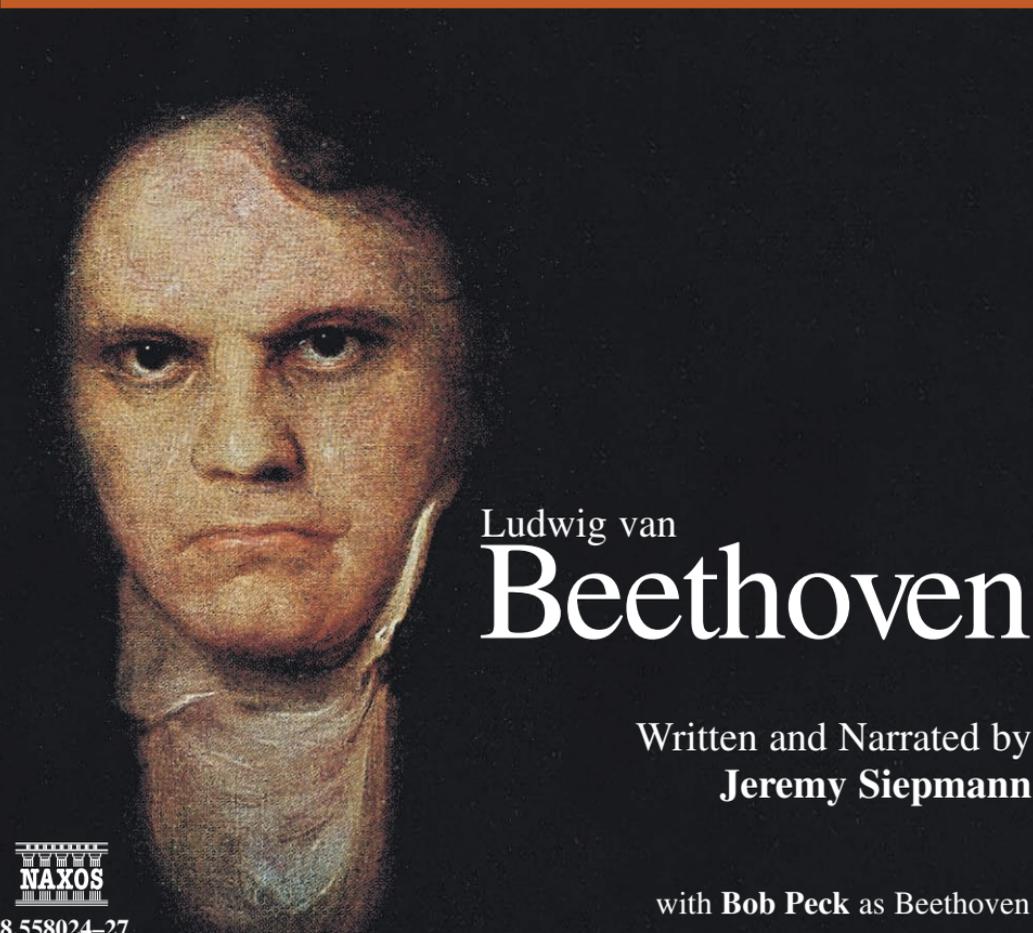


L I F E   A N D   W O R K S



Ludwig van  
**Beethoven**

Written and Narrated by  
**Jeremy Siepmann**

with **Bob Peck** as Beethoven



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## Preface

If music is ‘about’ anything, it’s about life. No other medium can so quickly or more comprehensively lay bare the very soul of those who make or compose it. Biographies confined to the limitations of text are therefore at a serious disadvantage when it comes to the lives of composers. Only by combining verbal language with the music itself can one hope to achieve a fully rounded portrait. In the present series, the words of composers and their contemporaries are brought to life by distinguished actors in a narrative liberally spiced with musical illustrations.

The substantial booklet contains an assessment of the composer in relation to his era, an overview of his major works and their significance, a Graded Listening Plan, a summary of recommended books, a gallery of biographical entries on the most significant figures in his life and times, and a calendar of his life showing parallel developments in the arts, politics, philosophies, sciences and social developments of the day.

**Jeremy Siepmann**

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# Ludwig van Beethoven

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## Cast

Jeremy Siepmann – Narrator

Bob Peck – Beethoven

Other parts read by Neville Jason, David Timson, Elaine Claxton and Karen Archer

## Jeremy Siepmann

Though long resident in England, Jeremy Siepmann was born and formally educated in the United States. Having completed his studies at the Mannes College of Music in New York, he moved to London at the suggestion of Sir Malcolm Sargent in 1964. After several years as a freelance lecturer he was invited to join the staff of London University. For most of the last 20 years he has confined his teaching activity to the piano, his pupils including pianists of worldwide repute.

As a writer he has contributed articles, reviews and interviews to numerous journals and reference works (including *New Statesman*, *The Musical Times*, *Gramophone*, *BBC Music Magazine*, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*), some of them being reprinted in book form (Oxford University Press, Robson Books). His books include a widely acclaimed biography of Chopin (*The Reluctant Romantic*, Gollancz/Northeastern University Press, 1995), two volumes on the history and literature of the piano, and a biography of Brahms (Everyman/EMI, 1997). In December 1997 he was appointed editor of *Piano* magazine.

His career as a broadcaster began in New York in 1963 with an East Coast radio series on the life and work of Mozart, described by Alistair Cooke as ‘the best music program on American radio’. On the strength of this, improbably, he was hired by the BBC as a humorist, in which capacity he furnished weekly satirical items on various aspects of American life.

After a long break he returned to broadcasting in 1977, since when he has devised, written and presented more than 1,000 programmes for the BBC, including the international-award-winning series ‘The Elements of Music’. In 1988 he was appointed Head of Music at the BBC World Service, broadcasting to an estimated audience of 135 million. He left the Corporation in Spring 1994 to form his own independent production company.

**Bob Peck**

Bob Peck was a highly versatile actor in the British tradition. He played many major classical roles at the Royal Shakespeare Company, including Macbeth, Lear and Iago as well as taking leading parts in new plays, including Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. At the same time, he was active in films and was seen extensively on television winning the 1985 BAFTA award for Best Actor and the BAMF Comedy Award in 1998. He died in 1999. This recording of *Beethoven's Life and Works* was one of his last performances.

**Neville Jason**

Neville Jason trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, where he was awarded the Diction Prize by Sir John Gielgud. He is a familiar voice on BBC Radio. For Naxos AudioBooks he has abridged and recorded Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in 12 volumes.

**David Timson**

David Timson trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, as both actor and singer. He has performed in modern and classic plays in the UK and abroad, and is a leading voice actor on radio and audiobook. For Naxos AudioBooks he has recorded volumes of Sherlock Holmes stories, and has directed *Twelfth Night* in which he also plays Feste.

**Elaine Claxton**

Elaine Claxton has worked extensively in UK theatre, including London's Royal National Theatre. She has twice been a member of the BBC Radio Company, during which time she participated in over 200 broadcasts.



### **Karen Archer**

Karen Archer has worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company in *Nicholas Nickleby* and as Mrs Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, as well as across the UK in plays such as *Ghosts*, *She Stoops to Conquer* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Her television appearances include *The Chief*, *Ruth Rendell Mysteries*, *Casualty* and *Chancer* and she has been seen in the films *The Secret Garden* and *Forever Young*.



