

BEETHOVEN

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There is probably no greater composer than Beethoven. He achieved in fifty six years and, under the most difficult circumstances for a creative musician, the problem of eventual total deafness, and may have suffered more than many other composers. I willingly accept that many will say that J S Bach is the greatest.

Beethoven's story is one of tragedy and mystery. His music is probably the most dramatic and enduring ever written.

But was he German? His name was not von Beethoven but van Beethoven and his family can be traced back three hundred years, before Ludwig was born, to the Flemish Brabant region of what is now Belgium. It would appear that the van Beethovens came to Bonn in Germany around 1741, thirty years before Ludwig was born and about the time that Ludwig's father was born.



His father was Johann van Beethoven who, in 1752, entered the Court Chapel Choir. He played the clavier and the violin. He began to receive a salary as a Court musician in 1764. He taught the rich to sing and to play the clavier.

Ludwig's mother was Maria Magdalena, nee Keverich, a very serious woman who had been married before.

Young Beethoven was born in Bonn in December 1770. The date was either the 15th or the 16th. There are some stories, which may be apocryphal, that his age was falsified to make him out to be a child prodigy. What is known is that the family lived on the second floor of a house on the Rheingasse and in poverty.

By the time Beethoven was five years old, he was showing a great interest in music. In 1778, he began clavier lessons with the Court organist, Heinrich van den Eeden. Between 1779 and 1781, he had many other teachers. The young boy was shy and seemed to have no friends; apparently no one played with him. He took part in a public concert in March 1778, although it is not known what he did.

The Dutch connection is also interesting since young Beethoven and his mother visited Rotterdam in 1781. Later, he took lessons with Christian Gottlob Neefe, the newly appointed Court organist. He came from Saxony and his dates are 1748-1798. Among his works are several operas. In 1782, at the age of eleven, Beethoven deputised for him. He began to compose. There were some Variations on a march by Dressler and the Electoral Sonata of 1783, the same year in which he was made the cembalist in the Court orchestra.

By now, his mother was constantly ill and his father's drink problem had become serious. Ludwig had

private pupils to supplement the income for his family. All the stories that he was an uncaring and thoroughly dislikeable person are not true. He cared for his mother deeply. He had found friends with two local families, the von Breunings and the Wegelers. With the first family he learned about German literature and, as they were a family of culture, he learned how to behave in company. With Wegeler, he emulated his desire for knowledge and personal advancement.

However, he could be bad tempered and difficult. But one has to take into account the shabby way he was treated at home by his father and, later on, his deafness which may have been caused, or partly caused, by his father's violence including beatings around the head.

The curious and endearing thing about Beethoven was that he obviously fell in love with some of his pupils. Look at the dedication of some of his scores. Clearly, he fell in love with Eleonore von Breuning and must have been heartbroken when she married Wegler in 1802. It is said that he was always in love.

To improve himself further Beethoven took advanced violin lessons.

In 1787, at the age of sixteen, he went to Vienna to meet Mozart who was very taken with him and said these immortal words about Ludwig, "Keep your eyes on him; some day he will give the world something to talk about."



Eleonore von Breuning

Later that year, Beethoven's mother died of consumption. Beethoven never recovered from this. All his life he had long periods of great sadness at the memory of this event. She was only 45 years of age. It may be speculation on my part but one reason why Beethoven may not have married was because he probably believed that no woman could or should compare with his beloved mother. Her death also affected the widower whose life deteriorated further into drink and negligence. He was also seriously in debt.

We should repeat that it is often said that while Beethoven was a boy his father beat him around the head and this may have contributed to Beethoven becoming completely deaf while still a comparatively young man.

Neefe, having introduced Beethoven to the von Breunings and the Wegelers, extended the list of nobility to whom Beethoven became acquainted thus killing another myth that he was always scruffy, dirty and bad-mannered, although he certainly went through phases when he was. He also made friends with other composers including the flautist Anton Reicha whose music for wind is superb.

In 1788, Neefe took the leading role in the New National Theatre in Bonn. Beethoven was involved with this and was highly regarded. Due to his father's infirmity, Ludwig was declared the head of his family and entitled to receive half of his father's salary. His father was often arrested by the police and bailed out by his son.

