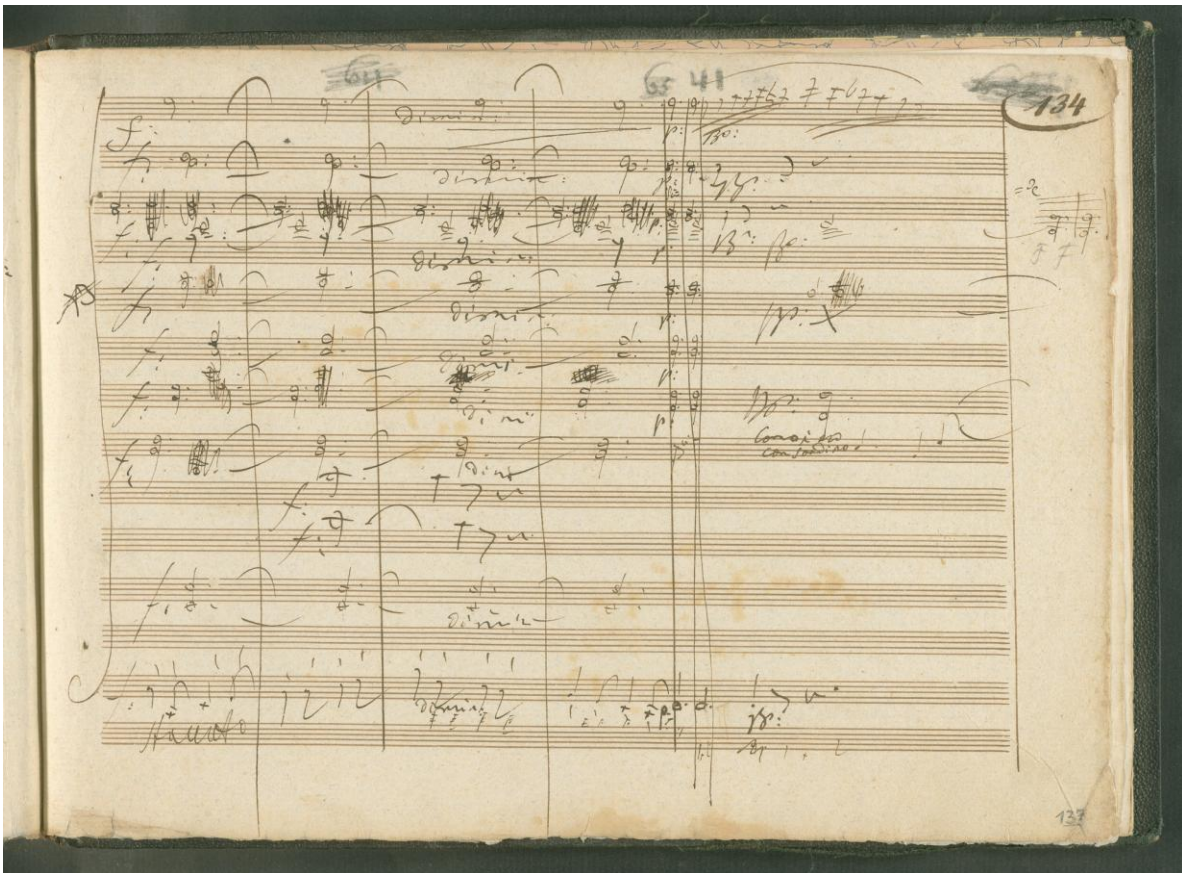


Figure 30. Measures 254–59 in the Autographed Score. Ludwig van Beethoven, “Sinfonie Nr. 6 (F-Dur) op. 68 (*Pastorale*),” score, 1808, BH 64, Beethoven-Haus Bonn. It reveals the late addition of two measures in the final elided passage of movement 5.

The ambiguity of these added measures is best understood not as a notational irregularity but as a deliberate preparatory gesture. Rather than treating the late-added bars as a problem to be corrected, it is more productive to view them as functioning in a preparatory rather than rhetorical capacity. Their resistance to clear phrasing does not signal a withdrawal from meaning; instead, it creates a threshold within the musical flow. The added chords neither continue the shepherd’s song nor provide a final thematic summation. Instead, they suspend regular phrase logic in order to clear perceptual space for the horn call that follows. By interrupting the expectation of melodic continuation, Beethoven allows the horn’s final gesture to emerge without the weight of preceding momentum.