# Historical Background: The Eighteenth Century 1

## Overview

The eighteenth century has rightly been called ‘the century of revolutions’ (though the nineteenth can lay equal claim to the title), but the most lasting of these, on the whole, were agricultural, industrial and scientific, not military or political. Human knowledge expanded to an unprecedented degree, with effects on daily life which would eventually eclipse the transient decisions of governments and rulers. Wars, as ever, proliferated, with five in particular having the most lasting impact: the Wars of the Spanish and Austrian Succession, the Seven Years War and the American and French Revolutions. Despite the gathering groundswell of democracy, absolute monarchies continued to flourish in most parts of the world. Prussia and Russia (the latter, ironically, under the Prussian-born Catherine the Great) became world powers, French power diminished under the increasingly inept rule of Louis XV and Louis XVI, the British Empire expanded, most dramatically in India, and America became a major player on the international political stage. More important, however, than any armed insurrection or expansionist military campaign was the emergence of an increasingly powerful and independent middle class. More than any previous century, the eighteenth was a century of commerce.

World trade was an immediate beneficiary of the improvements in transport and communications which flowed from the scientific and technological advances then taking place

on almost every front. By the mid-century, raw materials were being imported from countries all over the world, often to the social and economic disadvantage of the exporting nations. Europe, on the other hand, profited hugely, exporting a wide range of goods and spawning a large quantity of financial institutions – banks, stock exchanges, insurance companies, and so on. Cheques were increasingly used in place of cash, and the proliferation of paper money increased the amounts a pedestrian could easily carry. For the newly well-to-do, shopping became a pastime as well as a business.

### **Science and Technology**

The eighteenth century was a veritable festival of exploration and discovery, in medicine, mechanics, physics, chemistry and many other fields, including weaponry. Here, as elsewhere, ingenuity sometimes outstripped practicality, as in the ill-fated, one-man, hand-cranked Turtle submarine launched into the depths off the east coast of America in 1755. More useful was Harrison's marine chronometer of 1735, which enabled sailors to pinpoint their exact position at sea; more lethal were Wilkinson's precision-boring cannon of 1774 and Bushnell's invention of the torpedo in 1777. On more peaceable fronts, the period saw the discovery and first harnessing of electricity, most famously by Benjamin Franklin, inventor of the lightning conductor, and the Italian Alessandro Volta, who invented the electrical battery and whose surname, minus the 'a', has long since become a household word. Another similarly honoured was James Watt, whose improvement of Newcomen's steam engine in 1764 precipitated the Industrial Revolution (the term 'watt', incidentally, refers to a unit of power rather than to anything exclusively electrical). Other notable inventions include Chappe's telegraph (a mechanical form of semaphore used to relay coded messages over long distances) and the hydraulic press.

Among many significant medical advances which substantially improved the quality of life, the most important was the discovery of a vaccine against smallpox – but not before one epidemic killed 14,000 people in Paris alone. An unforeseen side effect of middle-class affluence and

improved standards of public and personal hygiene was an increase in population which threatened to outstrip the food supply. Although many did indeed starve, the era saw more and greater changes in agricultural methods than had occurred for many centuries. Farming became a major industry as the demand for food and wool increased. But of all eighteenth-century revolutions, none had more far-reaching consequences than the Industrial Revolution.

Originating in Britain at around the time of Beethoven's birth in 1770, it owed its initial impetus to the invention of the steam engine, first used as a means of draining mines but rapidly put to use in factories. With the unprecedented proliferation of new machinery which vastly increased the speed and output of manufacturing, England became known as 'the workshop of the world', and prospered accordingly. The revolution soon spread to other countries, shifting the balance of power from the aristocratic landowner to the industrial capitalist and creating a large urban (and increasingly vocal) working class.

### **Political Movements**

Yet despite a burgeoning, increasingly prosperous middle class, which made much of 'good manners' and the trappings of gentility, the great majority of the population, in Europe as elsewhere, continued to live in poverty, suffer ill health and die early. Education for the poor was minimal, illiteracy and crime were rife, child labour commonplace and political representation generally non-existent. In the Old World and the New, slavery continued unchecked, although an increasing number of Europeans, particularly in Britain, found the practice repugnant.

Throughout Europe, indeed in many parts of the world, the traditional ruling classes came increasingly under threat. Of the numerous insurrections which erupted in the eighteenth century, the first of world significance was the American Revolution (1776–1783), from which emerged the newly independent United States, a country of vast resources whose political creed, resoundingly based on libertarian principles and clearly set out in its Declaration of Independence and formal Constitution, served as a beacon to oppressed minorities elsewhere, and undoubtedly

emboldened the disaffected in France, whose own revolution, initiated by the storming of the Bastille in July 1789 and lasting effectively until Napoleon's seizure of power ten years later, was to be the bloodiest, and in some ways the most counter-productive, in history. In 1793 alone, during the infamous Reign of Terror, more than 18,000 people were publicly beheaded. In the meantime, the revolutionary government (in reality a sequence of them) was simultaneously at war with most of Europe, which justifiably feared that the revolution might spread beyond French borders.

### **Religion**

As ever, religion remained both inspirational and contentious. Though there were some signs of increased tolerance in certain quarters – as in England, which saw the founding of Methodism by John Wesley in the 1730s and of the Shaker sect in 1772, and, rather surprisingly, in Russia, where Catherine the Great granted freedom of worship in 1766 – religious bigotry continued to flourish, particularly in the relations of Protestants and Roman Catholics. 1731 saw the expulsion of 20,000 Protestants from Salzburg (most of whom emigrated to America), and the Jacobite rising in the mid 1740s, like the viciously anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780, demonstrated the fragile limits of religious tolerance in Britain. Nor was the appeal in 1781 by the German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (grandfather of Felix) for better treatment of the Jews either the first or the last. While not as widespread as in the previous century, superstition was still rife amongst the less educated classes throughout the western world.

### **Ideas**

The eighteenth century, following on from the rationalist trends of the previous century, was the age of the Enlightenment, one of the richest eras in the history of western philosophy. Thinkers in every sphere of endeavour, influenced by the quickening flood of scientific discovery, placed ever greater faith in reason as the gateway to truth and natural justice. Highly critical of the status

quo and hostile to religion, which they saw as enslaving humanity with the chains of superstition, their writings reached a wide audience and contributed directly to the underlying ideals of the American and French Revolutions. Though based mainly in France, where its principal proponents were Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau, the movement attracted other important thinkers, most notably the Scots David Hume and Adam Smith, the American Thomas Paine and the Germans Immanuel Kant and Gotthold Lessing. Voltaire and Rousseau, in particular, used satire as a potent political weapon, and Diderot presided over one of the greatest works of scholarship ever produced, the 28-volume *Encyclopédie*, completed in 1776 and including 17 volumes of text and 11 of illustrations. Rousseau's *Discourses on the Origins of Inequality* (1754) pilloried the decadent effects of civilization and proclaimed the superiority of the 'noble savage'. His *Social Contract* of 1762 emphasized the rights of people over government and exhorted people everywhere to overthrow all governments not representing the genuine will of the population. Both books are among the most influential ever written. Adam Smith was an economist whose great work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) took the revolutionary step of defining wealth in terms of labour, and advocating individual enterprise and free trade as essentials of a just society. Hume's best-known philosophical work, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), is an attack on traditional metaphysics and suggests that all true knowledge resides in personal experience. Kant, on the other hand, argued that right action cannot be based on feelings, inclinations or mere experience but only on a law given by reason, the so-called 'categorical imperative'. The subject of Thomas Paine's famous book *The Rights of Man* is self-explanatory.

