

**Introduction: 'What Makes a Symphony?'**

Donald Runnicles conducts the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra performing ***Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor***

**TOM SERVICE:**

'Du Du Du Dum'.

The opening bars of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony, the world's most famous symphony. Those four notes have captured the world's imagination pretty well since the piece was first heard in Vienna in 1808. Since then those notes were the BBC's call sign during the Second World War, the symphony was a disco phenomenon in 1970s and it was even sent into space as the voice of planet Earth to impress any alien life forms who might be out there. Haydn's ***Surprise***, Mozart's ***Jupiter***, Beethoven's ***Eroica***, Schubert's ***Unfinished***, Shostakovich's ***Leningrad*** - the symphony's been with us for 400 years and for many composers it represents the pinnacle of what they can hope to achieve, what they want to achieve in instrumental music. They were Haydn's bread and butter, he wrote 106 of them. Beethoven composed 9, a number that assumes an almost mystical significance for subsequent generations of composers. Brahms managed only four, already with the weight of history on his shoulders by the mid-nineteenth century. Mahler's symphonies chart his own personal emotional trauma, and in Soviet Russia Shostakovich's symphonies tell a story of political compromise, censorship, negotiation and ultimately transcendence. Among today's composers Peter Maxwell Davies returns again and again to the form and astonishingly the Finnish composer conductor Leif Segerstam has so far written 270 of them and counting. So the

symphony is crucially important for composers, for audiences, indeed for world culture, but what is it that makes a symphony? Well that's what we're going to explore in this BBC iWonder Guide.