In December 1790, the great Haydn passed through Bonn with Salomon on the way to London. On the Sunday they went to Mass in the Court chapel. Whether Beethoven was there is another matter. Two years later, Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna, never to return, initially for the purpose of studying with Haydn.

Before that, his duties as a court musician allowed him some time to compose including two cantatas in 1790 namely *On the death of Joseph II* and *On the Accession of Leopold II* who, incidentally, died the following year, as did Mozart.

Studying with Haydn in 1792 must have made Beethoven aware that he was a mere novice. It made Beethoven feel small and he is reported to have said that he learned nothing from Haydn. There are also stories that Haydn was unhappy that Beethoven did not inscribe on his work that he was a pupil of his. Beethoven turned to Johann Schenk for help with harmony and counterpoint to supplement his lessons with Haydn.

At first, while in Vienna, Beethoven rented an attic and he kept accounts carefully as he was very limited in funds. He knew what it was like to struggle financially. But soon he moved to a room in Prince Lichnowsky's house on the Alsterstrasse, the prince being interested in music. But dear Haydn wrote to various people about Beethoven's sad finances and obtained help for him.

Beethoven was beginning to show some unfortunate traits. His criticisms of Haydn were unfair and it is said that if he were going to any function he would stick his head round the door and, if there was anyone there that he did not like, he would not stay. His clothes were unfashionable and not always tidy and, away from the influence of the nobility in Bonn, he became socially bad mannered.

It was at Karl Lichnowsky's house that Beethoven's Opus 1 Piano Trios had their first airing. Haydn was present and was complimentary. Beethoven was happy that two of the trios were published but had his doubts about the C minor Trio. He was probably being contrary as Haydn declared this trio to be the best. For their time, the Trios were very good.

In the middle of 1794, Beethoven's brother, Carl Caspar Anton, 1774-1815, arrived in Vienna to earn a living as a music teacher. Other friends also fled from Bonn, and elsewhere, to escape the French.

A grand concert for the orphans and widows of musicians in March 1795 marked Beethoven's debut in Vienna as a performer with his Piano Concerto in B flat, later to become known as his second piano concerto, a fine piece with a freshness and sparkle. Czerny, 1791- 1857, was in the audience and deeply impressed with the adagio. The following day at another concert, Beethoven improvised and earned more praise. One of the finest composers of the day, now almost forgotten, was Ferdinand Ries, who was also very impressed. Then there was a concert arranged by Mozart's widow in which Beethoven played Mozart's D minor concerto and improvised his own cadenzas.

And so, 1795 did a very great deal for Beethoven.

He was sometimes seen going to the opera or the theatre with one of his lady friends. Apparently, he took them in turns. He composed his three Piano Sonatas, Opus 2, dedicated to Haydn, and the two Cello Sonatas, Opus 5, and the massive C major Piano Sonata, Opus 7, dedicated to a lady, the Countess Babette von Keglevis. His Quintet for piano and wind, Opus 16, was clearly modelled on Mozart and premiered in April 1797. The following year came the first group of Violin Sonatas, Opus 12.

Another composer in Vienna was the much maligned Antonio Salieri who many think was a finer composer than Mozart but the stories of Salieri's hatred of Mozart, one of which says he poisoned him, are mischief. Salieri was the chief instigator and organiser of the concerts for widows and orphans and proved himself to be a very likeable man. Beethoven had some lessons with him, as did Liszt and Schubert, although it did Schubert no good, since Schubert was a lazy and difficult person. Beethoven also had some lessons with Albrechtsberger.

The military ambitions of the French and the war footing in Europe meant that soldiers were always present. Beethoven found a friend in a young French general, Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, who suggested to Beethoven an Heroic Symphony from which came Beethoven's first monumental masterpiece the Symphony no. 3 which became known as the Eroica. There was now peace between Napoleon and Austria and Bernadotte was an appointee of Napoleon as an ambassador to Vienna.

