

The Symphony of Bass in the Grand Narrative: On the Position and Function of Trombone in Beethoven's Symphonies

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Abstract. Trombone is an important brass instrument and plays an important role in modern symphony orchestra. Trombone is different from other brass instruments. In the history of the development of western Musical Instruments, the shape and playing mode of trombone have hardly changed. However, the position of the trombone in Beethoven's previous symphonies was radically different. Beethoven is recognized as the first composer to bring the trombone from sacred to secular music. This article will list three symphonies composed by Beethoven that include the trombone. Through the research of the creation background of these three works, this paper discusses the trombone and explore the reason why Beethoven used the trombone here. In addition, this paper also briefly lists the position of the trombone in each symphony, and analyzes its functional characteristics, function and status in each Beethoven symphony. Beethoven's influence on the trombone is profound, and this paper hopes to analyze these three symphonies to draw out Beethoven's influence on the use of trombone by later composers.

Keywords: Trombone, Beethoven, symphony, orchestra.

1. Introduction

The trombone is an important brass instrument. Trombones include treble trombone, alto trombone, tenor trombone, bass trombone, double bass trombone, etc. They are widely used in solo, ensemble, chamber music, symphony, and jazz music. The use of trombones is particularly common in modern orchestras, mainly in tenor and bass trombones. The trombone plays an irreplaceable role in the bass part of the orchestras.

Beethoven stands as a pivotal figure in the history of Western music, he not only inherited the classical musical style but also influenced the creation of the Romantic movement, serving as a crucial link between past and future musical masters. With in Beethoven's works, the symphony emerges as the most significant genre, where in his innovative spirit is most profoundly reflected [1]. Beethoven's symphonies reflect the spirit of freedom and equality that he pursued all his life, and his symphonies show the heroic giant style. Beethoven's symphony can give full play to the characteristics of the instrument, give the instrument strong vitality and expression, so that the symphony reached a new height. Before Beethoven's time, almost no one included such an important instrument--Trombone in the orchestration of symphonies. Although the trombone had been used in many sacred music before, it was Beethoven who first took the trombone out of sacred music and brought it into secular music. With his unique vision, Beethoven found the special timbre and acoustics of the trombone, and brought it into his fifth Symphony "Fate Symphony" for the first time, setting a very important milestone in the history of the trombone. This article will analyze the three symphonies composed by Beethoven, Symphony No. 5, Symphony No. 6 and Symphony No. 9 in sequence. And also explains how the function of the trombone becomes more and more important in Beethoven's symphonies step by step by describing the background of its creation and the performance of the trombone in the repertoire.

2. Beethoven Symphony No.5

2.1. Creation Background

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is probably one of the most famous pieces of Western music in the world. Its melody is so ingrained in people's minds that it has become the hallmark of the classical symphony. The 19th century was a time of social, cultural, and political change and upheaval. Europe was in the throes of the Napoleonic Wars, and the cultural environment was in the transition period between classicism and Romanticism. It was against this background that Beethoven began to conceive and compose the Fifth Symphony in 1804, which was finally premiered at the Royal Opera House on December 22, 1808 [2]. During the four years of his creation, he suffered from ear problems, even wrote the famous "Heiligenstadt Will," and was emotionally abandoned by his lover, Countess Julietta Zinati. This series of blows made Beethoven on the verge of collapse, but all the hardships that did not beat Beethoven would make him stronger. Beethoven did not succumb to despair, but incorporated his pain, tenacity and indomitable spirit into his works.

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is another masterpiece that reflects the hero's thought after his third Symphony. The integrity of the work and its unique symphonic logic make it a model in the history of music. This is the first time in the history of music that the trombone has been used in a symphony, and it is an unprecedented work in the history of the trombone. The symphony has a total of four movements, of which the trombone is mainly concentrated in the fourth movement. The fourth movement is Allegro sonata-style, full of the joy of post-victory revelry. The whole movement has a kind of overwhelming momentum, with an unstoppable powerful force throughout [3]. Beethoven took a fancy to the trombone in the bass zone thick solemn, in the middle zone round fullness, in the high zone brilliant and powerful timbre characteristics, for the first time to add three trombones in this song. The trombone in this track mainly plays a harmonic and acoustic enhancement role. Next, this paper will verify its harmonic function through the analysis of some musical examples.