Read through Immanuel Kant's aesthetic philosophy, the ambiguity surrounding these final measures can be understood as a moment in which musical closure gives way to reflective awareness. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues that aesthetic experience does not culminate in conceptual resolution but in a state of contemplative satisfaction, where the mind lingers on the object without seeking further explanation or purpose.⁷⁰ The cadence in measure 258 fulfills the structural expectations of the movement, allowing the imagination and understanding to recognize formal completion. Yet the additional F-major chord that follows interrupts the immediacy of this closure. By suspending regular phrase logic, Beethoven prolongs the listener's awareness of the present moment. The music does not continue forward, nor does it fully conclude; instead, it invites the listener to dwell briefly in a state of reflective stillness. The horn call that follows emerges not as a continuation of thematic argument but as a final affirmation of restored harmony between human perception and the natural world. Rather than ending with rhetorical finality, Beethoven concludes the symphony with a moment of quiet equilibrium, one that aligns with Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment as an experience in which the mind finds satisfaction not through resolution, but through reflective awareness.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

The late addition of these two measures leaves the conductor with a genuine interpretive decision regarding their temporal and expressive relationship. One possibility is to bind them together rhetorically as part of a single closing gesture; another is to differentiate them in time and character. Because measure 258 completes a perfect authentic cadence, it is most convincing to group this bar with the preceding phrase. Heard in this way, the cadence fulfills its traditional role by providing harmonic and emotional closure to the shepherd's song material. Dynamically

⁷⁰ Kant, "First Section," 35.

and phrasally, it should function as the natural settling point of the phrase rather than as the beginning of a new musical event.

The following F-major chord in measure 259, however, occupies a different expressive space. Unlike the cadential arrival that precedes it, this chord resolves nothing; instead, it stands alone. Interpreted as an independent unit, it functions less as continuation than as a reaffirmation of stability. Allowing a slight sense of temporal separation before this chord—without exaggeration—clarifies its role as a threshold leading into the final horn call.

The dynamic relationship between these events further reinforces their differing functions. The F-major chord in measure 259 should be quieter than the cadential arrival in measure 258, yet not softer than the opening of the horn call that follows, as Beethoven's notation suggests. Shaped in this way, the chord neither competes with the cadence nor anticipates the horn's entrance. Instead, it bridges two expressive states. The first chord completes the phrase, the second sustains the space, and the horn call delivers the final gesture. The closing moments therefore move from formal completion toward reflective presence, allowing the symphony to conclude not with rhetorical assertion but with a sense of settled stillness.

Questions to Consider

1. Should the cadential chord in measure 258 be clearly shaped as the conclusion of the preceding phrase, or should it be slightly restrained so that the following F-major chord in measure 259 can emerge as a separate moment of stillness?
2. How much temporal space, if any, should separate the cadential arrival in measure 258 from the isolated F-major chord in measure 259 to clarify its role as a bridge into the final horn call?

3. How should the dynamic relationship between the cadence, the isolated F-major chord, and the horn entrance be balanced so that the final gesture feels like a natural reawakening of sound rather than a competing climax?

Use of Space

Movement 4: Thunderstorm

In the fourth movement, silence functions not as expressive space but as a momentary intensification within the storm's otherwise unbroken motion. Figure 31 shows a rest on beat two—remarkably, the only moment of silence in the entire movement. In a movement defined by continuous agitation and persistent forward motion, the absence of regular pauses reinforces the storm's relentless character. This isolated rest therefore does not operate as a breath or moment of relaxation. Instead, it places heightened emphasis on beat three without requiring exaggerated effort from the orchestra. The silence itself creates a vacuum that naturally intensifies the arrival of the descending F minor triad. Even without Beethoven's written *sforzati*, the harmonic gesture would carry weight simply because it emerges from absence. The descending F minor triad in measures 35, 37, and 39 is therefore more than a harmonic figure; it is directional. The music falls. This falling motion becomes the expressive center of the passage. When the same sequence returns in measure 89, however, the effect is altered significantly: the rest on beat two disappears from the woodwinds and brass. This contrast reveals that the earlier silence was not incidental but carefully deployed. In measures 35–39, the rest fractures the texture and heightens the impact of beat three; in measure 89, the uninterrupted texture reinforces the storm's relentlessness. The later iteration thus feels less like a tear in the musical fabric and more like a surge within it. What initially appeared as momentary destabilization now becomes sustained force.