Beethoven visited Prague and met Tomasek to whom he played his C major Piano Concerto, Opus 15, which if played quickly and rhythmically is quite splendid, and the revised version of the B flat concerto. Tomasek referred to Beethoven as a giant among players. The next year Beethoven met the double-bass virtuoso Domenico Dragonetti who played the second cello sonata on the bass.

The century ended with the composition of one of Beethoven's most famous works the Piano Sonata in C minor, Opus 13, known as the Pathétique, modelled on the Electoral Sonata. It is dedicated to Prince Lichnowsky who had helped him out financially. Although this piece is hacked these days, it is a good piece from the grave opening through a splendid slow movement, splendid as long as it is not sentimentalised, and a fine rondo finale.

The beginning of the 19th century was one of change and revolution. Beethoven underwent all sorts of philosophical and political thinking. He was brought up as a Roman Catholic but he never talked about religious subjects. He had little time for Catholic ritual as such or Freemasonry. He did see in Napoleon revolutionary ideas and a new set of exciting concepts that he took into his music. The visionary, the new, the imaginary were all concepts of the new romantic age.

But change takes time and has to be accepted comparatively slowly. The six String Quartets, opus 18, break no new ground but are very elegant. The Symphony no. 1, Opus 21, and the Septet, Opus 20, which was dedicated to the Empress broke little new ground either although the minuet of the symphony is interesting. You could not dance the minuet to this music. Perhaps Beethoven had thoughts similar to mine. What is more important, the dance or the music? Watch a ballet without its music and what have you got? To a serious and wise musician, there is nothing more distracting than your music being overlooked by the display of graceful movements or physical exercise. In modern times so much music is ruined by noisy tap dancing or that horrid Spanish shoe clattering. But ballet was becoming popular in Vienna and Beethoven wrote his ballet Prometheus and ballet has remained popular largely due to its overtly visual sexual impact.

The Symphony no 1 harks back to the eighteenth century Viennese classical style as does the Symphony no 2 with its curious somersault in the finale which seems to Have Mozart's Prague symphony in its sights, The Symphony no 1 was first performed on 2 April 1800 at the Burgtheater in Vienna in a concert that included the Septet. The symphony was an instant success. One reviewer of the time praised it for its considerable art, novelty and wealth of ideas

In 1801, there appeared a new work of Beethoven that has become famous, the Piano Sonata in C sharp minor, Opus 27 no. 2, known as the Moonlight, although the first sonata in the set is more convincing both in form and style.

Beethoven's health was becoming a matter of concern. He was under great stress and the beginning of his deafness was showing. On 5th April 1803, his oratorio Christ on the Mount of Olives and the wonderful Piano Concerto no. 3 in C minor, Opus 37, were premiered.

This concerto must rank as arguably the first really great piano concerto. People who like to make comparisons, which can be odious, have opined that Beethoven used Mozart's Piano Concerto no 24 in C minor as a model. It has been said that Beethoven desired the respectability of Mozart but Beethoven does not use imitation as such, It is a work that has been very popular with soloists and audiences alike and deservedly so. I heard a performance by the ultra-superlative Peter Katin and I still cannot believe that a mortal played it.

There appeared the greatest of his Violin Sonatas, the Kreutzer, Opus 47, the first performance of which was given by George Augustus Polgreen Bridgetower. It was originally dedicated to the French violinist Kreutzer but a quarrel over a girl made Beethoven re-dedicate it to Bridgetower.

1804 was even more productive with the Ercia, the Triple Concerto for piano trio and orchestra, the Piano Sonata in C, Opus 53, known as the Waldstein, because it is dedicated to Count Waldstein, and the Piano Sonata in F minor, Opus 57 known as the Appassionata. Squeezed between these two massive sonatas is the Piano Sonata in F, Opus 54, a marvellous little piece noted for its difficulty.

It is my view that Beethoven was not competent in writing for the voice. Nonetheless, in 1804 and 1805 he worked on his only opera, Fidelio, based on a libretto by Joseph Ferdinand von Sonnleithner and, in simple terms, tells of a devoted wife rescuing her husband from the guillotine. Beethoven's love of women meant that he wanted to call the opera Leonore after the heroine. But the powers that be would not allow this. Florestan has been imprisoned and his wife disguises herself as a boy, Fidelio, and becomes an assistant to the jailor, Rocco. The story has a happy ending.