2.2. Musical Analysis

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Allegro (♩ = 84)

The musical score shows the beginning of the fourth movement, marked 'Allegro (♩ = 84)'. The instrumentation includes Piccolo, 2 Flauti, 2 Oboi, 2 Clarinetti in C, 2 Fagotti, Contrafagotto, 2 Corni in C, 2 Trombe in C, 3 Tromboni (Alto, Tenore, Basso), Timpani in C-G, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso. The dynamics are marked 'ff' (fortissimo). The score is for measures 1-5 of the movement.

Figure 1. Symphony #5, Fourth, measures 1-5 [4]

The trombone was introduced to the orchestra only in the fourth movement of the Fifth Symphony. After nearly twenty-two minutes of precipitation in the first three movements, it explodes in full force at the beginning of the fourth movement. As shown in the Figure 1, all the instruments are playing in unison at the beginning of the movement, and the trombone is no exception: the alto, the tenor, and the bass trombone play two F force C major chords. They then moved on to V and VI chords, which supported the overall harmonic part of the orchestra. In the first four bars three different types of trombones are played in the I-V-I harmonic progression, while some changes occur from the fifth bar until the exposition is completely over. In this playing process, the notes played by the trombone part are mainly half notes and quarter notes, which are short, full of tension and elasticity, and this jump also adds a more warm and cheerful atmosphere to the whole music [5].

Figure 2. Symphony #5, Fourth, measures 76-82 [4]

In the connecting section (Fig.2), the trombone enters in bar 78, providing the main harmonic support for the horn theme in the connecting section. The harmonic progression is mainly V-I-IV-V. The progress of harmony shows signs of shifting to the tonality of the sub-part, which makes a good foundation for the establishment of the tonality of the sub-part theme [5]. In the connecting section, the notes played by the trombone are mostly quarter notes, and the division of labor of the three trombones is not the same. The alto and tenor trombones play overlapping thirds, while the bass trombone is the fifth of the main chord.

The position and function of the trombone in the orchestra at that time was similar to that of the double bass, primarily as support for the harmonies of the orchestra and as preparation for other instruments to enter into melodic themes. Among the trombone, the bass trombone was considered to double the sound effect of the double bass. The bass trombone cannot play complex rhythms and melodies like the double bass for strings, so it can only double the contours or downbeats of the double bass in technical passages [6]. For example, in figure 3, the bass trombone could not play four eighth notes so fast in such a short time, Beethoven wrote a simple connection for the trombone instead, so that the bass trombone could support the orchestra harmony as normal as the double bass.



Figure 3. Symphony #5, Fourth, measures 6-11 [4]

In general, although Beethoven added trombone parts in his Fifth Symphony firstly, the trombone was much less important in orchestras than it is today. The trombone has no melodic part to play, and its function in the orchestra is mainly to enhance acoustics and support the orchestra's harmonies.

3. Beethoven Symphony No.6 'Pastorale'

3.1. Creation Background

The first sketch of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony appeared in 1802. At the same time Beethoven was writing the Fifth Symphony, Beethoven was also preparing for the creation of his sixth Symphony. Both works premiered at a lengthy concert at the Wiener Theatre in Vienna on 22 December 1808. At that time, the original manuscript of the symphony said "pastoral symphony in memory of rural life, focusing on emotional expression rather than pictorial description [7]."

The work was completed in 1808. At that time, Beethoven suffered from ear problems, and it was difficult to talk to people, so he often walked in the wild. Beethoven loved nature so much, as he wrote in a note to Therese von Malfatti 'You are lucky to be in the country so soon...I am as happy as a child when I think of walking among the bushes, among the trees and grass and rocks in the forest. No one loves the country more than I do.' [8]. Beethoven found all kinds of inspiration in nature, and he was able to apply these inspirations to his own creations. In his works, he has repeatedly used instruments to imitate the sounds of birds, rivers, and the natural sounds of lightning and thunder.

