

Cumberland Advisors Market Commentary – Sturm und Drang & Beethoven's Pastoral

Surprisingly, the German term *Sturm und Drang* originated with the American Revolution in 1776.

The term first appeared as the title of a play by Friedrich Maximilian Klinger. The setting of the play is the unfolding American Revolution, in which, says Wikipedia, “the author gives violent expression to difficult emotions and extols individuality and subjectivity over the prevailing order of rationalism.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sturm_und_Drang)



Pronounced “SHTURMN und DRAHNG,” the meaning of this German phrase is multidimensional and fierce. Here’s a further definition:

“The protagonist in a typical *Sturm und Drang* stage work, poem, or novel is driven to action – often violent action – not by pursuit of noble means nor by true motives, but by revenge and greed. Goethe’s unfinished *Prometheus* exemplifies this along with the common ambiguity provided by juxtaposing humanistic platitudes with outbursts of irrationality. The literature of *Sturm und Drang* features an anti-aristocratic slant while seeking to elevate all things humble, natural, or intensely real (especially whatever is painful, tormenting, or frightening).”

(<https://sites.google.com/site/themusichistorywiki/sturm-und-drang>)

The entire world is now consumed in the COVID-19 *Sturm und Drang*.

We see it in swelling unemployment worldwide. In hunger and possible starvation in some places. In science and medicine racing to find prophylaxis and vaccines. In government leadership that is admirable in some quarters and lamentably bad in others, with the stakes being the life or death of millions around the globe. Some leaders inspire a unity of purpose, a willingness to sacrifice, and a determination to succeed, while others are merely unprepared, unwilling to face facts and take sound scientific advice, and seemingly bereft of both compassion and common sense.

In a [recent commentary](#) we related the pandemic to the *Sturm und Drang* of war, using the example of WW2. Others have used WW1 and the Spanish flu pandemic that followed hard on its heels. I suggest you read *The Great Influenza*, by John Barry (<https://www.amazon.com/Great-Influenza-Deadliest-Pandemic-History-ebook/dp/B0000CXFWE>).

For a Sunday listen replete with *Sturm und Drang*, I recommend the fourth movement of Beethoven's sixth symphony, the *Pastoral*. This happens to be our favorite symphony.

Let's look within the story it tells.

The five movements are named (1) "Awakening of happy feelings"; (2) "Scene by the brook"; (3) "Gathering of country folk"; (4) "Storm and tempest"; and lastly, closing out the story, we have the fifth movement's delivery of the shepherd's song: "Happy and thankful feelings after the storm." Many thanks to Peter Avis for these notes.

There are many productions of the *Pastoral*. Here's a good one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbfa86bTD34>.

A note of history. Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, with its famous opening roar "Boom, Boom, Boom, BOOMMM," presages the *Sturm*

und Drang of *Symphony No. 6*. The fifth and sixth symphonies were nearly contemporaneous in creation. In fact, there was confusion at their simultaneous debut on December 22, 1808, in Vienna. The *Pastoral* was listed as number five, and what we now know as Beethoven's Fifth was listed as number six. The debut was on the occasion of a massive Beethoven concert that included both symphonies and several other pieces. (History research credit: EMI Classics and Bridgeman Art Library, London)

Sturm and Drang.

Worldwide.

Please remember that the final movement is the shepherd's song.

Beethoven's *Pastoral*. Please enjoy a listen.

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