The story was topical for its time and was one in a series of 'rescue' operas which were all the rage.

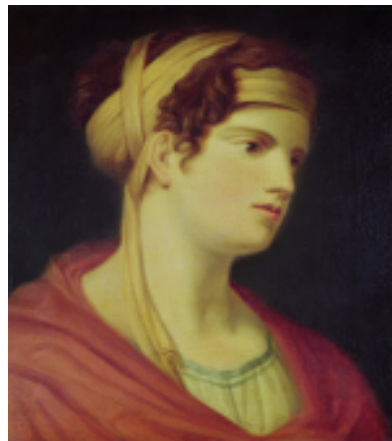
On October 30th, 1805, the French army entered Salzburg. Fidelio was put on the back burner until 1814 after a few performances in 1805.

Beethoven used Leonore as a heroine. Was Eleonore von Bruening in his mind at the time? He once thought that Napoleon was a hero but no more. In addition, Fidelio is an opera of clear sexual overtones. The woman is supreme and Beethoven's love and admiration of many women is here exemplified. He adored women and it is easily forgotten that Beethoven was a red-blooded man with normal sexual feelings. That he remained a bachelor does not mean or suggest that he did not have such feelings nor does it suggest that he was as homosexual. That Leonore is dressed as a boy is a sexual device used by many... Shakespeare's Rosalind is another example. The idea of a woman in boy's clothes mixing with men and the danger of their sexuality being revealed or that woman seeing the sexuality of a man is both a thrill and dare of many a story. How did Rocco not see that Fidelio had breasts and was therefore a woman? These sexual implications still excite audiences today.

Beethoven was a real man. Wegeler said that there was never a time when Beethoven was not in love. Beethoven was on a lifelong quest for the perfect woman, someone of immense beauty and intellectual qualities, who was not moody or unpredictable but constant in all her ways. As perfect women probably do not exist no women ever really fulfilled his expectations. Yet he had morals. He wrote of not wanting a physical relationship with a married woman since it would break any trust she had in him. At one time, he lived opposite a family called Flohberger who had a daughter, Lise, who had a bad reputation. He would watch her unnoticed. He seemed to have been obsessed with the immorality of women. Ferdinand Ries wrote that Beethoven 'loved to see women, particularly pretty young faces; he would turn his hand to look at one and would laugh or grimace if I observed him doing so'. His interests were usually young pretty girls simply because he loved the idea of virginity. But they had to be intellectual. As with Lise, Beethoven felt that once a woman had had sex, she had lost her virtue



Josephine von Brunswick



Therese von Brunswick



*Countess Giulietta
Guicciardi*

and, perhaps, he felt that any woman he admired should only lose their virginity to him. The Moonlight Sonata was dedicated to Countess Giulietta Guicciardi with whom he was clearly in love. Her father disallowed an engagement since Beethoven did not have the rank, finances and position. There were the Brunsvik sisters, Therese and Josephine. To Therese he dedicated his Sonata in F sharp. opus 78. During 1804, Beethoven developed a deep love for Josephine but she married Count Deym who loathed music but, when he died in 1804, this revived Beethoven's love for her. He adored her and yet she was not his ideal woman. She had been married and was therefore no longer pure. By 1805 he was writing love letters to her. But the love between them died.

There was the Countess Anna Marie Erdody who married a Hungarian who was an avid admirer of Beethoven.

In the winter of 1808/9, Beethoven rented apartments in her house and was friends with her for about ten years. She was a very strange person and was constantly watched by the police. Another strange woman, Bettina Brentano, was besotted with Beethoven between 1810 and 1812. Great men are often subject to the admiration of unusual people but then so are rogues.

The two most beautiful girls in Vienna were said to be the Malfatti sisters, Therese and Anna. In 1810, Beethoven fell for the eighteen year old Therese, a striking brunette with dark eyes. She was aware of his shabby clothes and remedied the situation. Marriage was briefly contemplated. For Beethoven, Therese met his expectations so far. She was a virgin. But she began to show feminine tendencies which have ensnared men for all time, ever since Eve. She was a minx. But for all her typical female fickleness, she did help to look after Beethoven in his last illness.