Beethoven's Sixth Symphony is innovative. This is the first and only work in which Beethoven personally added the title to a symphony. The Pastoral breaks the original four-movement structure of the symphony and adds a fifth movement. In addition, although the music sentences written by Beethoven in this work are all descriptions of scenery, in fact, these show Beethoven's creative concept of "writing emotion rather than painting scenery" which transmitted by music. Beethoven uses the different power of music and the technique of pitch change in this work to combine the depiction of pastoral landscapes with his personal expression of emotion. It provided great inspiration and profound influence for composers in the Romantic period. It can be said that this work is the musical precursor of the Romantic era.

In this work, Beethoven uses only two trombones, the alto trombone and the tenor trombone. The trombone appears at the end of the fourth movement and in the fifth movement. The fourth movement is named Thunderstorm and the fifth is Shepherd's Song: Happy and Thankful Feelings after the Storm.

3.2. Musical Analysis

The fourth movement is called thunderstorm, with a meteorological theme, which shows that this movement has a strong natural atmosphere. As the famous French composer Hector Berlioz once commented on Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, 'It has to be heard to understand how realistic and sublime imitative music can become in the hands of someone like Beethoven. Listen to the gusts of wind and rain, to the muffled roar of bass instruments, to the squeal of piccolo, foretelling a terrible storm to come. The storm drew near and spread. A huge chromatic scale, starting with the high instruments and going deep into the orchestra. The bass then lifts the music upward, mimicking a whirlwind that uproots everything in its path. The sudden sound of the trombone and the thundering of the timpani make the scene depicted by the music feel apocalyptic. Cover your face, poor

traditional poet. No matter how pure and harmonious your traditional language is, it cannot be compared with the art of sound. You don't understand what we call melody and harmony today, you don't understand the combination of different timbres and different instruments, you don't understand transposition. We have ears pleasantly surprised sounds, with strange accents that are enough to resonate in the deepest unexplored depths of the psyche.[9]

The fourth movement follows immediately after the third. The movement begins with the cello and double bass playing a very weak vibrate, depicting the thunder in the sky, which heralds the coming of a storm. Then, the violin part begins to progressively advance the melody, and the tune shifts to the subordinate D flat major. The woodwinds are added in the ninth bar, and the diminished seventh chord is played to accentuate the sense of tension and awkwardness, making the audience feel uneasy and panicked. The music then intensifies until it reaches bar 21. The addition of timpani, trumpet and French horn, along with the string instruments, depicts the low thunder scene. By the 29th bar, with the timpani accompaniment, the orchestra was playing more and more rapidly, and the main melody played by the string instruments at the 35th bar made people feel that the rain was coming. After the 35th bar until the 95th verse, the overall intensity of the orchestra decreases, but the theme of the music does not change much. The violins play a steady stream of choppy sixteenth notes, the woodwinds play tense diminished seventh chords, and the trumpets and horns and timpani punctuate a thrilling play that mimics the thunder of a thunderstorm. Starting in bar 95, the double bass plays a storming chromatic melody that goes deep into the orchestra and back up to the top. As Berlioz described, it is like a whirlwind that lift everything in its path.

After this stormy melody, the trombone joins the orchestra at bar 106. The trombones play an octave for two forte forces, and join the other wind instruments in playing the VI diminished seventh in A-flat major, which lasted 16 beats long. The addition of trombones makes like a thunderbolt in the storm of the orchestra's imitation. In addition, in bar 112 (Fig.4), the wind part, with the exception of the trombone, plays a diminished seventh chord on the I level of A-flat major with extreme force. Only the trombone plays the F, which is free from the wind part. Beethoven wants to use this non-chord tone enhancing the tension of the diminished seventh chord. In fact, the harsh and penetrating metallic tone of the trombone really adds to the tension.

