

Ludwig Van Beethoven

(Lood-vhig fahn BAYHT – ho- fon)

Classical & Romantic Composer

Baptized: 17 December 1770, Bonn, Cologne, Holy Roman Empire (modern-day Germany)

Died: 26 March 1827; Vienna Austria

Beethoven's childhood was a hard one. The grandson of a beloved Kapellmeister of Bonn (Ludwig Beethoven Sr.), Ludwig Jr. was born to a father who wanted to have a musical prodigy like Amadeus Mozart. He forced Beethoven to practice for hours a day, and sometimes, even woke the little boy up in the middle of the night to make him practice more. In one way, the practice paid off: Ludwig became a performing sensation and was hired while still a child to perform and learn with the best teachers Bonn could find. He even had an opportunity to travel to Vienna and may have met Mozart. A story about this meeting was written down many years later, and in it, 16-year old Beethoven was invited to play for Mozart and his friends in Mozart's home. Beethoven played so passionately and perfectly that Mozart, in the astonished silence after the last note fell, announced: "Mark this young man; he will make a name for himself in the world." But when Beethoven returned home, his mother died, and his father was too ill to work, Beethoven became the family breadwinner.

After his father passed away, Beethoven, now 20, headed to Vienna, the capital of music in Europe. Mozart had just died, but Joseph Haydn took Beethoven in and allowed him to study the immense collection of music Haydn collected of the composers of the past. Beethoven studied Baroque counterpoint from Bach's nearly-forgotten pieces, and Mozart's flamboyant style. First known as a spectacular piano performer, Beethoven's compositions soon made their mark on Vienna society.

Beethoven's career is now marked in three phases: His Early Period (all his works until 1802), when all of his pieces were extremely Classical in style and showed the immense influence Mozart and Haydn's compositions had on him. In his Middle Period (1802-1812) Beethoven composed many of his now-famous works, including his 3rd and 5th Symphony. Beethoven started to stretch the restraints of the Classical style of music, pushing instruments (and their players!) to the edges of their capabilities, with dynamic changes, quick passages at the very top or bottom of the instrument range, and music that seemed to explore the whole range of human emotion. During his Late Period (1813 – 1827) Beethoven produced fewer large-scale works and more works for smaller groups and ensembles. These works often "broke" many of the "rules" of music, and Beethoven, re-studying the music of Bach and Handel, infused his new works with many tricks and techniques of the century-old Baroque pieces.

Sadly, the worst fear of a musician struck Beethoven: he slowly went deaf. Four months after Beethoven debuted his now-famous 5th Symphony, Napoleon invaded and attacked Vienna, shelling the city with cannon fire. Beethoven, more terrified of losing what remained of his hearing than dying in the battle, hid in his brother's cellar with pillows tied over his ears, still stubbornly composing. But nothing mattered: his hearing was completely gone by the time he was 44.

Still, Beethoven kept composing, including his 9th Symphony, the largest piece he ever composed, and the first piece to incorporate a choir. Because of the growth of his pieces, he is considered one of the last Classical composers, and also one of the first Romantic ones. And some say, he is the greatest composer that has ever lived.



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Beethoven Quotes:

“Tones sound, roar, and storm about me until I have set them down in notes.”

“Recommend virtue to your children; it alone, not money, can make them happy. I speak from experience.”



Figure 1; Beethoven's 9th Symphony, written in his own hand. Now in the possession of the Berlin State Library, in 2001, this score was the first musical piece to be added to the United Nations, "Memory of the World Program Heritage List."

VOCABULARY

Symphony: (*SIM-fon-ee*)

Since the time of Josef Haydn (1732 – 1809), a “Symphony” means a specific type of orchestral work with three or four pieces (movements) performed together. Early in the Classical Period of Music, the symphony typically had three movements:

- 1.) A fast movement
- 2.) A Slow Movement
- 3.) A second fast movement

Many of Mozart’s and Haydn’s early symphonies were built like this. Then Haydn added a fourth movement, which he wedged between the slow and final fast movements. Many symphonies have been built along these lines ever since:

- 1.) A fast (allegro) opening movement, usually in a Sonata form.
- 2.) A slower (Adagio) movement
- 3.) A short, lively movement based on a dance step (minuet) or a scherzo (lit. “joke”)
- 4.) A final fast movement, often in a Sonata or Rondo form.