Therese Malfatti (at piano)

A brief fling with Amalie Sebald, a singer, in 1811 was followed by a longish relationship with Dorothea von Ertmann who was married to an Austrian army officer. This relationship seems to have been purely platonic. She did not meet his ideal woman situation either. She was married. But she was a very good pianist and Beethoven wrote his magnificent Piano Sonata in A, Opus 101, for her.

Dorothea recorded how Beethoven was. 'He was often irritable, jumpy, very sensitive and had not eaten properly. His deafness drives him mad and one has to take into account his physical and moral sufferings. He suffers...'.
'

There is some suggestion that Dorothea was Beethoven's 'immortal beloved'. I do not subscribe to that view. The 'immortal beloved' was a woman whose identity was never revealed and to whom letters were apparently written which were of an intimate and rather beautiful nature. One such letter of Beethoven's begins:

My Angel, my All, my very self

A later passage says:

Love demands all, and rightly so... to face life I must live altogether with you or never see you... I am faithful to you: no other woman can possess my heart, never... never... never... why must one be separated from her who is so dear.

It ends:

Be calm for only by calmly considering our lives can we achieve our purpose of living together... be

calm love me... today... yesterday what tearful longing for you: for you... you... my life, my all... all good wishes to you Oh, do continue to love me never misjudge your lover's most faithful heart... ever yours, ever mine, ever ours.

The letter was found in his bureau after his death where he also kept a picture of Therese Brunsvik.

It tells us a lot about Beethoven particularly his loneliness and that he had a heart... and it was a good one, too.

In the years 1806/7 Beethoven's work became lyrical. The sublime Symphony no. 4 in B flat, opus 60, is case in point. It is sunny, cheerful and has Beethoven's finest slow movement which apparently moved Berlioz to tears. No one who loves music can fail to love this glorious work. The Violin Concerto is also a sunny work and deservedly popular. It tests the soloists maturity and is a piece which every virtuoso should perform during their career. Ginette Neveu played it to perfection. I have heard famous violinists make a complete hash of it. Czerny thought it heavenly and Clementi (1752-1832) wanted to publish it as he did many other works by this genius. It is interesting to note that when Joachim played it in London in 1844 that this work was eventually recognised.

The Piano Concerto no. 4 in G has always been a blind spot for me although I have enjoyed playing the finale. It is a work that I may come to love in time.

His finest work for piano and orchestra (and choir) is the Choral Fantasy Op 80, sometimes stupidly dismissed as an exercise for the Choral Symphony. It is arguably Beethoven's finest work for piano and orchestra.

1806 also saw the production of the three Rasumowsky String Quartets, Opus 59, which mark the pinnacle of Beethoven's success in this genre. Count Andreas Rasumowsky (1752-1836) had been one of the patrons of the Piano Trios, Opus 1. It may seem unfair to highlight one of the quartets but the C major is almost perfection and the finale, a stupendous fugue, if played with speed and brilliance is a brilliant tour de force.

Beethoven's brother, Carl Caspar, was something of a naughty boy. He had got his latest girlfriend, Johanna Reiss, in the family way and eventually married her. Their son, Karl, was born less than four months later and was to play an important part in Beethoven's life.

It is sometimes forgotten that concerts in Vienna were often long and may have included three symphonies, a concerto and other smaller items. Today, 1967, we have an overture, a concerto and a symphony, perhaps 80 minutes. In Beethoven's time they were marathons. He also went through a sticky patch with Lichnowsky but this was later repaired and he gave two concerts at the prince's house including his four symphonies to date.

In 1807, Beethoven signed a contract with Muzio Clementi the London publisher and composer. That summer was spent composing the Symphony no. 5 in C minor, Opus 67, and the Mass in C to mark the nameday of Prince Esterhazy's wife. The Symphony has become famous and has been abused. The four note motif has been said to portray Beethoven's rage at his deafness and it is surprisingly how many conductors cannot get this right. The only accented note is the last one because it falls on the first beat of the second bar. I have just heard Karajan's dreadful performance but I will not listen to it again. He does not get it right either. The idea of Churchill, cigar in mouth and sticking two figures up accompanied by this musical motif annoys me as well.