The image shows a musical score for measures 110-113 of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Symphony #6. The score is arranged in a system with eight staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Picc. (Piccolo), Fl. (Flute), Ob. (Oboe), Cl. (Clarinet), Fg. (Bassoon), Cor. (F) (Trumpet in F), Tr. (E♭) (Trumpet in E-flat), and Tbnl. (Trombone). A large bracket above the first three staves (Picc., Fl., Ob.) spans measures 110, 111, and 112. In measure 110, a diminished seventh chord is indicated with a circled '7' and a flat sign. In measure 112, a diminished seventh chord is indicated with a circled '7' and a flat sign. The Trombone part (Tbnl.) plays a single note (F) in measure 112, which is noted as being free from the wind part. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'f' (forte).

Figure 4. Symphony #6, Fourth, measures 110-113 [10]

In the fifth movement, although the position of the trombone at the time made it less important, the unique tone of the trombone also gave it an appear chance. As shown in Figure 5, Beethoven could have used the horn instead of the trombone to play these simple notes, but Beethoven still wrote the trombone at the beginning of each bar stress. Beethoven wanted to use the loud and majestic

sound of the trombone to bring out a theme of the horn. It is the unique timbre of the trombone itself that makes it impossible to replace.

Figure 5. Symphony #6, Finale, measures 134-136 [10]

In general, although the trombone has two movements in the Sixth Symphony, the actual playing time is much shorter than that of the Fifth Symphony. However, based on the playing time, it does not follow that the status of the trombone has decreased in Beethoven's symphonies. The important difference between the Pastoral and the Fifth Symphony is that while the former is unabashedly programmatic, the latter is not [11]. In the Fifth Symphony, the trombone is used more to enhance the acoustics of the string bass, which is emotionless. In the Pastoral Symphony, Beethoven discovered the special tone characteristics of the trombone. He used the special timbre of the trombone to make the description of the storm more vivid and more frightening. The creation of the Sixth Symphony also made the trombone's status in the symphony orchestra have a certain promotion, so that the trombone also has an irreplaceable role.

4. Beethoven Symphony No.9

4.1. Creation Background

The Ninth Symphony is the last symphony Beethoven composed which includes the trombone. Symphony No. 9 is the pinnacle of Beethoven's symphony creation and has a very high status in the history of Western music. Beethoven began work on the opera in the early 1810s, and some drafts even predate his Eighth Symphony. The whole piece has been created for more than ten years, reflecting Beethoven's meticulous attitude and pursuit of perfection [12]. The most notable aspect of the symphony is that Beethoven included a chorus in the last movement, a first in the history of symphonic composition. Beethoven's choice was influenced by Schiller's Ode to Joy. Schiller's poem was written in 1785, and his advocacy of unity, freedom and fraternity resonated deeply with Beethoven. Beethoven had long been eager to set the 'Ode to Joy' to music, and finally achieved it in his last symphony [12].

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was premiered in Vienna in 1824 and was an unprecedented success at the time. Beethoven's performance caused great commotion. When Beethoven appeared, he was welcomed by the audience with five applauds; At the time, royal appearances were so used to only three applauds that the police had to intervene [7].

The symphony's unconventional structure, depth of expression, and inclusion of vocal elements provided inspiration for later composers. Many composers after Beethoven, such as Wagner, Brahms and Mahler, drew inspiration from it and regarded it as a benchmark for symphonic expression.

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is still influential today. It has been featured in various movies, advertisements and major events. In particular, in 1985 the European Union adopted 'Ode to Joy' as its official national anthem, an act that underscored the power of the symphony as a symbol of unity and cooperation, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers [12].

4.2. Musical Analysis

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony has four chapters, and where the trombone appears most is the third variation of the fourth. At the beginning of the variation, the bass trombone, double bass and cello play together to render a holy atmosphere and guide the beginning of the chorus. The penetrating sound of the bass trombone, like a horn, sends out a signal of unity, paving the way for the entrance of the chorus. In the first eight bars, although there are only three instruments, it is because of the heavy sound of the trombone that the symphony orchestra's sound does not appear thin. In the eighth bar, the woodwinds lead the soprano into the melody. From here, the tenor trombone and tenor trombone play the G major major chord, clarifying the tonality of the mode and providing support for the development of the melody.

