

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven was born December 16, 1770, into a musical family. His grandfather was Kapellmeister at the court of the Elector of Cologne in Bonn, where also his father was a tenor. Beethoven's father gave him his first violin and piano lessons, and was apparently so strict that the boy used to cry while standing at the keyboard. Legend has it that the father would arrive home from a local tavern at midnight and wake the boy up to practice.



After a few lessons from local teachers, Beethoven began organ lessons in 1781 with Christian Gottlob Neefe, the court organist. At the age of eleven, Beethoven stood in for Neefe and also became pianist for the orchestra where he heard many operas. He received a salary of 150 florins when the new elector, Maximilian Franz, came into power in 1784.

Moody and somewhat withdrawn, the young Beethoven nevertheless came to know the elite of Bonn society, mainly through the von Breuning family. Frau von Breuning took Beethoven under her wing, excusing his self-absorption with the statement "He is in his raptus again." Beethoven also met friends at the Zehrgarten, a social club where revolutionary ideas were discussed. Beethoven was inspired by enlightened thought and wrote an important cantata on the death of the reformer, Joseph II.

Beethoven visited Vienna in 1787 to take lessons with Mozart, who said, "Watch this boy; he will give the world something to talk about." But the visit had to be cut short because of his mother's death. Later, Beethoven took the unusual step of declaring himself head of the family when his father's alcoholism got out of hand. He asked for and got half his father's salary, thus becoming guardian of two younger brothers, Caspar Carl and Nikolaus Johann, at age nineteen.

Count Waldstein, his first patron, probably encouraged the Elector to send Beethoven to Vienna to study with Haydn in 1792. He wrote in Beethoven's autograph book, "Receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands." However, Beethoven did not have a satisfactory fourteen months with Haydn, partly because the old man was beyond correcting simple counterpoint exercises, and partly because Beethoven could not subordinate himself to another composer. He had a temperamental inability to bow down to authority. He secretly began taking lessons with Schenk, and, later, with Albrechtsberger and Salieri, Mozart's rival.

Beethoven's virtuosity at the piano and his connections with Haydn and Waldstein guaranteed that he was accepted immediately by fashionable society. He lived with Prince Lichnowsky, Mozart's patron, and began playing private concerts. Baron von Swieten, who kept a library of old music, asked him to stay. Several charity concerts in 1795 garnered him greater recognition. Beethoven was pampered by the nobility and was invited to stay with the Esterhazys in Eisenstadt in 1793.

Beethoven's music is divided into three periods: early, middle and late. His first published opus in Vienna was his three piano trios in 1794. Haydn apparently had reservations about the third piano trio because it was innovative, which enraged Beethoven. In general, works from Beethoven's early period (1792-1802) are still in the style of Mozart, as if he were trying to master the Viennese classic style. His first two symphonies, written in 1800 and 1802, are restrained and conservative, and his first set of string quartets and two piano concertos were modeled after Mozart and Haydn. However, his piano sonatas went through a rapid evolution and show originality. Beethoven altered the traditional three-movement, allegro-andante-allegro sonata form, often adding a fourth movement. He also weighted the various movements in many compositions differently so that the final movement was more dramatic. He used unusual key relationships. The "Pathetique Sonata" of 1798, with its dynamic contrasts in tempo and mood, and the "Moonlight Sonata," written in 1801 like a fantasia, are highlights of this era.

The young composer cut a romantic, if somewhat eccentric figure. Not traditionally handsome, Beethoven was swarthy, called "the Spaniard" by his friends, with a broad nose, flat cheekbones and an untidy appearance. According to his friends, Franz Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries, he was always in love. In 1799, he taught piano to Countess Josephine von Brunsvik. Although their relationship deepened in the years 1804 to 1807 after her husband died, Josephine would not marry him. Josephine's young cousin, Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, was the object of Beethoven's affections in 1801, and he dedicated the "Moonlight Sonata" to her.

A crisis erupted in 1802. For some years, Beethoven had been plagued by strange buzzing noises in his ears which doctors had been unable to treat. Finally, the composer was forced to face the terrible truth that he was going deaf. While on a summer visit to Heiligenstadt, he poured out his heart in a famous letter to his brothers that has come to be known as the Heiligenstadt Testament. In it, the composer appears panicked, despairing, even suicidal, yet at the same time heroic and determined.

Once the crisis had passed, Beethoven returned to his music. The new "heroic" type of compositions of his middle period were linked to his victory over despair. The "Eroica" (third) symphony of 1804, originally dedicated to Napoleon Bonaparte, was a turning point in the history of music for its originality and bold, declamatory style. Scholars have seen in his 1803 oratorio, *Christ on the Mount of Olives* links between Christ's cup of sorrow and Beethoven's suffering over his deafness. Other works in the heroic mold include the Waldstein and Appassionata piano sonatas and the string quartets dedicated to Count Razumovsky. Beethoven composed thirty major works in this era and his fame grew throughout Europe.

