

Listening Guide: Beethoven's Piano Concerto #1 in C Major.

1. Mel Zuirier told us that this is an early concerto of Beethoven's, but not his *first* piano. This piece got numbered as Beethoven's first piano concerto because it was *published* first, but it was actually *composed* after another piano concerto was completed, after the piece officially title Piano Concerto #2. Nevertheless, this Piano #1 is firmly in the Classical style of Haydn and Mozart, showing Beethoven's starting points as a composer. Listen to the first and second movements. Can you hear the kinds of melodies, harmonies and interactions with the orchestra that as so reminiscent of Mozart?
2. In addition to its sound and melodic palette, this concerto has the classic concerto structure:
 - Three movements:
 - Allegro Con Brio, with cadenza
 - Largo
 - Rondo. Allegro scherzando

This three-part structure is designed to show-off a performer's virtuoso skills, his/her lyric skills, and his/her interpretive skills. Listen to a few different performers of this piece on YouTube. Select any of them. Does any one of the performers seem to you to get high marks in all three categories? What sorts of things do you want Saturday evening's soloist, Alon Goldstein, to be sure to do?

3. As you listen to the various performances, listen for these features in the First Movement:
 - a. The piece starts with a long orchestral introduction that features two melodies. The orchestra starts the first melody with the opening notes. Listen to it. Swafford says this first melody, Melody A, is "military" in style. It certainly is rhythmic, but would you call it military? What description would you use?
 - b. The second melody, Melody B, is deliberately opposite in style (the Classical approach). It begins at the 2.30 – 2.40 min. mark. How would you describe it?
 - c. Finally, after a long orchestral intro, the piano enters. Does the piano pick up one Melody A or B or present a new melody, C? The answer: Melody C—a surprise element for a 'classical' concerto. Does the piano ever play melodies A & B?
 - d. Listen for other surprises in the first movement.
 - Does the piano ever play Melody A—the 'military' Melody? Yes, but only very late in the first movement. Why so late, do you think?
 - About halfway through the first movement, the music softens to a pause and then restarts, but this time with the piano playing the opening melodies. It is as if Beethoven has restarted the concerto. Do you feel the piano is now leading the music?
 - Notice the long, technically-challenging cadenza. Beethoven wrote two different cadenzas for this concerto, both long. Do you feel the length of this cadenza is in balance with the first movement? Or might it be mostly a show-stopper for the soloist?
4. Listen to the second movement. Notice that the tempo is marked "Largo," one of the very slowest of the slow tempos, and notice that the piano starts this movement, taking its time

presenting a lovely, Mozart-like melody, Melody A. Doesn't this opening establish a spacious, thoughtful, almost inward-looking mood—but not a sad mood?

- Now notice the orchestral response, Melody “B,” which is a more flowing melody with hints (to my ears) of a more “Romantic” melody line.
- For much of this movement, the piano and orchestra stick to its given melodies. Does the piano ever play both melodies (A & B)? What is your theory about why this takes so long? (Is this a strategy similar to the first movement?)
- One of the most beautiful parts of this movement comes late in the movement: a beautiful duet between piano & clarinet. Listen for it!

5. The third movement is in a ‘Rondo’ form, starting with the piano. The rondo form is usually upbeat, dancelike, and features the solo instrument and the orchestra exchanging melodies, going round and round with each other. Listen for the ways Beethoven handles this form in this third movement.

- Notice that for the first half of the movement, the piano/orchestra exchange melodies three times A-B, A-B, A-B.
- Notice that right in the middle of the movement, suddenly the piano plays a delightful, off-beat, dancelike tune and that the orchestra picks it up. Melody C! Swafford calls it a “Turkish dance.” Does Melody C add an exotic flavor to this standard rondo? How long does the segment with Melody C last?
- Notice that for the rest of the third movement, the piano/orchestra return their exchange of melodies A-B, A-B, A-B, again for three times! Beethoven's teacher, Joseph Haydn, would have been delighted!
- Finally, the ending. Every critic calls attention to the “Joke” ending--another Haydn touch: The piano plays a very short cadenza, the orchestra briefly returns and the music quickly softly fades. The concerto is over. But wait—no, the oboe comes back, and suddenly: A classic, loud, if rapid, thump-thump ending!