As shown in figure 6, beginning in bar 25, the three trombones are continuously switched over the I, IV, and V chords in F major, and the functionality and acoustics of traditional harmony are particularly evident. The alto trombone plays the same melody as the mezzo-soprano, the tenor trombone plays the tenor melody, and the bass trombone plays the bass melody. The trombone adds bass support to the singing of these three chorus parts, making the overall effect of the harmony more powerful [1]. After a 12-bar break, the trombone suddenly breaks into the G minor sub chords of bar 44 and bar 48, adding to the harmonic acoustics. The subsequent subordinated chords create a strong atmosphere for the chorus to sing, depicting the image of God in heaven.

The image displays a musical score for measures 25-30 of the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. It features six staves. The top two staves are for trombones: 'Tbnl. A & T' (Alto and Tenor) and 'Tbn. Basso' (Bass). The bottom four staves are for vocal parts: 'S.' (Soprano), 'A.' (Alto), 'T.' (Tenor), and 'B.' (Bass). The lyrics are: 'Brü - - der! ü - - ber'm Ster - - nen - zelt muss ein woh - nen. Brü - - der! ü - - ber'm Ster - - nen - zelt muss ein'. The score includes dynamic markings like *f* and *sf*, and articulation like *v*. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is common time (C).

Figure 6. Symphony #9, Finale, Variation 3 measures 25-30 [13]

In this symphony, the three trombones have more functions than in the previous two symphonies. The trombone provides bass support for the three chorus parts, creating a strong atmosphere; Guided the entry of the chorus; To make the harmony more powerful; The more penetrating sound of the trombone makes the melody thicker, sets off a strong and holy atmosphere, and makes the melody more appealing.

5. Conclusion

Beethoven is a great musician in the history of western music. His innovative thinking has provided many creative inspirations for later generations of composers. It was his innovative thinking that made the trombone, an instrument discriminated against by composers at that time, gradually enter the secular symphony.

The status of the trombone gradually rose as Beethoven gradually deepened his understanding of the instrument. In the Fifth Symphony, the first to include a trombone, the trombone's role was merely to increase the volume of the bass strings and to build the orchestra's harmony. In the pastoral symphony, through the flexible use of trombone timbre, the trombone part shines brightly in the scene description of the symphony. The characteristic metallic sound of the trombone adds vividness and panic to the storm. By the time Beethoven put the trombone into the orchestra for the third time, the sacred timbre of the trombone had already made it indispensable for guiding other voices. The role of the trombone is no longer just a simple rhythmic accompaniment, the trombone can also really release the music, showing the unique characteristics of the instrument.

The use of trombones in symphonies is the original application of Beethoven in the classical period. Although Beethoven still has some shortcomings in the use of the trombone, he has made a huge impact on later music creation. He brought the trombone to the attention of composers, and the trombone increasingly played a more important role in the orchestra, assumed more important tasks, and was elevated to a more important status.

By the development of music, the trombone is no longer just a supporting instrument, but has become one of the key instruments that can undertake important melody and emotional expression, and has received more attention in the orchestra and music creation. Many modern composers have incorporated the trombone part into their music as an important melodic instrument. For example, in the French composer Ravel's 'Bolero', the trombone has a large solo melody, in which Ravel also composed music for the characteristic glissando of the trombone. The harmonic effect of the trombone and other brass instruments has also inspired many later composers. For example, Wagner used the trombone as the main melody in his Ring of Nibelungen to play a grand theme. The trombone occupies a very high place in Wagner's creation.

In this paper, the important performance part of trombone in the symphony is briefly analyzed, and there are some defects in the lack of a systematic analysis of all the performance bars. The article also does not study Beethoven's initial motivation for using the trombone, hoping that it can be carried out in the future academic research.

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