The image displays a musical score for measures 35 through 41 of Movement 4. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts:

- Fl.** (Flute): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*. Annotations: Blue arrows point to the first notes of measures 35, 37, and 39.
- Ob.** (Oboe): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*. Annotation: *a 2* above measure 39.
- Cl. in Bb** (Clarinet in B-flat): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*.
- Bsn.** (Bassoon): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*. Annotation: *a 2* above measure 35.
- Hn. in F** (Horn in F): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*.
- Tpt. in Eb** (Trumpet in E-flat): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*.
- Timp.** (Timpani): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *p*.
- Vln. 1** (Violin 1): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *pp*. Annotations: Red circles around the first notes of measures 35, 37, and 39; a purple circle around the final note of measure 41.
- Vln. 2** (Violin 2): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *pp*.
- Vla.** (Viola): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *pp*.
- Vc. e Cb.** (Violoncello and Contrabass): Measures 35-41. Dynamic markings: *ff*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *pp*.

The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The dynamic markings *ff* (fortissimo), *sf* (sforzato), and *p* (piano) are used to indicate changes in volume. The annotations highlight the use of space to emphasize the *sforzato* on beat 3.

Figure 31. Measures 35–41 of Movement 4, illustrating the use of space to emphasize the *sforzato* on beat 3.

The shaping of this passage also resonates with Kant's description of the Sublime as an experience that produces not charm but serious exaltation. Unlike beauty, which delights through grace and harmony, the sublime evokes gravity, respect, and a heightened awareness of power. In this passage, the downward contour and persistent intensity generate precisely such an experience. The repeated falling motion of the F minor triad conveys overwhelming natural force, suggesting the storm's capacity to dominate the musical landscape. Yet because the motion remains perceptible and directed, the listener does not descend into confusion. Instead, the passage produces a heightened awareness of power—both the storm's force and the listener's capacity to withstand it.

For Kant, the pleasure of the sublime arises from the realization that even when nature appears overwhelmingly powerful, our rational and moral capacities remain intact. Beethoven's storm operates in a comparable way. Although the music conveys immense force and instability, it never dissolves into chaos. The violence is structured. The storm tests the limits of musical coherence without destroying it, allowing the listener to experience intensity and instability while still perceiving an underlying order.

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

Interpretively, this suggests that each statement of the sequence must be shaped according to its contour. Although the overall dynamic remains *fortissimo*, the presence of sustained loudness does not eliminate the need for internal direction. In fact, shaping becomes even more critical in passages of prolonged intensity. When a section remains loud for twenty consecutive measures, the risk is not insufficient volume but monotony. Within a static dynamic marking, the conductor can still shape the line through micro-inflections: slight intensification toward the descending gesture, a subtle release after the point of impact, and an immediate

renewal of forward propulsion. These internal gradations allow the music to retain kinetic energy rather than hardening into a uniform block of sound.

This internal shaping also helps the audience perceive the storm's structure. Without differentiation, the passage risks sounding like an undifferentiated surge of sound. With it, the listener can sense waves of force gathering and breaking within the orchestral texture. The storm's violence thus becomes legible as motion rather than noise. The orchestra projects intensity, but the conductor ensures that this intensity retains direction and trajectory.

This passage represents only one example among many in the movement where Beethoven relies on such internal contouring within sustained dynamics. The cumulative effect of the fourth movement depends on this kind of differentiation. When shaped carefully, the storm reveals not chaos but a sophisticated layering of energy and contour. Even at its most extreme, Beethoven's depiction of natural power remains compositionally deliberate. The conductor's role is therefore not simply to unleash volume, but to illuminate the directional forces embedded within the music, allowing the storm to feel overwhelming while still perceptibly shaped.