### **The Arts**

The eighteenth century saw the birth and early development of the modern novel with the works of Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*) and Samuel Richardson (*Pamela*, *Clarissa*). Above all, however, it was a century of great poets who effectively created the Romantic movement which was to find its musical manifestation in the nineteenth century. Pre-

eminent amongst them were the Germans Goethe and Schiller, closely followed by the Britons Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge. But it was also the century of the great philosopher-satirists, of whom the greatest were Voltaire (*Candide*), Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see above, under Ideas). Satire was also conspicuous in the realm of painting, as in the work of William Hogarth (*The Rake's Progress*). The greater painters and sculptors were among the finest portraitists who ever lived: David, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Chardin (who prophetically turned his attentions away from the upper classes and painted the lower bourgeoisie and working classes), Goya (his grim 'romantic' visions came in the next century) and Houdon, whose sculptures of Voltaire, Jefferson and Washington are almost eerily lifelike. Amongst the greatest scholars and men of letters was Samuel Johnson, whose monumental *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was the first ever compiled. In the realm of dance, the eighteenth century saw the rise of modern ballet, centred, like so much else, in France. The most influential figures were the ballerina Marie-Anne Camargo, who in 1720 took the revolutionary step of shortening the traditional flowing, court-style dresses to reveal the feet and legs, the choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre (*Les Petits riens*) and the composer Jean-Philippe Rameau.

## Architecture

Except in the upper reaches of society, domestic architecture in eighteenth-century Europe changed relatively little. That of public buildings and the dwellings of the well-to-do changed dramatically, on both sides of the Atlantic. The grandiose and ornate gestures of the Baroque era gave way to simpler styles, many of them strongly influenced by the graceful majesty of classical Greek and Roman designs. Famous examples are the White House and Capitol building of Washington D.C., 'Monticello', Thomas Jefferson's home in Virginia (designed by himself) and the Royal Crescent at Bath in England. With the proliferation of new cities spawned by the Industrial Revolution and the steady expansion of the United States, architects and town planners turned their attentions to the design not only of buildings but of towns and cities themselves. The

gridiron pattern of Manhattan Island in New York is the fruit of just such planning, and was to be duplicated in many American cities. Here the regularity and symmetry of the neo-classical approach had a thoroughly practical purpose: with this scheme, cities could be indefinitely extended in any direction. A striking feature of industrial architecture, in particular, was the use of new materials such as cast-iron.

## Music

The eighteenth century saw the culmination of the Baroque in the great works of Bach and Handel, and the finest flowering of the Classical era which succeeded it. Domenico Scarlatti was the exact contemporary of Bach and Handel but such was the astounding originality and exotic nature of the keyboard sonatas which have kept his name alive that he stands largely outside mainstream trends and developments. In some respects, his most important music is closer in spirit and style to the Romantics of the nineteenth century than to anything else written in his own time. If the defining features of the Baroque style (or to be truer to reality, the Baroque family of styles) was a combination of grandiosity and polyphony (counterpoint; see Glossary) with a high degree of ornamentation, the Classical era represents an era whose relative simplicity of harmony, texture and style was entirely in keeping with the ascent of the middle-class and the progressive weakening of the aristocracy. The learned, long-lined contrapuntal weaves of the Baroque gave way to the more straightforward texture of melody and accompaniment, often simple broken chords in a pattern known as the Alberti bass (see Glossary), and the basic harmonic vocabulary became much simplified. Most music written in the Classical era (roughly 1750–1820) is based on an economical framework of four or five basic chords (triads; see Glossary) and draws its material from two or three relatively short, self-contained melodic ‘themes’, frequently of a simple, folk-like character. Not only themes but phrases tend to become shorter and more regular than in most Baroque music. Large-scale structures, too, become generally clearer and more symmetrical, showing clear analogies with the classical architecture of the ancient Greeks and

Romans. Along with a somewhat ritualised approach to form comes a more formal, more ‘objective’ approach to the expression of emotion. It’s often easier to describe the contour of a classical theme than it is to associate it with a particular mood. The prevailing virtues are symmetry, order, refinement and grace. The most significant contribution of the classical era to the history of music is the crystallization of Sonata Form (see Glossary), brought to its highest peak by Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. Virtually all of the great works of the classical era are based on it. The principal genres of the period – sonata, string quartet, concerto and symphony – are all, in fact, sonatas, differing only in the size and character of the chosen instrumental medium.

Standing largely apart from this development is the parallel evolution of opera, dominated in the first half of the century by Handel and Rameau and in the latter by Mozart and Gluck (1714–87). Because he confined himself for the most part to opera, Gluck’s name tends to get left out when people refer loosely to the Classical era, but he was one of the giants. His greatness lies in the quality of his music but his long-term significance derives from his radical reforms, which did much to simplify and purify an art which had become overladen with irrelevant conventions, complicated by labyrinthine love plots and disfigured by an excessive attention to virtuosity for its own sake. He derived his plots from classical Greek mythology (*Orfeo ed Euridice*, *Iphigénie en Aulide*, *Armide* etc.), suited the music to the emotional and dramatic requirements of his libretto, softened the distinction between recitative and aria [see Glossary], paid scrupulous attention to subtleties of character development and elevated the role of the chorus (another nod to the classical Greeks). Mozart, although his operas (*Don Giovanni*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, *The Magic Flute* etc.) are perhaps the greatest ever written, was not a reformer.

## Historical Background: The Nineteenth Century 2

### Overview

The nineteenth century, especially in Europe and North America, was an era of unprecedented change, peppered, inevitably, with wars and revolutions of almost every kind and at every level of society. The continuing advance of the Industrial Revolution, while far from abolishing poverty, brought new wealth to an ever-expanding middle class, factories proliferated throughout Europe, soon exceeding the supply of indigenous raw materials and thereby intensifying the impulse towards colonization. The British Empire increased its dominions dramatically, Africa was carved up by Britain and other European colonists, and despite increasing unease, the slave trade continued, though its days were numbered. Alarmed by European expansionism, China and Japan attempted to shut out the West altogether. But empire-building went on apace within Europe itself, never more dramatically than during the Napoleonic Wars (1799–1815), which had the incidental effect of igniting in countries from Italy to Russia a fervent nationalism which was to become a running feature of the century as a whole.

Science and technology, as in the previous century, had expanded human knowledge to an unprecedented degree. When Joseph Lalande published his catalogue of 47,390 stars in 1801, he heralded a century of astronomical discovery, both literal and figurative.

Agriculture, easily sidelined by the achievements of the Industrial Revolution, experienced

revolutions of its own, with breeding experiments leading to ever bigger crops and fatter animals. Cyrus McCormick invented his reaping machine in America, heralding a new age of mechanized harvesting.

### **Ideas**

As might be expected in a time of such ferment, the century was rich in philosophers, though the ideas which had, and continue to have, the most impact came from other quarters. Philosophically, the highground was held by the Germans, much as the French had held it in the previous century. The great names of the Beethoven era included Hegel (1770–1831) and Schopenhauer, (1788–1860), both of whom were much concerned with music in one way or another. Hegel argued that consciousness and the world of external objects were inseparable aspects of a single whole, and that truth is discoverable only through a dialectic process of contradiction and resolution – a thoroughly rationalist idea with clear parallels in the concept of sonata form [see Glossary]. Schopenhauer took a more pessimistic view (and one more in keeping with the preoccupations of the Romantics), in which the irrational will is seen as the governing principle of our perception, dominated by an endless cycle of desire and frustration from which the only escape is aesthetic contemplation. His thinking was to have a powerful effect on both Wagner and Nietzsche, who rejected established concepts of Christian morality, Nietzsche proclaiming that ‘God is dead’ and postulating the ideal of the *Übermensch*, or ‘Superman’, who would impose his self-created will on the weak and the worthless – a view fully in keeping with the gargantuan nature of the romantic ego, with its roots in the controlling powers of the Industrial Revolution and the spate of scientific discoveries which granted Man an ever greater mastery of his environment.

