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Biography *Ludwig van Beethoven* *With Note Pages*



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Ludwig van Beethoven (; ; baptised 17 December 1770 – 26 March 1827) was a German composer and pianist. He was a crucial figure in the transitional period between the Classical and Romantic eras in Western classical music, and remains one of the most acclaimed and influential of all composers.

Born in Bonn, which was then in the Electorate of Cologne in western Germany, he moved to Vienna in his early twenties and settled there, studying with Joseph Haydn and quickly gaining a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. Beethoven's hearing gradually deteriorated beginning in his twenties, yet he continued to compose, and to conduct and perform, even after he was completely deaf.

Biography

Background and early life

Beethoven was the grandson of a musician of Flemish origin who was also named Ludwig van Beethoven (1712–1773).

Johann married Maria Magdalena Keverich in 1767; she was the daughter of Johann Heinrich Keverich, who'd been the head chef at the court of the Archbishopric of Trier. Beethoven was born of this marriage in Bonn on 16 December 1770. Children of that era were usually baptized the day after birth, but there's no documentary evidence that this occurred in Beethoven's case. It's known that his family and his teacher Johann Albrechtsberger celebrated his birthday on 16 December. Thus, while the evidence supports the probability that 16 December 1770 was Beethoven's date of birth, this can't be stated with certainty. Of the seven children born to Johann Beethoven, only second-born Ludwig and two younger brothers survived infancy. Caspar Anton Carl was born in 1774, and Nikolaus Johann, the youngest, was born in 1776.

Beethoven's first music teacher was his father. A traditional belief concerning Johann's that he was a harsh instructor, and that the child Beethoven, "made to stand at the keyboard, was often in tears".

Some time after 1779, Beethoven began his studies with his most important teacher in Bonn, Christian Gottlob Neefe, who was appointed the Court's Organist in that year. Neefe taught Beethoven composition, and by March 1783 had helped him write his first published composition: a set of keyboard variations (WoO 63).

Maximilian Frederick's successor as the Elector of Bonn was Maximilian Franz, the youngest son of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, and he brought notable changes to Bonn. Echoing changes made in Vienna by his brother Joseph, he introduced reforms based on Enlightenment philosophy, with increased support for education and the arts. The teenage Beethoven was almost certainly influenced by these changes. He may also have been strongly influenced at this time by ideas prominent in freemasonry, as Neefe and others around Beethoven were members of the local chapter of the Order of the Illuminati.

In March 1787 Beethoven travelled to Vienna (it's unknown at whose expense) for the first time, apparently in the hope of studying with Mozart. The exact details of their relationship are uncertain, including whether or not they actually met. After just two

weeks there Beethoven learned that his mother was severely ill, and he was forced to return home. His mother died shortly thereafter, and the father lapsed deeper into alcoholism. As a result, Beethoven became responsible for the care of his two younger brothers, and he spent the next five years in Bonn.

Beethoven was introduced to a number of people who became important in his life in these years. Franz Wegeler, a young medical student, introduced him to the von Breuning family (one of whose daughters Wegeler eventually married). Beethoven was often at the von Breuning household, where he was exposed to German and classical literature, and where he also gave piano instruction to some of the children. The von Breuning family environment was also less stressful than his own, which was increasingly dominated by his father's strict control and descent into alcoholism. It's also in these years that Beethoven came to the attention of Count Ferdinand von Waldstein, who became a lifelong friend and financial supporter.

In 1789, he obtained a legal order by which half of his father's salary was paid directly to him for support of the family. He also contributed further to the family's income by playing viola in the court orchestra. This familiarized Beethoven with a variety of operas, including three of Mozart's operas performed at court in this period. He also befriended Anton Reicha, a flautist and violinist of about his own age who was the conductor's nephew.