Questions for Consideration

1. How can the conductor shape each descending F minor triad so that the sequence retains directional energy rather than becoming a static *fortissimo* texture?
2. What balance of accent, gesture, and rebound best communicates the falling contour of the passage while preserving the relentless forward motion of the storm?
3. How can internal dynamic shaping within a sustained *fortissimo* help the audience perceive waves of intensity rather than a uniform wall of sound?

Movement Five: Sheperd's Song: Charitable Feelings, Coupled with Gratitude Towards the Deity, After the Storm

Near the close of the fifth movement, Beethoven introduces one of the most intimate passages in the entire symphony. As shown in Figure 32, the harmony is strikingly simple and the strings are marked *sotto voce*, the only instance of this indication in the work. The marking appears near the end of the movement, immediately following an extended *fortissimo* section, creating a dramatic shift in expressive character. After the grandeur and fullness of the preceding music, the sudden withdrawal of dynamic weight produces an atmosphere of quiet reflection. Rather than intensifying the celebratory tone of the movement's conclusion, Beethoven turns inward, allowing the music to settle into a moment of restrained intimacy.

The image displays a musical score for measures 237 through 244 of the fifth movement. The score is written for four string parts: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 6/8. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano). The instruction *sotto voce* is present for all string parts. The harmony is indicated by Roman numerals below the Vc. part: I, V, I, I IV⁶ I⁶ ii⁶, V, I. The score shows a melodic line in the violins and a harmonic accompaniment in the viola and cello.

Figure 32. Measures 237–44 of Movement 5, illustrating the intimate, hymn-like passage.

Kant's account of the Dynamically Sublime emphasizes reflection rather than immediate terror. The experience does not arise in the moment of fear itself, but in the awareness that follows a confrontation with overwhelming natural force. When we contemplate nature's might—storms, floods, or other powers capable of physically destroying us—the imagination initially recoils before its magnitude. Yet from a position of safety, reason asserts something decisive: our moral freedom is independent of nature's causal power. Even though nature could annihilate us as physical beings, it has no authority over our rational will. Our true dignity therefore lies not in bodily strength but in our participation in a supersensible moral order. The pleasure of the Dynamically Sublime is thus serious and elevating, grounded not in sensory delight but in the recognition that the mind possesses a power that nature cannot overcome.⁷¹

Interpretive Considerations for Conductors

The *crescendo* in measure 241 presents a crucial interpretive question. Should it grow only toward the written *piano*, maintaining the passage's overall restraint implied by the opening *pianissimo* marking? Or should it briefly blossom before receding again, shaping the swell in a more dramatic arc? Performances differ significantly in their treatment of this moment. In his 1963 recording with the New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein shapes the arrival almost as a *subito piano*, creating the impression of a breath or suspension rather than a lyrical expansion. Bernstein also introduces subtle temporal space between measures 237–238 and 239–240 and adopts a tempo noticeably slower than Beethoven's marking of dotted quarter equals 60.⁷² Jordi Savall and *Le Concert des Nations* adopt a similarly spacious approach, allowing the passage to

⁷¹ Kant, "First Section," 90–96.

⁷² Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven: Symphony No.6 in F major, Op.68 (Pastoral)," New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, 1963, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IGgeWwStzA>.

unfold with a heightened sense of inward calm.⁷³ These interpretations suggest that the *crescendo* functions less as a dynamic goal than as a gathering of energy that immediately releases inward rather than outward. The swell creates expectancy, while the return to *piano* prevents the music from becoming rhetorical. Instead of blossoming into lyricism, the phrase folds back into itself.

What makes this passage remarkable is not simply its softness, but its expressive withdrawal following magnitude. The orchestra has just spoken with overwhelming force; now Beethoven reduces texture, harmony, and gesture to their barest essentials. This reduction carries expressive weight precisely because it follows prolonged fortissimo writing and dramatic accumulation. If the passage were soft in isolation, it might register merely as pastoral lyricism. Heard after the storm's sustained intensity, however, the effect is quite different. The music does not collapse or fade away; it deliberately steps back. The gesture suggests reflection rather than exhaustion.