Beethoven completed his first opera, *Fidelio*, in 1805, which tells the story of the heroic rescue of a wrongfully imprisoned officer, Florestan, by his faithful wife Leonore. The first performance of the opera coincided with the invasion of Vienna by Napoleon's troops and opening night was attended by French officers. The Austrian nobility had fled

to their country estates.

In 1806, Beethoven completed the Fifth Symphony, whose famous four-note motif he described as "fate knocking at the door." His sixth (or "Pastoral") symphony, composed in 1808, describes the emotions of someone walking through the countryside, a favorite activity of Beethoven's. In 1809, Princes Lobkowitz, Kinsky and Archduke Rudolph promised to pay him an annuity of 4000 florins for life, thus ending any financial worries.

Throughout his life, Beethoven was drawn to unavailable women, who were either too young for him, of a different social class or married. In 1810, he proposed marriage to his doctor's niece, the twenty-year-old Therese Malfatti, who, by all accounts, was not interested in him. But one woman, known to scholars by a few letters written by Beethoven in 1812, appears to have loved him deeply. Beethoven called her "the Immortal Beloved." Scholars guess that she was Antonie Brentano, a married woman, who met Beethoven in Vienna in 1810. Despite the deep love felt by both, Beethoven renounced the possibility of a life together.

This renunciation caused the composer to fall into a deep depression and his creative work suffered. Years after he gave up his only chance for happiness, he remarked to a friend, "I have not been able to get it out of my mind." In a letter to Ries, he wrote, "Unfortunately, I have no wife. I found only one whom I shall doubtless never possess." His song cycle, *To the Distant Beloved* written in 1816 was doubtless influenced by Antonie.

The agonizing battle with deafness and the loneliness of his solitary life made Beethoven behave with increasing eccentricity. His brother died in 1815, and in a desperate attempt to create his own family, Beethoven began to challenge his sister-in-law, Johanna, for the custody of his nephew, Karl. The struggle took them in and out of court for many years. Beethoven attacked Johanna mercilessly, calling her an unfit mother. Due to his influence and fame, he ultimately won full custody of his nephew.

By 1818 he was completely deaf, and kept conversation books in his studios so friends could write down their thoughts to him. Not content with separating Karl from his mother, he constantly harangued and nagged Karl, until the distraught young man tried to kill himself in 1826.

Beethoven's last era of composition, from 1820 to 1826, is of great interest to twentieth century listeners. Beethoven was aware of the beginnings of Romanticism in the 1820s and became newly interested in folk melodies. He also incorporated fugal writing (fashionable in the time of Bach) into his music, which is apparent in the Hammerklavier piano sonata of 1818. He also began using variation form again, as seen in the "Diabelli Variations." His last five string quartets were very advanced.

Beethoven conducted some movements from his 1822 *Missa Solemnis* and his last symphony (the Ninth) at his last concert in 1824. The Ninth contains a choral setting of Schiller's "Ode to Joy," which declares that "All Men are Brothers." It is the first symphony ever to have a choral movement. Being totally deaf, Beethoven did not hear

the thunderous applause after one of the movements, and had to be turned around to face the audience by one of the singers.

Beethoven's death on March 26, 1827, was as dramatic as his life. Feeling the end was near, he whispered to those at his bedside, "Applaud friends, the comedy is ended." On his last day, during a violent snowfall and thunderstorm, he suddenly opened his eyes, lifted his right hand and clenched it into a fist. Then he fell back onto his bed, dead.

Questions for Study and Discussion

1. Describe what sort of music Beethoven wrote in his early period. _____

2. What was the Heiligenstadt Testament? _____

3. Describe the music Beethoven wrote in his middle period. _____

4. Who was the "Immortal Beloved"? _____

5. Why did Beethoven want to look after his nephew, Karl? _____

6. Describe the music of Beethoven's late period. _____

7. What sort of personality did Beethoven have? (see "**More on Beethoven's Music**")

Ludwig Van Beethoven (Cont.)

DATES TO REMEMBER

After each date, describe what event occurred in Beethoven's life:

1. 1792 _____
2. 1802 _____
3. 1804 _____
4. 1815 _____
5. 1818 _____
6. 1824 _____
7. 1827 _____

More on Beethoven's Music

The Eroica (Heroic) Symphony

Like many young men of his time, Beethoven had a great interest in the French general, Napoleon, who, he believed, was liberating Europe from repressive governments and kings. Even though Napoleon had invaded his own native Vienna, Beethoven dedicated his third symphony to him. But when Napoleon declared himself Emperor (thus turning out to be yet another tyrant), Beethoven tore the title page in two in disgust and retitled his work the "heroic symphony."

Beethoven's Attitude to Nobility

Beethoven had a strange relationship with the aristocracy. He refused to act decorously towards them if he didn't feel like it. When walking with the great Romantic poet Goethe past an imperial procession, Beethoven refused to doff his hat. "My nobility is in here and in here," he declared, pointing to his head and his heart. Later, he told friends that he was greatly disappointed in Goethe's servile attitude, as he thought that artists should be above the aristocracy in status.