The spring of 1809 saw the French invade Vienna again. The Archduke Rudolph left the capital. Beethoven's hatred of Napoleon increased and with him his admiration for the Archduke for whom he wrote the Piano Trio, Ops 97, known as the Archduke. It is also lyrical and abounds in melodic

invention. But, at the time, Beethoven was finishing his finest Piano Concerto, number five in E flat, Opus 73, and known as The Emperor, for obvious reasons. It is heroic but has a different character to the Eroica which now has Napoleon as its dedicatee crossed out. The Emperor is a towering achievement, the greatest piano concerto written then to date, full of sparkle and a profound slow movement. Only a genius could have written this. Czerny gave the premiere.

But then only a genius could have written his Cello Sonata in A major, Opus 69, a work that I have often played with my girlfriend, Ngoc. The melody and the development of the thematic material is outstanding and Beethoven's sense of form is truly impeccable.

It is a personal opinion but I have never taken to the Symphony no 6 The Pastoral. I understand its popularity but it does not have a symphonic form and could be called a Symphonic Poem.

It may be true to say that his most popular work is the Symphony no. 7 in A, Opus 92, written in 1811/12. He had just mentally exhausted himself with some incidental music based on Goethe's five-act play Egmont which had an interest to Beethoven as Lamoral, Count of Egmont was Flemish coming from Dutch nobility. I ask the question again, Was Beethoven Holland's greatest composer? What we do know is that Beethoven corresponded with Goethe during the composition of this music.

The Seventh Symphony is a masterpiece of the highest proportions. Wagner called it the apotheosis of the dance. As in the Fifth Symphony and the Waldstein Sonata there is no real slow movement. The scherzo and trio may have one repeat to many but the finale, if taken at the right speed, swirls with unmitigating excitement and the horn entries are thrilling. It is such an amazing work after the disappointment of the Symphony no. 6 in F known as The Pastoral. This symphony is programme music. It tells of a visit to the country as many Viennese did in the summer. But the music has no form or logic and a silly tune that wears itself out. The thunderstorm can be effective but the work does not hang together comfortably.

But the apotheosis of the dance, the glorious Seventh Symphony, has a rhythmic vitality and, again, it is sexual, the work of a normal red-blooded male. It is orgasmic. Beethoven is here in the music and so are the pretty young women he admired. Dance in itself is sexual. It is the legitimate touching or holding of a girl so that you can dance with her. The climaxes in the music portray something else. It is as sensual as Schoenberg's incomparable Transfigured Night or Berg's impressive Violin Concerto written to the memory of an angel, the eighteen year old daughter of Manon Gropius.

Beethoven's Symphony no. 8 in F seems slight compared to the Seventh and may be a trifle repetitive but it is an enjoyable piece and is bright and cheerful which, for a man very deaf, and seeing French canon balls destroy buildings and setting fires is quite surprising. In one fire and attack, 117 houses including the palaces of the Esterhazys were razed to the ground and a charity concert was put on to provide funds for the victims.

Domestic crisis loomed. His brother, Nikolaus Johann (1776-1848) wanted to marry his housekeeper and Beethoven objected violently and took civil and ecclesiastical action to try to prevent the marriage but to no avail. The following year, 1813, found his brother Carl to be very ill and Beethoven interfered again. He did not like Carl's wife. She had no virtue but nonetheless Beethoven asked his publisher to lend the family money. As when his mother was dying Beethoven financially supported his family although he had no obligation to do so.

His brother, Carl Caspar, died on 16th November 1815 appointing



his wife and Beethoven to be the guardians of young Karl. But in the will the phrase 'along with my wife' was deleted and thus making Beethoven to be the sole guardian but a codicil stated that Karl should not be taken from his mother. A long legal battle ensued. Beethoven was fond of his nephew but hated his mother. She was a wanton woman. She had had an illegitimate daughter. In February 1816 she went to the Artists' Ball staying until three in the morning and exposing herself naked and offering herself for hire for twenty gulden! The current and absurd belief that you cannot have a party without entertainment, alcohol and sex is not new.

