

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827) was born in Bonn, Electoral seat of Cologne, and grew up in court surroundings. At the time of Ludwig's birth his father, Johann van Beethoven (c. 1740 - 92), was a tenor at the Electoral court, and his grandfather, Ludwig (Louis) van Beethoven (1712 - 73), was Kapellmeister there. Ludwig was the second of Johann's seven children, only three of whom survived infancy; his younger brothers, Kaspar Anton Karl (1774 - 1815) and Nikolaus Johann (1776 - 1848), played important roles in Ludwig's life.



When Ludwig was very young, his father taught him to play piano and violin; after the age of eight, Ludwig received organ lessons from various local organists and a relative taught him viola and violin. Beethoven had no formal education beyond elementary school; in later life, though he attained a high level of literacy through self-education, he continually experienced difficulties with spelling, punctuation, and mathematics. In 1779 Christian G. Neefe (1748 - 98) was employed at court as musical director of a theatrical troupe; soon, he became court organist. From him Beethoven received music lessons - organ, counterpoint, and composition - and learned Bach's *Das wohltemperirte Klavier*. At that time Beethoven's hands were still small and his fingers stubby, but he was determined and mastered the preludes and fugues. By 1782 he was sufficiently proficient to be Neefe's assistance and to serve as deputy organist when Neefe was away from court. In 1783, Neefe hired Ludwig as orchestral harpsichordist at court, a responsible position that exposed him to all musical genres and the variety of styles than current.

By 1782, Beethoven was composing music deemed worthy of publication, though his early works were issued without opus number (WoO): [9] Variations on a March by Dressler (1782), and three piano sonatas dedicated to Elector Maximilian Friedrich (1783). There survives only the solo part (with orchestral cues) of an unpublished piano concerto in Eb written in 1784.

At age 30, Beethoven was an attractive man, dark complexioned, with dark brown deep-set eyes and black hair. Though he was not tall, he was stocky of build and of lofty bearing. There was about his countenance a look of determination. He had tremendous vitality, and his energy was seemingly boundless. His disposition was that of an autocrat. At times domineering, self-willed, and quick to anger, he was equally quick to remorse, to self-incrimination for hurts he caused others, and he could be wonderfully kind. Visible in his character are traces of self-sufficiency and arrogance. His pride is apparent in his personal life in his decision to avoid society rather than disclose his increasing deafness, and in his career in his desire to present to the world as his Op. 1 his three Piano Trios (1795), though he had composed and published some excellent music earlier. The sketchbooks in which he jotted down and revised his musical ideas - a practice acquired from Haydn - provide a record of his creativity and work methods, document his constant striving for perfection of his musical ideas, and indicate also his desire for continual self-improvement.

Beethoven was raised a Catholic but seems to have cared little for the highly formalized aspects of that religion. That he envisioned God as being very personal is evidenced by papers found among his estate. He was not a pantheist, though he perceived God in nature and in everything in the world about him. Beethoven loved the out-of-doors; he enjoyed taking long walks in the countryside (and took a sketchbook with him).

Usually, he spent the summer months in small villages rather than in Vienna. In many respects, Beethoven was a representative of the Enlightenment. His delight in nature, his interest in the brotherhood of man, his belief in a personal God, all found places in his music - and all concur with Enlightenment thinking.

In later life, deafness and serious illnesses wrought changes in Beethoven's character and disposition. His hair greyed, his complexion became florid, and often his appearance was unkempt. In direct contrast with his lack of concern for his personal appearance and the cluttered state of his lodgings is the high regard he maintained for himself as musician and composer and for his compositions. His esthetic doctrine was the same as that of poet Johann Schiller (1759 - 1805) - that is the moral obligation of a work of art to uplift and ennoble an audience.