Establishing his career in Vienna

With the Elector's help, Beethoven moved to Vienna in 1792. He was probably first introduced to Joseph Haydn in late 1790, when the latter was travelling to London and stopped in Bonn around Christmas time. They definitely met in Bonn on Haydn's return trip from London to Vienna in July 1792, and it's likely that arrangements were made at that time for Beethoven to study with the old master. In the intervening years, Beethoven composed a significant number of works (none were published at the time, and most are now listed as works without opus) that demonstrated a growing range and maturity of style. Musicologists have identified a theme similar to those of his third symphony in a set of variations written in 1791. Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna in November 1792, amid rumours of war spilling out of France, and learned shortly after his arrival that his father had died. Beethoven responded to the widespread feeling that he was a successor to the recently-deceased Mozart over the next few years by studying that master's work and writing works with distinctly Mozartean flavour.

Beethoven didn't immediately set out to establish himself as a composer, but rather devoted himself to study and to piano performance. Working under Haydn's direction he sought to master counterpoint, and he also took violin lessons from Ignaz Schuppanzigh. Early in this time he also began receiving occasional instruction from Antonio Salieri, primarily in Italian vocal composition style; this relationship persisted until at least 1802, and possibly 1809. With Haydn's departure for England in 1794, Beethoven was expected by the Elector to return home. He chose instead to remain in Vienna, continuing the instruction in counterpoint with Johann Albrechtsberger and other teachers. Although his stipend from the Elector expired, a number of Viennese noblemen had already recognized his ability and offered him financial support, among them Prince Joseph Franz Lobkowitz, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, and Baron Gottfried van Swieten.

By 1793, Beethoven established a reputation in Vienna as a piano virtuoso and improviser in the salons of the nobility, often playing the preludes and fugues of J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. His friend Nikolaus Simrock had also begun publishing his compositions; the first are believed to be a set of variations (WoO 66). Beethoven's first public performance in Vienna was in March 1795, a concert in which he debuted a piano concerto. It's uncertain whether this was the First or Second, as documentary evidence's unclear, and both concertos were in a similar state of near-completion (neither was completed or published for several years). Shortly after this performance he arranged for the publication of the first of his compositions to which he assigned an opus number, the piano trios of Opus 1. These works were dedicated to his patron Prince Lichnowsky. During his early career as a composer, Beethoven concentrated first on works for piano solo, then string quartets, symphonies, and other genres. This was a pattern he was to repeat in the "late" period of his career. Twelve of Beethoven's famous series of 32 piano sonatas date from before 1802, and could be considered early-period works; of these, the most celebrated today's probably the "Pathétique", Op. 13. The first six quartets were published as a set (Op. 18) in 1800, and the First and Second Symphonies premiered in 1800 and 1802. By 1800, with the premiere of his First Symphony, Beethoven was already considered one of the most important of a generation of young composers who followed after Haydn and Mozart.

All musical authorities agree that Beethoven's early work was closely modelled on that of Haydn and Mozart. However, Beethoven's own musical personality's still very much evident even at this stage. This is seen, for instance, in his frequent use of the musical dynamic *Sforza do*, found even in the early "Kurfürst" sonatas for piano that Beethoven wrote as a child. Some of the longer piano sonatas of the 1790s are written in a rather discursive style quite unlike their models, making use of the so-called "three-key exposition".

In this time he settled into a career pattern he'd follow for the remainder of his life: rather than working for the church or a noble court (as most composers before him had done), he supported himself through a combination of annual stipends or single gifts from members of the aristocracy; income from subscription concerts, concerts, and lessons; and proceeds from sales of his works.

Teaching and financial support

Beethoven had few students. From 1801 to 1805, he tutored Ferdinand Ries, who'd go on to become a composer and later published *Beethoven remembered*, a book about their encounters. Carl Czerny studied with Beethoven from 1801 to 1803. He went on to become a renowned music teacher himself, taking on Franz Liszt as one of his students. He also gave the Vienna premiere of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor" in 1812.