### **The Arts**

In the realm of literature it was the century of the novel, pioneered in England by Jane Austen and

Sir Walter Scott, and in Germany by Goethe, Jean-Paul Richter and the fantastical E.T.A. Hoffmann (whose critical writings on Beethoven rank with the most perceptive and influential ever written).

### **Architecture**

Nineteenth century architecture in Europe and America reflected both the Romantic obsession with the past and the industrialists' concerns with practicality and economy. Public buildings tended for most of the century toward an ever more massive grandiosity, drawing on a wide variety of styles ranging from the distant to the recent past, often within a single building. A famous example is the Palace of Westminster (better known as the Houses of Parliament) in London.

### **Music**

Never has an art known greater changes in so relatively short a time than music in the nineteenth century. When the century began, Beethoven was only 30, Schubert only three and Haydn (68) was still at the height of his powers. When it ended, Debussy's revolutionary *Prélude a l'Après-midi d'un Faune*, often cited, even today, as 'the beginning of modern music', was already seven years old, and Schönberg (26), Ives (also 26), Bartók (19) and Stravinsky (18) were all fully active. In between, the end of the Classical era and the dawning of Romanticism could be seen in the maturest works of Beethoven and Schubert (whose symphonies, sonatas and chamber music reached previously undreamt-of proportions and expanded classical forms to their outermost limits), harmony underwent unprecedented transformations, including the progressive dissolution of traditional tonality by Liszt, Wagner, Debussy, Mahler and Ives [for more on tonality see Glossary], the piano attained its full maturity (its evolution significantly dominated by the influence of Beethoven and Liszt) and became the world's most popular and commercially successful instrument, the art of orchestration became a front-line issue, thanks in no small part

to Beethoven's symphonies, overtures and concertos. There was a major shift from the relative 'objectivity' of the Classical era to the intensely emotional and formally self-generating outpourings of the Romantics. Illustrative 'programme' music achieved a popularity never approached before or since and the cult of virtuosity became a dominant feature. The specialist (i.e. non-composing) performer became the rule rather than the exception (such figures were scarcely to be found in the previous century), and musical schools and conservatories became commonplace. Despite this, the discipline of counterpoint, hitherto amongst the most highly prized of musical attributes, fell into widespread disuse, though it plays an important part in Beethoven's music, as it was later to do in that of Liszt, Wagner, Brahms and Richard Strauss. In the works of Schubert, Lanner, Weber and the Strauss family, the waltz became the most popular form of the century. Forms in general polarized, from the millions of piano 'miniatures' and 'character pieces' (pioneered by Beethoven in his *Bagatelles* and the famous *Für Elise*), to the gargantuan music dramas of Wagner, the sprawling symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler, and the extravagantly coloured symphonic works of Richard Strauss – all of which, in one way or another, were composed in the shadow of Beethoven.

## Beethoven in his Time 3

The music of the Classical era, still in a relatively early phase at the time of Beethoven's birth in 1770, was based on preconceived notions of order, proportion and grace. Beauty and symmetry of form were objects of worship in themselves and combined to create a Utopian image, an idealisation of universal experience. In the Romantic Age, thanks in no small part to Beethoven's truly epoch-making influence, this was largely replaced by a cult of individual expression, the crystallisation of the experience of the moment, the unfettered confession of powerful emotions and primal urges, the glorification of sensuality, a flirtation with the supernatural, an emphasis on spontaneity and improvisation and the cultivation of extremes – emotional, sensual, spiritual, and structural. Where a near-reverence for symmetry had characterised the classical era, romanticism delighted in asymmetry. Form was no longer seen as a receptacle but as a by-product of emotion, to be generated from within. While the great romantic painters covered their canvases with grandiose landscapes, the great romantic composers, starting with Beethoven and Weber (but anticipated by Haydn in his oratorio *The Seasons*), attempted similar representations in sound. Music took on an illustrative function to a degree never previously attempted, although 'programme music' (music, in effect, which tells a story) had been around in one way or another almost as long as music itself. In its cultivation and transformations of folk music (or that which was mistakenly perceived as folk music) it became, too, an agent of nationalism, one of the most

powerful engines of the romantic era. Although this played a relatively minor part in Beethoven's output, we find it reflected in some of the late works by his adoption of German rather than the traditional Italian terminology (including his brief flirtation with the German word 'Hammerklavier' as a substitute for the Italian 'pianoforte'), and his irrational preference for Mozart's German operas – most notably *Die Zauberflöte* ('The Magic Flute') – as against his Italian ones (*Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* etc.).

A further feature of the romantic imagination was a taste for extravagance. And here, particularly where instrumental music is concerned, Beethoven was a trend-setter. His 'Eroica', 'Pastoral' and 'Choral' symphonies expanded the scope and size of the symphony to hitherto unimagined degrees (among them the inclusion of vocal soloists and chorus in a symphonic work), and his great 'Hammerklavier' Sonata was twice as long (and twice as profound) as any typical classical sonata by Mozart or Haydn.

The ideals and consequences of the French Revolution were a source of alarm to the rulers of the crumbling Holy Roman Empire. As a consequence, Austria, with Vienna as its capital, became a bastion against French imperialism, and an efficient police state in which liberalism, both political and philosophical, was ruthlessly suppressed. But the Viennese, as Beethoven early perceived, were not natural revolutionaries. Rather, they were noted for their political apathy and an almost decadent taste for pleasure. More troublesome to them than their homegrown overlords were the two occupations by the French in 1805 and 1809, the second of which, in particular, brought considerable hardship to the city in the form of monetary crises, serious food shortages and a fleeing population, while Austria as a whole suffered serious political and territorial setbacks. With the final defeat of Napoleon in 1814, however, Austria recouped many of her losses, and during the Peace Congress of 1814–15 became the principal focal point of European diplomatic, commercial and cultural activity. It was during this period, the capital now awash with visiting dignitaries and their entourages, that Beethoven's *Fidelio* was mounted 21 times with consistent success. But while the festivities associated with the Congress marked a return to gaiety, they could

also be seen as a wake for an age whose time was over. Increasingly, throughout Europe, bankers and businessmen replaced the nobility and landed aristocracy as the principal arbiters of taste and culture. To an altogether new extent, music passed out of the palaces and into the marketplace. Composers were decreasingly dependent on aristocratic patronage. They now relied for their livelihood on the sales of their work, or, more commonly, on their income as teachers of the well-to-do, and those who aspired to be so. Vienna at that time (and it was not, even then, one of the larger cities) housed something in excess of six thousand piano students. Performers, ever more reliant on the fickle patronage of a fee-paying public, emerged as a specialised breed of their own. Yet in the realm of the public concert, Vienna lagged well behind London. Although orchestral concerts had been mounted there since the 1770s, it was not until 1831, four years after Beethoven's death, that it acquired its own purpose-built concert hall. Throughout his life, concerts took place either in the palaces of the declining nobility, in theatres (often privately owned and managed), or in ballrooms and other halls, none of them originally designed for music.

Inevitably, changes in social structure were accompanied by changes in taste. Especially after the hardships of the Napoleonic era, the public mood was for lightweight, escapist entertainment, most spectacularly exemplified by the new wave of lightweight Italian operas. This period marked the lowest ebb in Beethoven's fortunes as a composer, and the height of his anger and disgust at the society around him.