BEETHOVEN'S MUSIC IN GENERAL

Grouped according to genre, Beethoven's music includes the following completed works: nine symphonies, plus the so-called Battle Symphony, Wellington's Victory; two independent orchestral concert overtures (e.g., Coriolan Overture, inspired by but never performed with Collin's tragedy Coriolon); incidental music for six dramatic presentations, including Egmont and Die Ruinen von Athen (The Ruins of Athens); two ballets, the most significant being Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus (The Creatures of Prometheus); the opera Fidelio; two Masses (in C and in D); the oratorio Christus am Olberge (Christ on the Mount of Olives); the Fantasia ("Choral Fantasy"; piano, vcs., orch.); a violin concerto, five piano concerti, and a triple concerto (piano, violin, cello, and orch.); nine piano trios; thirty-two large sonatas for piano; ten sonatas for violin and piano and five for cello and piano; at least twenty sets of variations for solo piano; two Romances for violin and orchestra; and 166 string quartets plus the Gross Fuge (Grand Fugue) in Bb. In addition, he wrote many Lieder and other songs, arias, scenas, several pieces for the wind band, short piano pieces, almost two hundred arrangements of folk songs with piano trio accompaniment, and numerous pieces of miscellaneous types.

Beethoven's personality and his beliefs are inherent in his music. His boundless energy is found in driving rhythms, in pressing fugues (Op. 59, No. 3, mvt. 4), in the quiet murmuring of a babbling brook (Symphony No. 6, mvt. 2), and in robust marches that serve also to provide relief from tension, to change the mood, or to engender humor (Symphonies Nos. 3 and 9).

He expressed humor in a variety of other ways, of which the following are but a few: the delayed entrance of an instrument (timpani, in Symphony No. 9, mvt. 2); pitch limitations imposed on an instrument (bassoon's "do" and "sol" in Symphony No. 6, mvt. 3); general pauses that interrupt the rhythmic flow (Symphony No. 5, mvt. 1, recapitulation). The various moods that colored Beethoven's disposition - even his abrupt shifts between

contrasting moods - are present in his music: tenderness, joy exuberance, sadness, melancholy, and the serenity and peace that he found while walking down a country lane.

Many of Beethoven's themes are constructed from small motives. Motivic generation of thematic material and motivic development figure prominently in his style; he subjected motives to incredible degrees of modification. Frequently, he used one or more fortissimo or sforzando chords (as in the Eroica) or a chromatically rising or falling passage coupled with a crescendo to herald a theme's arrival (e.g., Op. 18, No. 3, mvt. 4, mm. 53 - 56). Often, in sonata-form movements of piano sonatas, he presented the first theme piano but recapitulated it forte (e.g., Op. 2, No. 1, mvt. 1, mm. 1 - 2, mm. 101 - 02). Habitually, he directed attention to a new theme by prefacing it with a rest (as did Mozart) or a diametrically opposed dynamic (e.g., sf or ff prior to pp entrance of theme). General pauses served also to effect unexpected modulations to remote keys.

When composing, Beethoven disregarded the comfort and convenience of the instrumentalist. He considered only the pitches, timbres, and effect he desired, and it mattered not at all to him whether the production of a passage was difficult or awkward. Probably, bass players and cellists suffered most because of this. See, for example, Serenade, Op. 8, mvt. 5, mm. 52 - 55, cello part; or, Symphony No. 5, mvt. 3, Trio, bass part. Beethoven's difficult orchestral string bass parts probably stem from his acquaintance with Domenico Dragonetti (1763 - 1846), virtuoso string bass player, and no doubt some of the horn parts were written with the talents of virtuoso Giovanni Punto (Jan Stich; 1746 - 1803) in mind.

Moreover, Beethoven was an innovator. In some of his youthful works, written in Bonn, he was already experimenting. After he mastered Classical forms and daring, his modulations bolder. He used augmented sixth chords (the so-called German, Italian, French, and mixed sixths) effectively. Sudden modulations, especially to keys a third above or below the tonic - a striking departure from the modulations expected in that era - became a lifelong feature of his style. Nor was he more cautious where form was concerned. To Beethoven, form was not a mold into which music was to be poured - his music could not be so confined. Rather, form was an elastic band, expandable at any point, capable of containing all that needed to be expressed without ever becoming so distorted that its identity was lost or so extended that it snapped. Beethoven never shattered form; he stretched it. Through his experiments with form, modulations, developmental processes, and instrumentation, music's horizons broadened considerably. Frequently, his compositions puzzled his contemporaries and drew their critical comment. Yet, his music influenced other composers, not only those of his own time, but many in later generations as well.