HISTORY: Prior to the Classical Period, “*Simfonia*” or “*Simfonie*” referred to various instruments which played pieces, including instruments now known as the hurdy-gurdy, the strummed dulcimer, the virginal, the spinet, even a two-headed drum. During the Baroque period, a “*symphony*” was often a piece within a larger work, like an opera.

ETYMOLOGY: Entered English in the 1300s, from the Latin “Symphonia” and the Greek “Symfonia” (Συμφωνία). Comes from the words “Sym-” meaning “together and “-Phone”, meaning “sound”.

Sonata Form: (*Sohn-AH-ta*)

From the Italian “*Sonata*” which means sound, or sounded, (as opposed to “*Cantata*” which means “sung”) a Sonata is a model or pattern for a specific type of music. It consists of a theme, an Exposition, and a Recapitulation (sometimes with a coda.)

- **Theme/Exposition:** The recurring melody or musical pattern in the piece. Beethoven’s first symphony opens with the famous “Da-Da-Da-DAAAAAH!” theme, and then the composer plays with the theme expanding into different variations. (Think of it as “Part A”)
- **Development:** a completely different part of the piece, which often leaves the theme behind. In Beethoven’s 5th, 1st movement, that’s around the 3:30 mark, with the woodwinds and strings. (This is “Part B”)
- **Recapitulation:** The Original theme is back (possibly with modifications)! (“Part A” again)

A Sonata form therefore, usually has an **A-B-A** Pattern.



A **CODA**, (*see symbol on the left*) comes from the Latin “*Caudal*” meaning “tail”. In music, it is the final passages in a music in order to bring it to a better close. Beethoven was famous for expanding his coda sections more so than previous composers.

Famous Beethoven Pieces:

MOONLIGHT SONATA- Composed ca. 1801. Beethoven named this piano piece, “*Sonata quasi una fantasia*” (“A Sonata in the manner of a Fantasy [improvisation]”), but five years after his death, it gained the name “*Moonlight Sonata*,” which it has been known by ever since. It consists of three movements, and the first is the most well-known.

3RD SYMPHONY (EROICA [HEROIC] SYMPHONY)-Composed 1803 – 1804; First Performed 17 April 1805. This piece is often cited as the beginnings of Beethoven’s transition to what would become the Romantic style of music. Unusually for Beethoven, he seems to have composed this piece backwards—from the 4th movement back through to the 1st. It was originally titled in honor of Napoleon Bonaparte, whom Beethoven admired as the ideal leader of the post-French Revolution Republic. When Bonaparte crowned himself emperor in 1804, a furious Beethoven viciously scratched his name out, retitling this his “Eroica” Symphony. When it debuted in 1805, it received mixed reviews, in part because the first movement alone was nearly as long as Haydn’s and Mozart’s entire symphonies!

5TH SYMPHONY (SYMPHONY OF FATE)- Composed 1804 – 1808; Premiered 22 December 1808. The four-note theme of this Symphony’s first movement is one of the most famous musical motifs in the world: da-da-da-DUM! Beethoven described it as “Fate knocking on the door of life.” While Beethoven did not name this Symphony (like the 3rd and the 6th) it is sometimes known as “The Symphony of Fate.” Despite its fame for over two centuries, its debut was just short of disastrous, as Beethoven finished the work the night before the concert—and the orchestra therefore, only got to practice it once!

6TH SYMPHONY (PASTORAL) – Composed 1802 – 1808; Premiered 22 December 1808. This Symphony debuted a few minutes before the fifth one, nonetheless, it is called the 6th Symphony. Beethoven, who loved to take walks through the countryside whenever he could, used those countryside scenes as inspiration for this work and named this work, “The Pastoral [County] Symphony”. It had five movements, not the usual four, and each movement was labeled with a title identifying what that movement was suggesting: “A Scene by a Brook,” “A storm,” “The Shepherd’s Song After the Storm.” This piece probably gained more fame in the modern world when it was featured nearly in its entirety in Disney’s 1940 musical collaboration “Fantasia.”