## **Politics**

Beethoven's relationship to the politics of his time was as individual, and sometimes as contradictory, as he was himself, and were based on a deep-rooted sense of natural justice, a powerful if not very precisely defined belief in a moral elite, and a curiously naive association of virtue with hard work and the overcoming of difficulties. 'What is difficult is also beautiful, good and great,' he once wrote. In his own life he seems frequently to have created difficulties for their own sake – or at any rate as a prerequisite of moral nobility. In 1816, he wrote in his journal, 'The

chief characteristic of a distinguished man: endurance in adverse and harsh circumstances.’ Nobility was a matter of moral virtue, not heredity, but it did constitute an elite and only those who had achieved it were fit to rule. That rulers were both necessary and desirable Beethoven never doubted, and he could never rid himself entirely of his admiration for Napoleon. While he championed the rights of humanity and saw it as a duty to give succour to the needy and the disadvantaged, he was by no means an apologist for the tenets of the French Revolution (the dominant political fact of European life in his youth). He publicly deplored the repressive actions of the Habsburg rulers in whose domain he had chosen to live, and admired the British for their form of parliamentary democracy, yet he was never wholly a democrat. He believed in a hierarchical, paternalist society and generally scorned the proletarian masses, declaring flatly that ‘the common citizen should be excluded from higher men.’

A striking feature of Romanticism was the cult of the hero, especially as represented in the writings and art of the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations. Given the character of his music (particularly that of his middle period) and the many entries and quotations in his journal concerning heroes and the heroic, there can be little doubt that he envisaged himself as a hero in the great Classical mould. Closely allied to the cult of the hero was the cult of the genius, which arose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in reaction against the concept of the musician as artisan rather than artist, servant rather than master (even Haydn had worn a uniform for most of his adult life, denoting his servile status, and Mozart had quite literally been kicked out of a room by an agent of his employer, the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg). The fact that the ‘genius’ in Beethoven’s case was both singular and eccentric (he had about him a suggestion of the occult, even the deranged) only added to his appeal, and served to fire his own imagination. Beethoven’s unique development as a composer was at least in part a reflection of his time. History was ripe for his emergence.

## The Major Works and their Significance 4

Beethoven transformed almost every medium he touched, and his minor works are relatively few. Even in his earliest published works, composed when he still identified strongly with the Classical movement exemplified by Mozart and Haydn, he expanded both the length and the emotional scope of received forms to an unprecedented degree. The three piano trios of Op. 1, like the three piano sonatas, Op. 2, written in 1794 and 1795 respectively, are fully a third longer than the average sonata and trio of Mozart, and almost twice as long as those of Haydn. And the great piano sonatas, in particular, require a level of virtuosity far beyond even the most difficult Haydn or Mozart sonatas (with the sole exception of Haydn's great *Sonata No. 62 in E flat*). While the average symphony by Haydn and Mozart lasts well under half an hour, Beethoven's *Third*, *Sixth* and *Ninth Symphonies* run to roughly 50 minutes in the case of the *Third* and *Sixth* and an hour and a quarter in the case of the *Ninth*. In matters of form, Beethoven moved fairly rapidly away from the established norms of the classical era, particularly the symmetrical, predetermined structures of so-called 'sonata form' (see glossary). While retaining an overall grounding in classical models, he pioneered the typically 'romantic' phenomenon of self-generating forms – forms determined by musical events rather than the other way round. The powerfully integrated structures of Beethoven's music (which generations of music lovers have sensed without any need of formal 'knowledge') derive to a large extent from the organic nature of their development. This isn't

something one needs to be aware of when listening, or indeed at all. It's quite possible that Beethoven himself was unaware of it. But the degree of thematic unity in his works is remarkable. Almost all the themes in his famous *Pathétique Sonata*, for instance, derive in one way or another from the pattern of the first four notes. The second main theme in the first movement of the *Appassionata Sonata*, is basically a variant of the first, turned upside down. And so it goes.

Few composers before Beethoven even approached the range, intensity and dramatic opposition of emotions which is evident in all of his great works, and many of his minor ones. And no composer approached his violence. It's almost true to say that there are more stabbing, slashing, pounding, rhythmically distorting accents in Beethoven's music than in the music of all his predecessors put together. Beethoven's last act in this world was to awaken from a coma in the midst of a freak, winter thunderstorm, and shake his fist at the heavens. He'd been doing the same in his music, on and off, for most of his life. Beethoven was, and very probably remains, the most dramatic composer who ever lived. He was also the first for whom the overt expression of emotion was the most consistent guiding principle of his music. Where the resolution of related contrasts was the chief (and most Utopian) principle of the classical sonata, in Beethoven the central issue, more often than not, is the resolution, or otherwise, of conflict. In his greatest tragic works, such as the turbulent and rightly nicknamed *Appassionata Sonata*, the tensions are not resolved, and Utopia doesn't get a look-in. In the serenest of his transcendent late works, as in the closing movement of his last piano sonata, the tensions are not merely resolved but eliminated altogether, leaving us in a world of spiritual purity beyond the scope of any other composer before or since.

Beethoven's mature works fall roughly into three periods, conventionally and sensibly referred to as Early (c. 1790–1803), Middle (c. 1803–1815) and Late (c. 1815–1826). Broadly speaking, the Early Period is that in which he works predominantly within the heritage of the Classical tradition, the Middle Period embraces the so-called 'heroic' decade in which he expanded and deepened the major classical forms of the sonata, the string quartet and the symphony to what

many regarded as their formal and dramatic limits, and stretched the technical demands of his instrumental works beyond the reach of all but the most accomplished amateurs, while the Late Period combines a transcendent spirituality, an increased preoccupation with counterpoint and a new emphasis on formal and thematic unity within multi-movement works. But these can only be used as generalisations, since within each period are a number of works which include the characteristics of the others – and in any case, neither art nor life is so neat.

### **Piano works**

Although Beethoven was a violinist and violist of professional calibre, the piano was his main instrument, and his works for it, especially the 32 piano sonatas, form the bedrock on which the vast bulk of the nineteenth-century repertoire was based. The great cellist and conductor Pablo Casals used to describe Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* as the Old Testament of music, and Beethoven's sonatas as the New Testament. Few would argue with him. With the sole exception of his last four years, Beethoven's piano works cover his entire life as a composer, serving as a kind of diary of the soul, and providing a record of the most adventurous and influential journey in the entire history of music.

### **The Sonatas**

It's significant that in the first three sonatas, Op. 2 (as in the three trios of Op. 1), he already adopts the four-movement plan of the Classical symphony. Significant not only because it reveals from the outset that this is a man who 'thinks big', but because he tended throughout his life to treat the piano as a surrogate orchestra. The wide spacings between the hands, the frequent use of massive, densely packed chords in the lower register, the unprecedented extremes of loud and soft, the use of silence as a major structural and dramatic device (ironically, his 'silences' often have the impact of hammer blows) – all these are characteristics which recur again and again in his piano-writing.

A perfect demonstration of this powerfully rhythmic use of silence is the slow movement of the Fourth Sonata, Op. 7 – a great work on a scale second only to the colossal *Hammerklavier Sonata* of Beethoven's last years.

The *Pathétique Sonata*, Op. 13, always among his most popular works, finds him once again drawing on symphonic models (and Haydn's symphonies in particular) in its use of a substantial slow introduction. The powerful, dramatic opening movement is the first in which Beethoven made significant alterations to the formal design of the Classical 'sonata form'. Repeatedly, at strategically placed moments, he brings back the slow introduction (or substantial, fragmentary developments of it). With its beautiful, long-spun melody, the slow movement reminds us that Beethoven the wrestler with fate was also a profoundly lyrical composer, whose big, singing tone at the piano was remarked on by everyone who heard him.