Perhaps Beethoven's most important aristocratic patron was Archduke Rudolph, youngest son of Emperor Leopold II, who in 1803 or 1804 began to study piano and composition with Beethoven. The two became friends, and their meetings continued until 1824. Beethoven dedicated 14 compositions to Rudolph, including the Archduke Trio (1811) and his great *Missa Solemnis* (1823). Rudolph, in turn, dedicated one of his own compositions to Beethoven. The letters Beethoven wrote to Rudolph are today kept at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna.

Other important patrons were Prince Lichnowsky, with whom Beethoven had a falling out in 1806, Count Franz Joseph Kinsky, and Prince Joseph Franz Maximilian Lobkowitz.

In the fall of 1808, after having been rejected for a position at the royal theatre, Beethoven received an offer from Napoleon's brother Jérôme Bonaparte, then king of Westphalia, for a well-paid position as Kapellmeister at the court in Cassel. To persuade him to stay in Vienna, the Archduke Rudolf, Count Kinsky and Prince Lobkowitz, after receiving representations from the composer's friends, pledged to pay Beethoven a pension of 4000 florins a year. Only Archduke Rudolf paid his share of the pension on the agreed date. Kinsky, immediately called to duty as an officer, didn't contribute and soon died after falling from his horse. Lobkowitz stopped paying in September 1811. No successors came forward to continue the patronage, and Beethoven relied mostly on selling composition rights and a smaller pension after 1815.

Loss of hearing

Around 1796, Beethoven began to lose his hearing. He suffered a severe form of tinnitus, a "ringing" in his ears that made it hard for him to perceive and appreciate music; he also avoided conversation. The cause of Beethoven's deafness is unknown, but it's variously been attributed to syphilis, lead poisoning, typhus, and even his habit of immersing his head in cold water to stay awake. The oldest explanation, from the autopsy of the time, was that he'd a "distended inner ear" which developed lesions over time.

Russell Martin has shown from analysis done on a sample of Beethoven's hair that there were alarmingly high levels of lead in Beethoven's system. High concentrations of lead can lead to bizarre and erratic behaviour, including rages. Another symptom of lead poisoning is deafness. In Beethoven's time, lead was used widely without an understanding of the damage which it could cause: for sweetening wine, in finishes on porcelain, and even in medicines. The investigation of this link was detailed in the book, *Beethoven's Hair: An Extraordinary Historical Odyssey and a Scientific Mystery Solved*. However, while the likelihood of lead poisoning is very high, the deafness associated with it seldom takes the form that Beethoven exhibited.

He lived for a time in the small Austrian town of Heiligenstadt, just outside Vienna. Here he wrote his Heiligenstadt Testament, which records his resolution to continue living for and through his art. Over time, his hearing loss became profound: there's a well-attested story that, at the end of the premiere of his Ninth Symphony, he'd to be turned around to see the tumultuous applause of the audience; hearing nothing, he began to weep. Beethoven's hearing loss didn't prevent his composing music, but it made concerts—lucrative sources of income—increasingly hard. After a failed attempt in 1811 to perform his own Piano Concerto No. 5 (the "Emperor"), he never performed in public again. Beethoven used a special rod attached to the soundboard on a piano that he could bite—the vibrations would then transfer from the piano to his jaw to increase his perception of the sound. A large collection of his hearing aids such as special ear horns can be viewed at the Beethoven House Museum in Bonn, Germany. Despite his obvious distress, however, Carl Czerny remarked that Beethoven could still hear speech and music normally until 1812. By 1814 however, Beethoven was almost totally deaf, and when a group of visitors saw him play a loud arpeggio or thundering bass notes at his

piano remarking, "Ist es nicht schön?" (Isn't that beautiful?), they felt deep sympathy considering his courage and sense of humour.

As a result of Beethoven's hearing loss, a unique historical record has been preserved: his conversation books. His friends wrote in the book so that he could know what they were saying, and he then responded either orally or in the book. The books contain discussions about music and other issues, and give insights into his thinking; they're a source for investigation into how he felt his music should be performed, and also his perception of his relationship to art. Unfortunately, 264 out of a total of 400 conversation books were destroyed (and others were altered) after Beethoven's death by Anton Schindler, in his attempt to paint an idealized picture of the composer.