Her husband had only been dead for three months. What if young Karl saw her like this? These thoughts were in Beethoven's mind. Days later the Court found in favour of Beethoven being the sole guardian of Karl because of the mother's reputation. Beethoven arranged for him to have the best education and to make him a man of culture. But it did not work. In 1818 Johanna brought a lawsuit against Beethoven to have the custody of her son stating that Beethoven was unfit, not the least because of his deafness. She lost the case although her arguments were valid. In December, Karl ran away. He was so unhappy and got up to dreadful misdemeanours. Court cases came and went and by 1825 Beethoven had persuaded Karl to go to university but he preferred the army and girls. Tension increased. On 30 July 1826 Karl tried to shoot himself. It devastated Beethoven who now agreed that Karl could join the army.

The final stage of Beethoven's life was marked by a new trend in his music. His final string quartets became introspective and lacking in vigour. It could be called mellowing or that he had become lazy or found that inspiration was lacking. There were more subdued and lacking in contrast and generally, without any real lively music of which to speak. Many people refer to these quartets as supreme masterpieces. The same is said of the late piano sonatas particularly the Hammerklavier, Opus 106, which is very long and predominantly slow. The Sonata in A flat Opus 110, is also restrained and the Sonata in C minor, Opus 111, has a magnificent full-blooded opening movement but the long finale is a set of variations often slow. For the perceptive musician, one variation is clearly jazz almost an hundred years before that word became known

The Symphony no. 9 in D minor, Opus 125, known as The Choral, was premiered in May 1824. It is a big work and the finale is scored for solo soprano, contralto, tenor and bass and sets Schiller's Ode to Joy. Again I have to say that the writing for the voice leaves much to be desired and I agree with Stravinsky that this movement, despite its many glorious moments, does not work. The discipline of form and cohesion noted in so many of Beethoven's works has gone. The opening movement is impressive, the scherzo is stunning and the slow movement has many sublime moments. The finale does not seem to belong to the rest of the piece. However, I have heard some convincing performances of this work in which I forgot any weaknesses.

He had and still has his critics. Britten poured scorn on Beethoven and Elgar said all that Beethoven wrote was shit!

The Missa Solemnis shows the tiredness of both the late piano sonatas and the late quartets and yet it is rather special. Beethoven had trouble writing this. It was scheduled for the enthronement of Cardinal Rudolph as Archbishop of Olmutz at Cologne Cathedral. The event was brought forward by two months and Beethoven's Mass was not ready. Strangely Beethoven regarded this work highly. As in the conclusion of the Ninth Symphony, the Mass is full of hope quite contrary to how Beethoven was physically and mentally.

Beethoven was spent.

He died of dropsy around six in the evening on Monday March 26th, 1827. The funeral took place on the 29th. A multitude turned out for this occasion. The pall bearers included Hummel and Gyrowetz and two of the torch bearers were Czerny and Schubert. Over 200 carriages made their way to St Stephen's Cathedral.

And so the greatest German composer (or was he Dutch?) was no more.

Keep your eyes on him; some day he will give the world something to talk about.

He is the greatest of us all.

Let me set out below many quotes made about Beethoven made by musicians and those who appreciate good music.

Unlike any other composer, he writes life-changing music.

He is the only composer that can blow the door off its hinges and put it back again!

The first great composer for the piano and the next great composer for the piano was Liszt.

The composer who is so good he leaves you speechless.

If you do not love Beethoven, you do not love life.

I did not believe in God, but listening to Beethoven has changed my mind!

The best composer ever... wonderful music, emotional and full of passion

Why is his music so brilliant?

His music is perfection.

The best music of Beethoven is because of his Christian faith. Atheism is a contagious mental disorder.

His music is beyond greatness, beyond praise.

I am not a religious person but Beethoven's sublime music must be inspired by God. A mere mortal could not write this splendid music on his own!

He is the only composer of which the word genius applies!

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