From the conductor's perspective, this withdrawal also has implications for gesture and tempo. Because the passage turns inward rather than outward, the physical motion of the beat should likewise contract rather than expand. Large, expansive gestures risk transforming the moment into lyrical affirmation, whereas smaller, more contained motions reinforce the intimacy of Beethoven's *sotto voce* marking. The orchestra should feel as though the sound is being drawn inward rather than projected outward. In this way, the conductor helps preserve the delicate equilibrium that emerges after the storm's violence.

⁷³ Ludwig van Beethoven, "Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 Pastoral," *Le Concert des Nations*, Jordi Savall, 2021, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuBDzeZnOgA>.

Equally important is the perception of time. Slight flexibility in pacing, as heard in performances such as Bernstein's (like the cited example on page 112), can allow the listener's ear to recalibrate after the symphony's most turbulent passages. These small temporal spaces need not become exaggerated rubato; even subtle elasticity can create the impression that the music is momentarily pausing to breathe. The effect is not hesitation but contemplation. The listener senses that the relentless momentum of the storm has subsided and that the music now occupies a quieter temporal frame.

Placed within the broader architecture of the movement, this moment functions less as a continuation of pastoral celebration than as a reflective clearing within it. By withdrawing dynamic force, reducing orchestral density, and allowing time to feel more spacious, Beethoven gently redirects attention away from spectacle and toward awareness. The storm has passed, and what remains is not triumph but composure.

Viewed through Kant's aesthetic framework, the large-scale design of the *Pastoral Symphony* mirrors the progression of the Dynamically Sublime. The fourth movement presents the overwhelming force of nature in the storm, yet sublimity does not reside in the storm's violence itself. Instead, it emerges in the reflective awareness that follows. The reconciliation of the fifth movement, and especially the intimate *sotto voce* passage discussed above, provides the space in which the listener can contemplate what has occurred. Once the immediate sensory agitation subsides, perception shifts from physical intensity toward reflective understanding.

In this sense, the symphony traces a movement from sensory disturbance to rational composure. The storm reveals nature's immense power, but the calm that follows affirms that human consciousness and perception endure beyond it. Beethoven therefore does more than depict nature's violence. He dramatizes the human capacity to encounter that power, withstand it,

and emerge with a heightened awareness of inward freedom. The Sublime, in Kantian terms, is not the storm itself, but the reflective mind that survives it.

CONCLUSIONS

Beethoven's Sixth Symphony has long occupied an ambiguous place in the symphonic canon. Frequently described as picturesque, pastoral, or programmatic, it is often approached either as a work of musical nature painting or as an anomaly within Beethoven's more overtly heroic output. Yet such readings risk overlooking the deeper experiential coherence that binds the symphony together. By approaching the *Pastoral* through the philosophical lens of Immanuel Kant's distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime, this study has proposed that the work is not simply descriptive, but structurally and perceptually unified by an aesthetic trajectory. Across its five movements, Beethoven constructs not merely a landscape, but a sequence of experiences: a progression from formal harmony and perceptual ease, through disruption and awe, and finally toward a transformed state of calm.

The symphony's harmonic and formal design plays a central role in shaping this trajectory. The first three movements unfold within a relatively stable tonal and formal environment centered on F major, reflecting the balance, clarity, and perceptual harmony that Kant associates with the Beautiful. Even moments of irregular phrasing or suspended motion function within a broader framework of equilibrium. By contrast, the fourth movement destabilizes this equilibrium both formally and harmonically. The storm's unusual binary structure and its progression from F minor toward C major disrupt the tonal center that had previously anchored the symphony. This instability mirrors the aesthetic logic of the Sublime, in which familiar forms collapse under the pressure of overwhelming natural force. The final movement restores tonal balance through the return of F major, but this restoration occurs within a transformed expressive space: harmony is reestablished, yet the preceding disruption lingers as

a memory that reshapes the listener's perception of calm. In this way, Beethoven's harmonic architecture supports the philosophical arc traced across the work.