The Middle period

Around 1804 Beethoven declared "I'm but lately little satisfied with my works, I'll take a new way." The first major work of this new way was the "Eroica" Symphony No. 3 in E flat. While other composers had written symphonies with implied programs, or stories, this symphony was longer and larger in scope than any other written. It made huge demands on the players, because at that time there were few orchestras devoted to concert music that were independent of royal or aristocratic patrons, and hence performance standards at concerts were often haphazard. Nevertheless, it was a success.

The *Eroica* was one of the first works of Beethoven's so-called "Middle period", or "Heroic Period", a time when Beethoven composed highly ambitious works, often heroic in tone, that extended the scope of the classical musical language Beethoven had inherited from Haydn and Mozart. The Middle period work includes the Third through Eighth Symphonies, the string quartets 7–11, the Waldstein and Appassionata piano sonatas, his only oratorio, *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, the opera *Fidelio*, the Violin Concerto and many other compositions. During this time Beethoven earned his living partly from the sale and performance of his work, and partly from subsidies granted by various wealthy nobles who recognized his ability.

The work of the Middle period established Beethoven's reputation as a great composer. In a review from 1810, he was enshrined by E. T. A. Hoffman as one of the three great "Romantic" composers; Hoffman called Beethoven's Fifth Symphony "one of the most important works of the age".

A particular trauma for Beethoven occurred during this period in 1809, when the attacking forces of Napoleon bombarded Vienna. Beethoven, very worried that the noise would destroy what remained of his hearing, hid in the basement of his brother's house, covering his ears with pillows. He was composing the "Emperor" Concerto at the time.

The Middle period ended with a flourish around 1812, with the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies and the third—and at last, successful—version of *Fidelio*. It was around this time that Beethoven's popularity with the contemporary public reached its apogee, and he was almost universally regarded as the greatest of living composers.

Romantic difficulties

Beethoven never married, although he was engaged to Giulietta Guiccardi. Her father was the main obstacle to their marriage. Giulietta's marriage to a nobleman was unhappy, and when it ended in 1822, she attempted unsuccessfully to return to Beethoven.

His only other documented love affair with an identified woman began in 1805 with Josephine von Brunswick, young widow of the Graf von Deym. It's believed the relationship ended by 1807 because of Beethoven's indecisiveness and the disapproval of Josephine's aristocratic family.

In 1812, Beethoven wrote three love letters to an "Immortal Beloved." Several possible addressees (male and female) have been suggested, with the most likely being Antonie Brentano.

Custody struggle

On 15 November 1815 Beethoven's brother Karl van Beethoven died of consumption leaving a son, Karl, Beethoven's nephew. Although Beethoven had apparently shown little interest in the boy up to this point, he now became obsessed with obtaining custody of this nine-year old child from his mother, Johanna — whom Beethoven despised and considered an unfit parent. The fight for custody of his nephew brought out the very worst aspects of Beethoven's character. In the lengthy court cases Beethoven stopped at nothing to ensure that he achieved this goal. During this time Beethoven stopped composing for long periods.

The Austrian court system had one court for the nobility, The R&I Landrechte, and another for commoners, The Civil Court of the Magistrate. Beethoven disguised the fact that the Dutch "van" in his name didn't denote nobility as does the German "von", and his case was tried in the Landrechte. Owing to his influence with the court, Beethoven felt assured of a favourable outcome. Beethoven was awarded sole guardianship. While giving evidence to the Landrechte, however, Beethoven inadvertently during a heavy hailstorm which was later confirmed by Gerhard von Breuning.

Viennese pathologist and forensic expert Christian Reiter (head of the Department of Forensic Medicine at Vienna Medical University) claimed that Beethoven's physician, Andreas Wawruch, inadvertently hastened Beethoven's death. According to Reiter, Wawruch worsened Beethoven's already lead poisoned condition with lead poultices applied after repeated surgical draining of his bloated abdomen. Reiter's hypothesis, however, was at odds with Wawruch's written instruction "that the wound was kept dry all the time". Furthermore human hair's a very bad biomarker for lead contamination and Reiter's hypothesis must be considered dubious, because of the lack of proper scholarly documentation in his article.