The so-called '*Funeral March*' Sonata, Op. 26, is significant on several counts. Like only one sonata before it (Mozart's in A major, K. 331), it begins not with the usual 'sonata form' movement but with a gentle, gradually intensifying set of variations. This is followed by a fiery Scherzo, which would normally be expected to come third, and this is succeeded by a fully-fledged Funeral March, complete with programmatic representations of drum-rolls and ritual gunfire. The alternately lyrical and turbulent finale is rather in the nature of a study, which evaporates at the end into thin air. No great sonata had hitherto been laid out in such an unconventional manner.

The two sonatas of Op. 27 (the second of which is the ever-popular 'Moonlight') are still less conventional. The four movements of the first (not one of which is in sonata form) are thematically linked and played without a break, a hitherto unheard-of procedure. This sonata may bring us very close to the character of Beethoven's renowned improvisations. In the 'Moonlight', the famous first movement belongs to no previously established form, though it contains elements of sonata form, the second is close to a kind of Minuet and Trio, and it's only in the stormy finale that we reach a true sonata form.

Of the three sonatas, Op. 31, the best-known is the middle one, the so-called '*Tempest*' Sonata

whose opening movement, with its returning introduction, recalls the similar device used in the *Pathétique*. The most revolutionary touches here, however, are the long pedal markings with their intentional blurring and mixing of clashing harmonies – a pretty audacious stroke at the time, which retains its sense of modernity even today.

The most famous of the Middle Period sonatas after the *Moonlight* are the great C major, Op. 53 (nicknamed the ‘Waldstein’, after its dedicatee, Beethoven’s patron Count Waldstein) and the still greater *Appassionata*, Op. 57. In both of them virtuosity reaches new heights. The *Waldstein* is perhaps the grandest and most spacious of all the sonatas so far, and was conceived and worked out at roughly the same time as Beethoven was expanding the symphony to previously unimagined proportions in the *Eroica*. In their sound-world alone, both sonatas achieve unprecedented effects, one of the most memorable being the poetically ‘blurry’ pedaling in the finale of the *Waldstein*. Spiritually, the two works are poles apart, the *Waldstein* being one of Beethoven’s most joyously positive and heroically invigorating works, the *Appassionata* being a unique example of almost unmitigated tragedy. Never before had the piano been entrusted with so much tumultuous emotion or such sustained tragic power (all the more affecting for the poignant beauty of the slow movement, whose repose is ripped apart by a single dissonant chord which leads straight into the almost shocking intensity of the final, doomed struggle). Indeed Beethoven was now writing beyond the capacities not only of most pianists but of the piano itself. In doing so, he was effectively forcing the pace of the instrument’s evolution.

Where the piano is concerned, the so-called ‘Farewell’ Sonata (‘Das Lebewohl’, often called ‘Les Adieux’), Op. 81a, is doubly significant. At a superficial level, it follows a programmatic plan, its three movements commemorating, respectively, the departure, the absence and the return of his friend and pupil the Archduke Rudolph. The word ‘lebewohl’ (farewell) is spelled out over the three-note descending ‘motto’ of the opening, which is periodically recalled in the following Allegro. Apart from being one of the richest and most instantaneously attractive works in the cycle (far removed from the tragic force of the *Appassionata*), it marked Beethoven’s farewell to

the piano sonata for a period of five years, and indeed a farewell to his ‘heroic’ Middle Period. The next sonata – No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90, in two movements – stands on the threshold of his transcendent Third Period.

In the view of many musicians, the last five sonatas (Opp. 101, 106, and 109–111) are the greatest ever written. Op. 101 is a notably concentrated four-movement work, to a slow-fast-slow-fast pattern, in which the lyrical, ruminative opening of the first movement returns to introduce the grandly assertive fugal finale (with echoes of Beethoven’s beloved Handel). Like all the late sonatas, the work is highly serious, but this doesn’t preclude a number of typical, self-mocking jokes in the midst of the generally imposing finale. And the obsessive dotted rhythms of the second-movement March (te-tum te-tum te-tum etc.) seem directly to anticipate Schumann.

Op. 106, the so-called ‘Hammerklavier’, is the longest, the most taxing, the most awesomely imposing sonata ever written. It’s name is not descriptive, but merely reflects a chauvinistically Germanic phase in Beethoven’s life, possibly in reaction against Napoleon. The word is no more than the German name for the piano, and the inscription ‘für Das Hammerklavier’ appears on the title pages of both Op. 101 and Op. 109. But there’s no doubt that it’s in this sonata that the klavier gets the greatest hammering. How the pianos of Beethoven’s day could withstand it is hard to imagine. Not that many had to. Beethoven was already writing for later generations and didn’t expect the public of his own time to understand it. For many musicians it only confirmed their belief that Beethoven, isolated by deafness, had gone mad. The fantastically difficult and extended fugue which crowns the work is in many ways as daunting, as challenging, as rawly elemental and as stupendously sophisticated today as it ever was, and after however many hearings. [For further comment on this work, see the Graded Listening Plan].

The last three sonatas, Opp. 109–111, take us onto hallowed ground. Each creates a universe all its own, each defies meaningful description. Each takes us on a kind of spiritual Space Odyssey, into uncharted regions of the soul, into realms of experience we could never previously have imagined.

## The Variations

Beethoven wrote variations at every stage of his life, many in separate, self-contained sets, some incorporated into sonatas, and they range from the merely attractive (some of the juvenilia) to the towering and unsurpassed (the so-called *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120 – his last great piano work – and the variations in the sonatas Opp. 109 and 111). Curiously enough, the most frequently played are among the least interesting: the *32 Variations on an Original Theme in C minor*. In all but the most exceptional hands, these too easily sound like a sequence of high-class exercises à la Hanon or Czerny. More engaging and less obvious are the clever and sometimes amusing sets on *Rule, Britannia* and *God Save the King*, but there are only three sets which give us really vintage Beethoven [Naxos 8.550676]. The first of these is the interestingly entitled *Six Variations in F major*, Op. 34 – interesting because only one of the variations is in that key, and that's the last (indeed no two share a key). Next comes a really great set, written at the same time (1802) and usually known today as the *Eroica Variations* because the theme is the same as that for the finale of the *Eroica Symphony*. In fact it predates the symphony. There's nothing forbidding here, but plenty in the way of grandeur, invention, virtuosity and humour. Indeed even the theme is humorous, in a characteristically Beethovenian vein, with its coy giving out of the principal notes and the rude interruptions where Beethoven seems to mock his own seriousness. It's one of the most appealing aspects of Beethoven's character that his sense of humour continually crops up in the most unexpected contexts. A striking case in point is his last major piano work, the monumental *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120. This is a genuinely forbidding work of massive intellectual force, yet even here there's an abundance of typical Beethoven jokes. And the way he mocks the trivial theme in the first variation is an example of bullying raised to the level of high art. A more merciless kick in the teeth was never delivered by a great composer to a small one. Having thus sorted out the men from the boys, Beethoven proceeds to extract from this 'cobbler's patch' (his own description of Diabelli's little waltz) a gigantic edifice of overpowering intellectual command, a spiritual range that embraces almost every shade of human experience,

and a compendium, according to Beethoven himself, of everything he knew about piano technique.

