

**Beethoven**

**Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60**

Adagio-Allegro vivace  
Adagio  
Allegro vivace  
Allegro ma non troppo

**Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60 (1806)**

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (*Loot-vikh vahn Bay-to-fen*)

Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn-on-Rhine, Germany

Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna, Austria

*Beethoven began work on the Fourth Symphony in the summer of 1806, and completed it that fall. The first performance was given in March of 1807 at the palace of Prince Joseph Lobkowitz in Vienna.*

Making a living as a composer is always a precarious proposition at best. Before Beethoven's time, the ideal was to get a position as a *Kapellmeister* (Music Director) at the palace of a nobleman or with a church. The composer handled all the gritty details of administering and directing an orchestra and, perhaps, a choir, but he had a steady income and could hear his music played as soon as the ink was dry. Beethoven broke away from this tradition to become one of the first truly independent composers, living entirely by his own wits and craft. He was able to do so, in part, because he was a shrewd and somewhat unscrupulous businessman who wasn't averse to shopping around for higher bids for his music. He sometimes sold the same composition to more than one publisher or patron, assuming that, in his age of slow communications, no one would be the wiser. The complex wheeling and dealing surrounding the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies is a case in point. Beethoven wrote the Fourth while he was visiting his friend and financial supporter, Prince Karl Lichnowsky in Silesia (now the Czech Republic) in September and October of 1806. While he was there, he met another great music lover, Count Franz von Oppersdorf, who had a castle forty miles north in Poland. Oppersdorf loved music so much that he made a point of only hiring servants for his domestic staff who could play musical instruments so that he had his own private orchestra. A great admirer of Beethoven, he commissioned two symphonies, paying an advance of 500 florins (about \$10,000) for the B-flat major symphony, which the composer assured him was almost complete. Beethoven was on a roll in 1806. In an incredible burst of creativity, he was finishing the *Appassionata* Sonata, the *Razumovsky* Quartets, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto. The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were also taking final shape in his sketchbooks. He interrupted work on the Fifth Symphony to finish the Fourth and get it to the copyist. The other symphony Beethoven promised Count Oppersdorf was to be the Fifth. They had discussed the instrumentation, and the Count paid him 350 florins as a deposit on it. In November of 1808 the Count received the following letter:

Esteemed Count!

You will view me in a false light, but necessity compelled me to sell the symphony [the Fifth] which was written for you, and also another one [the Sixth], to someone else...but I assure you that I shall soon send you the one intended for you. I hope that you have been well, and also your gracious wife, to whom I ask you to give my best wishes. ---Beethoven.

So! The only symphony the Count received was the Fourth, which had already been performed at a private subscription concert in Vienna (hosted by another of Beethoven's generous patrons, Prince Joseph Lobkowitz). According to the papers, this concert "contributed a very considerable sum for the benefit of the composer." Beethoven also promised the publication rights to the firm of Breitkopf and Härtel. Instead of six month's exclusive right of performance to a pristine new work that he paid for, all

Count Oppersdorf could call his own was the dedication of a symphony that had already been played (for profit) and sold for publication. He never did get his 350 florins back for the Fifth Symphony, either. Needless to say, the Count's relationship with Beethoven ended on a frosty note. That his name appears on the title page of a wonderful work of art, the most elegant and perfectly proportioned of all Beethoven's symphonies, might have been some consolation. The Fourth Symphony tends to be overshadowed by the more imposing length and seriousness of the Third and Fifth symphonies on either side of it, but whoever gets to know this work soon falls in love with it. Robert Schumann called it "a Grecian maiden between two Norse giants." Berlioz praised its character: "generally lively, nimble, joyous, or of a heavenly sweetness." Sir George Grove wrote: "The movements fit in their places like the limbs and features of a lovely statue; full of fire and invention as they are, all is subordinated to conciseness, grace and beauty."

The symphony begins with a slow introduction whose mystery and hesitant, almost creeping pace prompted Carl Maria von Weber to complain that it moved "at the rate of three or four notes per quarter of an hour." It's interesting to note that the first four notes in the strings here are almost exactly the same notes that comprise the famous 'Fate knocking' motive that dramatically begins the Fifth Symphony. The darkness of this introduction raises expectations of a tragic drama to follow, but this is simply Beethoven's first joke on us. He suddenly slaps the orchestra (and the audience) awake with eight great, crashing chords and we are hustled into the *Allegro vivace*, which is nimble, playful and enchantingly gay--Beethoven in one of his sunniest moods. The *Adagio* second movement is a love-song, pure and simple. Beethoven rarely achieved such magical, sensual sonorities as he does here, and it inspired Hector Berlioz to write: "Its form is so pure and the expression of melody so angelic and of such irresistible tenderness that the prodigious art by which this perfection is attained disappears completely." The *Menuetto* third movement is far removed from the elegant, aristocratic minuets of Mozart and early Haydn. Rather, it is the rowdy, boisterous peasant-style dance that the mature Haydn had begun to introduce into his later works. His student Beethoven now carries the energy to even greater heights, playfully throwing the dancers a curve by shifting the pulse from units of two beats to units of three and back. To make sure that everyone gets a turn on the dance-floor, he specifies that the Minuet and Trio sections be repeated twice. The final movement is a high-spirited romp that is an exhibition of consummate craftsmanship and puckish humor. One delightful touch is a comical solo for the bassoon, who, aghast at being left alone in the open, scurries for cover as the recapitulation begins. Near the end, Beethoven slows the main theme down, stretching it out like taffy until it is barely recognizable, then, with a sudden burst of scales in the basses, rushes the symphony to a boisterous finish.

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