Unlike Mozart, who was buried in a common grave (as was the custom at the time), 20,000 Viennese citizens lined the streets at Beethoven's funeral on 29 March 1827. Franz Schubert was a torch bearer. Beethoven was buried in the Währing cemetery, west of Vienna. His remains were moved in 1888 to Vienna's Zentralfriedhof.

Character

Beethoven's personal life was troubled due to his encroaching deafness which led him to contemplate suicide (documented in his Heiligenstadt Testament). Beethoven was often irascible and may have suffered from bipolar disorder and irritability brought on by chronic abdominal pain beginning in his twenties that's been attributed to possible lead poisoning. Nevertheless, he'd a close and devoted circle of friends all his life, thought to have been attracted by his reputed strength of personality. Towards the end of his life, Beethoven's friends competed in their efforts to help him cope with his incapacities.

Sources show Beethoven's disdain for authority, and for social rank. He stopped performing at the piano if the audience chatted among themselves, or afforded him less than their full attention. At soirées, he refused to perform if suddenly called upon to do so. Eventually, after many confrontations, the Archduke Rudolph decreed that the usual rules of court etiquette didn't apply to Beethoven.

Music

Beethoven's acknowledged as one of the giants of classical music; occasionally he's referred to as one of the "three Bs" (along with Bach and Brahms) who epitomize that tradition. He was also a pivotal figure in the transition from 18th century musical classicism to 19th century romanticism, and his influence on subsequent generations of composers was profound.

Overview

Beethoven composed in a fairly wide variety of musical genres, and for a fairly wide variety of instrument combinations. His works for symphony orchestra include nine symphonies (of which the Ninth includes a chorus), and about a dozen pieces of "occasional" music. He wrote nine concerti for one or more soloists and orchestra, as well as four shorter works that include soloists accompanied by orchestra. Fidelio's the only opera he wrote; vocal works including orchestral accompaniment include two masses and a number of shorter works.

His work for piano was extensive; 32 piano sonatas, and numerous shorter works, including arrangements (for piano solo or piano duet) of some of his other works. Works with piano accompaniment include 10 violin sonatas, 5 cello sonatas, and a sonata for French horn, as well as numerous lieder.

The amount of chamber music produced by Beethoven was notable. In addition to the 16 string quartets, he wrote five works for string quintet, seven for piano trio, five for string trio, and more than a dozen works for a variety of combinations of wind instruments

The three periods

Beethoven's compositional career's usually divided into Early, Middle, and Late periods. In this scheme, his early period's taken to last until about 1802, the middle period from about 1803 to about 1814, and the late period from about 1815.

In his Early period, Beethoven's work was strongly influenced by his predecessors Haydn and Mozart, but he also explored new directions and gradually expanded the

scope and ambition of his work. Some important pieces from the Early period are the first and second symphonies, the set of six string quartets Opus 18, the first two piano concertos, and the first dozen or so piano sonatas, including the famous *Pathétique* sonata, Op. 13

His Middle (Heroic) period began shortly after Beethoven's personal crisis brought on by his recognition of encroaching deafness. It's noted for large-scale works that express heroism and struggle. Middle-period works include six symphonies (Nos. 3–8), the last three piano concertos, the Triple Concerto and violin concerto, five string quartets (Nos. 7–11), several piano sonatas (including the *Moonlight*, *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* sonatas), the *Kreutzer* violin sonata and Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*.

Beethoven's Late period began around 1815. Works from this period are characterized by their intellectual depth, their formal innovations, and their intense, highly personal expression. The String Quartet, Op. 131 has seven linked movements, and the Ninth Symphony adds choral forces to the orchestra in the last movement. Other compositions from this period include the *Missa Solemnis*, the last five string quartets (including the massive *Große Fuge*) and the last five piano sonatas.

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