

# *Harmony*<sup>TM</sup>

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## About the Cover

by

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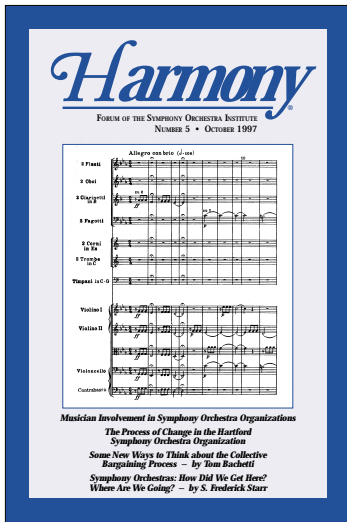
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## About the Cover



For this issue, we have selected one of the most recognizable pages in all music—the beginning of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony—because it opened a great chapter in the history of American music. This was the first work played by the New York Philharmonic Society on December 7, 1842—at the first concert given by our country’s oldest orchestra.

New York was a city of some 350,000 people in 1842. The incandescent electric bulb had just been invented, and Daguerre was taking his first photographs. In the international world of music, Robert and Clara Schumann were newlyweds; Verdi had scored his first success with *Nabucco*; and Wagner was beginning *Tannhäuser*. And on November 27, in Vienna, the great European musical capital, the Vienna

Philharmonic gave its inaugural concert—a mere 10 days ahead of New York.

Although Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony was only 34 years old in 1842—about the age of Britten’s *War Requiem* or Carter’s *Double Concerto* today—it was already a beloved classic. The choice of this pillar of German culture to launch an American orchestra is not surprising, for the burgeoning music scene in New York City, as in so many American cities, had a decidedly German accent. More than 40 percent of the original Philharmonic players were of German origin, and there were many German speakers in the audience on December 7.

Most concert goers that night were no doubt hearing this famous symphony for the first time. It had been performed in the city only once before, nearly two years earlier by the German Society of New York City, to benefit needy German immigrants. In the following years, Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony not only became a staple of the Philharmonic’s repertory, but it was also regularly chosen to baptize new orchestras (it was on the inaugural programs of orchestras in Chicago in 1891 and in Philadelphia in 1900).

Although the Fifth Symphony is one of the landmarks of our culture today, it was never Beethoven's own favorite (he preferred the *Eroica*), and it was not exceptionally popular during his lifetime. (Goethe complained that it didn't move him.) But within years of Beethoven's death, it became the most frequently performed of all symphonies. The sound of fate knocking at the door—Beethoven's own metaphor for the opening motto—became a universal symbol of man triumphing over his destiny. (And during World War II, it became the musical symbol of victory, since its celebrated opening rhythm, ta-ta-ta-TA, represents "V" in Morse code.)

The Fifth quickly came to be recognized as the quintessential Beethoven symphony, and accordingly, as one of the cornerstones of civilization. It has proved to be a wise bedrock for orchestras to build upon, for as Robert Schumann predicted less than a decade before the founding of the New York Philharmonic, this symphony will "be heard in future centuries, indeed as long as music and the world exist."

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