FUR ELISE- Composed 27 April 1810; Discovered and Published 1867. Literally titled, “For Elise”, this is one of Beethoven’s more well-known piano compositions, even though no one knows for certain who “Elise” is. It is composed in the Classical Style, with a melodic line, supported by arpeggio (separated) chords. It is also a *Rondo*, meaning the pattern of the piece is “A-B-A-C-A.” As you listen to the piece, you hear the initial theme three times, interposed with two different sections of melody. This piece was never published during Beethoven’s lifetime, and was discovered by a music publisher 40 years after his death.

9TH SYMPHONY: Composed 1822 – 1824; Premiered 7 May 1824. This work called for the largest orchestra in Beethoven’s works, and is the first Symphony to include choral singers. Commissioned by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, it debuted still in Beethoven’s hometown of Vienna. Profoundly deaf by this point, Beethoven conducted with a hearing conductor doubling. Beethoven’s passionate conducting was wild and fiery to watch, but he was nonetheless several bars off the actual beat, so the musicians watched the other conductor. When the symphony finished, Beethoven, several beats behind, continued to conduct, unaware of the applause until one of the soprano singers turned him around.

Take Home:

Classical Kids: Beethoven Lives Upstairs. I cannot recommend this series enough! This wonderful



radio-play style series highlights the life stories of famous composers while listening to selections of their works. In this title, one of the earliest, a little boy named Karl writes letters to his musician uncle complaining about his mother's crazy new house renter—Beethoven. Taking place during the time Beethoven was writing his 9th symphony, we see Beethoven's life and background through the letters between this frustrated boy and his compassionate uncle. To listen to this wonderful performance, you can use:

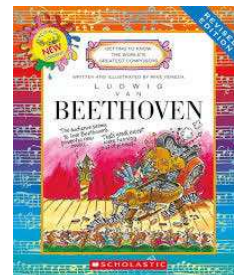
- **Spotify:** (Look up the Album, “Beethoven Lives Upstairs”)
- **CD:** Available on Amazon, or the Classical Kids Website (classicalkidsnfp.org)
- **DVD:** This title was made into a full-length production, available on DVD from Amazon and Classical Kids.

If you're really lucky, you might even catch a live performance: Just go to classicalkidsnfp.org (nfp stands for “not for profit”) and click on the “calendar” tab. That will show you which live productions are upcoming world-wide. Check back often, these productions are not to be missed!

Other titles in the Classical Kids series:

- **Song of the Unicorn** (*Medieval Music intertwined with the King Arthur Legends*)
- **Vivaldi's Ring of Mystery**
- **Hallelujah Handel**
- **Mr. Bach Comes to Call**
- **Mozart's Magnificent Voyage**
- **Mozart's Magic Flute** (*this one follows a girl as she gets sucked into Mozart's most famous opera- No Mozart bio.*)
- **Tchaikovsky Discovers America**
- **Gershwin's Magical Key** (*Available only in Live production!*)

Book: *Getting to Know the World's Greatest Composers: Beethoven* by Mike Venezia. Another in Venezia's delightful series, showing the life of Beethoven, along with many images from his world. Sadly, the composer books aren't as good as the artist books because it is impossible to HEAR the composer works, but the books help bring the composer's life to light for children, who then might be more interested in the music.



Music: Listen to any Beethoven compositions you can, and in time, you'll be able to pick out a Beethoven piece whenever it appears, whether on a podcast, a commercial, a movie, or playing somewhere. If you Google “*Beethoven on Period Instruments*” you might also hear slightly different variations on Beethoven's pieces, and hear them the way he imagined them in his mind (*in a world before keyed brass instruments, saxophones, xylophones, metal woodwind instruments, ect.*)

Movies: Disney's *Fantasia 2000* opened with Beethoven's 5th Symphony, 1st movement, using semi-abstract butterflies. It's a wonderful way to capture children's attention.

Disney also animated Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (6th) in the original *Fantasia* (1940), and borrowed several of Beethoven's motifs for the shorts (even if the shorts feature Greek myths!)