## **The Chamber Music**

**Piano Plus.** Although the early quartets for piano and string trio are engaging and interesting, Beethoven's first major chamber works were the three Piano Trios, Op. 1 (piano, violin and cello). Even here, at the formal beginning of his career as a composer, he was a master wholly fit to stand beside his teacher Haydn. Quite apart from their mastery, however, they are notable for their liberation of the cello, which in Haydn's trios seldom did more than double the left hand of the piano part. Also significant is Beethoven's adoption of the spacious four-movement plan normally associated with the Classical symphony – a plan chosen for all but one of his subsequent trios. The last of the present three, in C minor, is notable for being the most intensely emotional and dramatic piano trio written to date (Haydn found it downright alarming).

Among the later trios, two require special mention. The Trio in D major, Op. 70 No. 1, is a magnificent work whose astounding, eerie slow movement may well be the slowest slow movement ever written. Its atmosphere and textures are unique, its originality is breathtaking and its dark emotions haunt the mind long after the music itself has ceased to sound. Not for nothing is this trio widely known as 'The Ghost'. It doesn't always follow that last works are best, but in the case of Beethoven's final piano trio – the so-called 'Archduke', Op. 97 – there can be no argument. For sheer sustained inspiration, formal mastery and spiritual depth it remains unsurpassed.

The first of Beethoven's instrumental duos, the two wonderful *Cello Sonatas*, Op. 5 (*Naxos 8.550479*) are historically important as well as artistically captivating. In addition to their intrinsic worth, they are the first works of their kind. Haydn and Mozart wrote superb cello parts in their string quartets but left no sonatas for the instrument. Amongst great composers, the only precedent would be the three sonatas by Bach for viola da gamba and harpsichord. Of

Beethoven's remaining cello sonatas [*Naxos 8.550478*], the *A major*, Op. 69, has always been the most popular with cellists and audiences alike, and no wonder. It's a near perfect work. Most musicians, however, would be likely to agree that the greatest are the two late sonatas, Op. 102. These are more austere and cerebral, and both demand more from the listener, particularly the second, in D, which inhabits something of the same world as the *Hammerklavier Sonata* for the piano.

The largest body of Beethoven's duos are the ten violin sonatas. While the piano was Beethoven's main instrument, he was also a very competent violinist, and it shows. Each sonata finds him exploring the potentialities of the violin in different ways, never to purely instrumental ends, but always as a vehicle for artistic expression. And each is a developing study in the relationship between the violin and the piano. Even when he gives the violin apparently simple accompanimental figures, they are never 'merely' accompanimental, but enrichments of the musical blend, and enhancements of the music's spirit. Unlike Haydn's treatment of the cello in his piano trios, lending tonal support but adding nothing of its own, Beethoven will sometimes use the violin (as in the slow movement of the Third Sonata) as a kind of alternative to the pianist's left hand, demanding the most sensitive listening on the part of both players. At other times (say, the third variation in the First Sonata), he may stretch the very character of the violin by asking it to rival the turbulence and percussive rhythmic profile of the piano. The unfair 'loading of the dice' as an essential ingredient of the musical drama is a characteristic Beethoven ploy. His sometimes explosive emotional realism led to his becoming the first great composer who repeatedly enlisted an element of struggle, even harshness, as an agent of expression. There are moments in Beethoven, ironically, where to play beautifully can be downright unmusical. The violin sonatas show the same sort of progress away from the expected and traditional as one finds in the symphonies, the quartets and the piano sonatas. It can fairly be said that Beethoven made the violin a 'bigger' instrument than anyone had previously imagined. In the famous '*Kreutzer*' Sonata, Op.47, music, drama, virtuosity and intellect are inextricably combined and raised to a

level never before achieved in the medium, even by Beethoven himself. And as in practically every other medium he touched, he brought to the violin sonata an unprecedented emotional and dramatic range

**Mixed Families.** The *Septet in E flat*, Op. 20, for violin, viola, cello, double-bass, clarinet, horn and bassoon [Naxos 8.553090], lays no claim to being a profound work. What it is is one of the most sheerly delightful chamber works ever written, and it gives early notice of Beethoven's genius for combining contrasting tone colours in a manner that seems not only natural but inevitable.

**Strings.** Whether or not they should be classified as major works (which they certainly would be in any other composer's output), the three String Trios, Op. 9, are undeservedly neglected and hence almost unknown to the vast bulk of the music-loving public. These are not in any way string quartets manqué but splendidly full-bodied works in which Beethoven cleverly manages to make three instruments sound like four.

The real core of Beethoven's chamber music is his astonishing sequence of sixteen string quartets. This begins with the set of six, Op. 18, which he published in 1801. The fact that this self-confident genius and former pupil of Haydn waited until his thirty-second year to bring forth his first quartets demonstrates not only that he was highly self-critical but that he stood in some awe of Haydn's and Mozart's achievements in this field. That he regarded the medium itself with the utmost seriousness is already evident in the slow movement of the first quartet. As in many of his major works, this Adagio is the real heart of the quartet as a whole, which is otherwise genial and sometimes capricious. Beethoven was generally opposed to programmatic music but he did reveal that in this case he'd been inspired by the tomb scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

In the Second Quartet he pays his debts to Mozart and Haydn with the greatest elegance and grace, but introduces certain highly dramatic and intense touches, particularly towards the end of the first movement, that are already pure Beethoven.

Perhaps the most adventurous feature of the Third Quartet is Beethoven's strategic use of unexpected key changes as a structural device. No formal knowledge is necessary to feel the effects of this. The changes of tone, both aural and expressive, come across whether one recognises their source or not.

The Fourth Quartet is the odd-one-out of the set, introducing for the first time in the sequence a curiously rough-hewn, 'uncompromising' tone of voice, as it were - as though Beethoven felt the need to re-assert his originality and independence in the midst of so much 'classical' refinement. This is the Beethoven who would turn up at his patrons' palaces dressed almost like a tramp.

No. 5 seems to have been directly influenced by Mozart's A major String Quartet and is more remarkable for its intrinsic beauty and craftsmanship than for any significant historical influence.

Perhaps the most striking features of the last quartet in the set are the rhythmic swing and bounce of the scherzo, whose almost obsessive, jazz-like syncopations seem to say to the listener 'count this if you can!', and then the completely unexpected and dramatic change of mood as the last movement begins, with a slow introduction entitled 'malinconia' (melancholy), a mood which is so self-evident in the music that you wonder why we need a signpost. Not only is such an introduction to a finale revolutionary in itself, this particular introduction is remarkable for briefly abandoning a sense of key altogether and for its fragmentary recurrence later in the movement. The effect is of a kind of debate between the forces of darkness and light.

Five years were to elapse before Beethoven returned to the string quartet but the distance travelled in terms of content and conception seems more like light-years. The three so-called '*Rasumovsky*' *Quartets* (named after the Russian count who commissioned them) are conceived on a scale without precedent in the medium. And in that expansion of the scale is an expansion of the spiritual, emotional and psychological range it can encompass. Nor was this in any way an isolated phenomenon. The same holds true for the symphonies, sonatas and concertos that Beethoven composed during this period (these include the *Eroica Symphony*, the *Waldstein*,

*Appassionata* and *Kreutzer Sonatas* and the *Triple Concerto*). It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that with each of these works Beethoven transformed the entire concept of what music could do. But whereas the others met with a generally favourable reception from musicians and music-lovers alike, the '*Rasumovsky*' *Quartets* bewildered many musicians who were generally sympathetic to Beethoven's music. Schuppanzigh, Beethoven's favourite quartet-leader, apparently thought the first must be some kind of far-fetched joke whose point escaped him. Only the third gained anything like widespread acceptance at the time. An important (and then novel) feature of all three works is the degree to which Beethoven derives large scale structures from a small number of short musical 'cells'. The broad opening tune of No. 1, for instance, forms the basis for much of the movement. Another example is the expansive and often extremely subtle development of the first two chords of No. 2. Nor need these cellular building blocks be melodic or harmonic. The scherzo movement from the same quartet is derived to an extraordinary extent from the rhythmic figure of its opening bar. But it must be stressed that an ability to spot these organic relationships is no more essential to an appreciation of the music than an anatomical knowledge of facial musculature is to an appreciation of the *Mona Lisa*. A further significant aspect of these quartets is the unprecedented technical challenge which they pose to all four players.