Taken as a whole, this reading invites a reconsideration of what the *Pastoral* Symphony is and how it communicates meaning. Rather than positioning the work primarily within the history of program music, this study suggests that its deeper coherence lies in the domain of aesthetic experience. Beethoven's achievement is not merely to depict nature, but to construct a perceptual arc that mirrors philosophical accounts of how human beings encounter the natural world. In doing so, the symphony emerges as a work that mediates between form and experience, structure and perception, music and philosophy. It becomes not only a pastoral artwork, but an aesthetic inquiry into how beauty gives way to sublimity and how stability is reimagined in its wake.

This study represents only one possible entry point into a larger field of inquiry. Future research might extend this approach in several directions. One avenue would involve exploring how Kantian aesthetics might illuminate other works by Beethoven, particularly those that juxtapose formal clarity with moments of overwhelming intensity. Symphonies such as the Fifth or Ninth, or even late string quartets, may similarly reveal trajectories that resonate with philosophical accounts of beauty and sublimity. Such investigations could help determine whether the *Pastoral* is unique in this respect or part of a broader aesthetic orientation within Beethoven's output.

Another promising direction would involve expanding the philosophical framework beyond Kant alone. Romantic thinkers such as Schiller, Hoffmann, or Schelling, each of whom engaged deeply with questions of music and transcendence, may offer alternative or complementary lenses through which to understand Beethoven's relationship to nature and

experience. Comparative studies might also consider how later composers engaged with similar aesthetic tensions. Works by Berlioz, Mahler, or Strauss, for instance, frequently navigate the boundary between pictorial representation and overwhelming sonic experience, raising questions about the persistence and transformation of the beautiful–sublime dialectic in nineteenth and early twentieth-century music.

This interpretation also resonates with Rivka Elkoshi’s work on musical perception, which suggests that listeners often experience music as a sequence of shifting psychological states rather than as a static structure.⁷⁴ As listeners move through the symphony, the emotional and perceptual state shaped by one movement inevitably colors how the next is heard. In the *Pastoral* Symphony, this cumulative experience is particularly evident in the attacca transitions of the final movements, where the storm and its aftermath are experienced as a continuous dramatic process. At the same time, the same principle operates more subtly across the earlier movements: the sense of stability established in the first movement informs the pastoral calm of the second, while the growing energy of the third prepares the listener psychologically for the upheaval of the storm. From this perspective, the symphony guides audiences through perceptual transformations analogous to those described by Kant, as moments of stability give way to experiences of tension, disorientation, and ultimately renewed orientation. Although such responses vary among listeners, empirical approaches like Elkoshi’s open a promising path for exploring how philosophical aesthetic categories might be reflected in real listening experiences.

Ultimately, the enduring significance of Beethoven’s *Pastoral* Symphony may lie in its ability to sustain multiple modes of meaning at once. It can be heard as program music, as

⁷⁴ Rivka Elkoshi, “Tone Painting and Painting Tones: A Follow-up Study of Listeners’ Audiovisual Responses to Beethoven’s *Thunder Storm*,” *International Journal for Music Education* 37, no. 3 (Aug. 2019): 476–92.

symphonic innovation, as pastoral tradition, and as philosophical meditation without exhausting any of these identities. By situating the work within the aesthetic discourse of the Beautiful and the Sublime, this study has aimed to foreground one dimension of that richness: the way Beethoven shapes not just musical form, but human experience in time. In doing so, the symphony reminds us that music's power often resides not in what it depicts, but in how it transforms perception.

If the *Pastoral* continues to resonate with listeners more than two centuries after its premiere, it may be because it speaks to something enduring in the human encounter with nature: the desire for harmony, the inevitability of disruption, and the possibility of renewal. Beethoven does not resolve these tensions philosophically or narratively. Instead, he allows them to unfold in sound, inviting listeners to inhabit the space between beauty and sublimity. In that space, the symphony remains alive; not as a fixed meaning, but as an experience continually rediscovered through listening, performance, and reflection.

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