His patron, Prince Lichnowsky, knowing Beethoven's famous touchiness, asked his servant to go first to Beethoven if the two happened to ring for service at the same time. He bought a horse for Beethoven once, but Beethoven, not wanting to feel beholden, bought another one. Once he left a baron's country house because he couldn't stand how polite people were to each other, but on the other hand, when he was not asked to sit at the main table at a fancy dinner, he would also become enraged.

Beethoven's belief in the nobility of the artist and his insistence on freedom of action prefigured the Romantic era, with its emphasis on the importance of liberty, individuality and the common man.

Beethoven's Personality

Beethoven quarreled with many of his friends due to his suspicious and sensitive nature. These arguments were usually followed by a brief estrangement, then a stream of pleading letters, in which Beethoven begged forgiveness. He also had a warm side to his character. Beethoven's pupil, Czerny, pointed out that the master could be full of "witticisms and jokes" and loved a good laugh.

Influence on Other Composers

Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and the Romantic generation that followed were greatly influenced by Beethoven's piano works and songs. The Romantic composers thought of the artist as a hero; Beethoven's streak of eccentricity, his fruitless search for love and his "heroic" works dubbed him as the sort of artist they could idealize. Beethoven's works stood as a sort of model for them to worship or surpass.

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with its final choral movement, inspired Wagner's ideas of music drama, and his seventh symphony inspired Mendelssohn and Berlioz. His string quartets influenced Bartok.

Beethoven Super Puzzle

Find and circle the following words associated with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Words can appear in any direction.

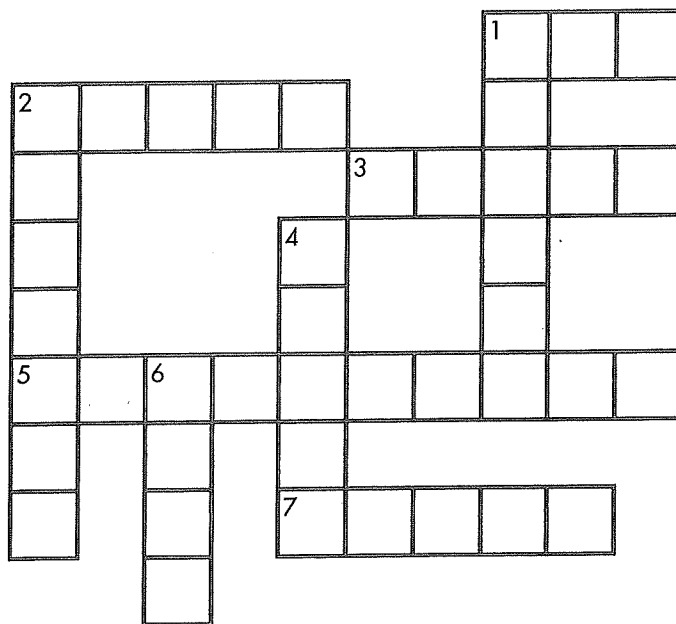
Bonn	Vienna	Heiligenstadt Testament
Immortal Beloved	Prince Lichnowsky	Prince Lobkowitz
Prince Kinsky	Baron van Swieten	Countess Giulietta
Antonie Brentano	Ferdinand Ries	Franz Wegeler
Johanna	Karl	The Von Breunings
Goethe	Josef Haydn	Mozart
Napoleon	Neeffe	Josephine
Carl	Johann	Eroica Symphony
Fifth Symphony	Pastoral Symphony	Ninth Symphony
String quartets	Piano sonata	Piano trios
Violin sonatas	Moonlight Sonata	Hammerklavier Sonata
Pathetique Sonata	Fidelio	To the Distant Beloved
Missa Solemnis	Diabelli Variations	Christ on the Mount of Olives

Ludwig Van Beethoven (Cont.)

**Creative Activities**

1. Imagine for a few minutes what it would be like to be deaf. (You may put your fingers in your ears to find out.) What is it like? Would you be able to sing songs or play the piano if you were deaf? Find some ways to experience music without using your sense of hearing. _____
- _____
- _____

2. Beethoven had an eccentric (meaning "unusual") personality. Why do you think he was that way? Do you think that geniuses are always eccentric? If so, why? _____
- _____



Crossword Clues

Across

- The choral movement in the Ninth Symphony is based on the poet Schiller's "___ to Joy."
- Beethoven's ___ Symphony contains the famous "fate knocking at the door" motif.
- Beethoven's first published work in Vienna, called Opus One, was his three piano ___.
- Beethoven stayed with Prince ___ when he arrived in Vienna in 1792.
- The composer ___ taught Beethoven when he moved to Vienna in 1792, but the two did not get on well together.

Down

- Christ on the Mount of ___* was Beethoven's first and only oratorio.
- Beethoven's first and only opera, ___, was performed to French officers after Napoleon invaded Vienna.
- The ___ Symphony was Beethoven's last symphony.
- Beethoven's nephew, ___, was adopted by the composer after Beethoven's brother, Caspar Carl, died in 1815.