The beautiful '*Harp*' *Quartet*, Op. 74 (so nicknamed because of the pizzicato effects in the first movement) is written on the same large scale as its three immediate predecessors, and is particularly noteworthy for being the only one of Beethoven's quartets to end with a set of variations.

The '*Serioso*' *Quartet*, Op. 95, is one of the most redundantly entitled works in history. Its seriousness is abundantly clear from the outset, and is unmistakably maintained thereafter. This is Beethoven's most compact and intense quartet, every bit as remarkable for its compression as the *Eroica Symphony* and the *Rasumovsky Quartets* are for their revolutionary expansion. A similar emphasis on conciseness is evident in the contemporaneous *Piano Sonatas*, Opp. 90 and

101 and the two *Cello Sonatas*, Op. 102. Interestingly, Beethoven wrote of this quartet that ‘it was composed for a small circle of connoisseurs and was never intended to be played in public.’ And for six years he refused to publish it.

Nearly fifteen years passed before Beethoven returned to the medium, and he then turned out six unique works which have been almost universally regarded ever since as the greatest quartets ever written. For many they constitute the greatest music ever written, regardless of medium or form. They carry us into realms of spiritual experience never before glimpsed, and attainable by no other means. That said, not one of them is an ‘easy’ listen. Each requires one’s entire and repeated attention, and each is the product of the most powerful intellect in musical history, working at full stretch.

## Orchestral works

**Symphonies.** Ask the average music-lover to name the five most famous symphonies ever written and the chances are that four of them will be by Beethoven: the *Eroica* (No. 3), the *Fifth* (with its memorable ‘fate knocking at the door’ motif), the *Pastoral* (No. 6) and the *Choral* (No. 9). Nowhere more so than in his nine symphonies did Beethoven take his well-mannered, courtly (and implicitly servile) eighteenth-century heritage and transform it, body and soul, into a blazing celebration of individual liberty and the triumphant power of the human spirit. There is scarcely a corner of our emotional, spiritual and psychological experience that doesn’t somewhere, somehow, find transcendent expression in Beethoven’s music. He was as comprehensive a poet and as pitiless an analyst of the human soul (starting with his own) as Shakespeare was. Each of his symphonies marks a particular stage of his own spiritual development.

The fact that he delayed writing his First Symphony until his 30th year (1800) is significant. His youth and early manhood are documented by a generous and varied output of piano sonatas, concertos, chamber music, choral music and so on, many of which reveal a downright boisterous self-confidence. From an early age, he had felt a powerful sense of destiny, quickened by a

brashly competitive streak. He knew full well that when he tackled the symphony he must be brave enough, and sufficiently well-armed, to confront the awesome example of Mozart and Haydn head-on. With the very opening gesture of his *First Symphony* he not only declares himself ready but openly mocks the predictable expectations of an audience reared on the well-formulated structures of Classical decorum. He begins by ‘blowing a raspberry’, in the form of a lone, two-chord cadence – the standard combination for ending a piece, not beginning one; and not only does he start with a stop, as it were, he does it in the wrong key. Three bars later he’s still in cadence mode, and still in the wrong key – but now a different one. For many at the time, this was an outrage – precisely as Beethoven intended. And at the start of the last movement, he pays out the notes of an ascending scale one by one (‘Wait for it, folks!’), each new step arousing a different degree of expectation. Bashful he wasn’t. No composer ever got more artistic mileage out of the frustration of expectation than Beethoven.

In the delicious Second Symphony (1802), he uses similar devices but this time on an altogether bigger scale. In the third movement, not forgetting that his adopted title ‘scherzo’ is the Italian word for joke, he makes a big show of obsessive repetition (though nothing like on the scale he was later to adopt in the *Pastoral Symphony*). But his major surprise is in the final movement. Everything about the symphony so far has suggested (or would have done to the audiences of his time) that Beethoven is conforming to the pattern of Haydn’s late symphonies by following two extensive movements with two relatively brief ones. But just when we expect him to be winding up for the close, he goes sailing into a coda (literally, ‘tailpiece’) which eventually accounts for fully a third of the movement.

With the Third Symphony, the *Eroica* (1803), we come to one of the most revolutionary works in the history of art. And here the expansionism evident in the finale of the Second Symphony is extended to the entire work, which is roughly twice as long as the First and half again as long as any symphony then written. The scale is gigantic, the form monumental, the demands on the players unprecedented, the grandeur indescribable. In addition to its epic reach, much of the detail

along the way is of a complexity and originality for which no-one was prepared. If the Second represented the swan song of the Classical symphony, the Third may be said to have ushered in a new age.

For some reason, Beethoven's odd-numbered symphonies have always enjoyed greater popularity than the even-numbered ones, the one major exception being No. 6, the *Pastoral*. This is particularly a shame in the case of No. 4 (1806), perhaps the least often heard. Shorter and far more economical in the number of its notes, it demonstrates as well as anything that in Beethoven the sense of 'space' is not dependent on length. The mood of the work as a whole is strikingly different from the prevailing heroism of the Third, but its intensity is hardly less and its vitality just as irresistible, if not so forceful. Broadly speaking, Beethoven's themes fall into two categories. On the one hand there are the beautiful, long-spun melodies such as those that dominate the Fourth Symphony, on the other there are short, motto-like figures which are more interesting for what happens to them than for themselves. In some cases, it would be stretching a point to describe them as melodies at all.

A perfect case in point is the opening of the famous Fifth Symphony (1808). 'Thus does Fate knock at the door,' said Beethoven himself. Dot-dot-dot DASH – silence – Dot-dot-dot DASH. A theme, yes; a tune, no. But from just such acorns do Beethovenian oaks often grow. A remarkable amount of the first movement – and beyond – derives directly, in one way or another, from this characteristically terse and unremarkable idea (whose rhythm, incidentally, haunts a number of Beethoven's works, sometimes in similarly 'fateful' mode, as in the first movement of the *Appassionata Sonata*, but often to very different effect, as in the first movement of the supremely lyrical Fourth Piano Concerto). For sheer, edge-of-the-seat excitement and adventure in music, the Fifth Symphony takes the cake. As millions of listeners have discovered over the best part of two centuries, one needs no musical 'knowledge' whatever to recognise in this work the triumph of the will over adversity. Starting with all the trappings of tragedy, it's one of the most overpoweringly positive and inspiring works ever conceived. And the weird, shifting, shadowy transition from the

scherzo to the finale, with its sense of hovering between life and death, is among the most astoundingly effective and original passages ever written. Only in the triumphant finale does Beethoven unleash his full orchestral forces. Having begun the work with a perfectly standard ‘classical’ orchestra, as used by Mozart and Haydn, he ends with a triumphal hymn to the new spirit of Romanticism which was to dominate the entire remainder of the nineteenth century.

The *Fifth Symphony* and the *Sixth*, the so-called ‘Pastoral’ (1808), are as different as two siblings can be, yet they were conceived and written at almost exactly the same time, and were premiered at the same concert. Where the *Fifth* was the most dynamic, the most consistently driven and densely packed symphony ever written, the *Sixth* was the most expansive and relaxed, the sunniest and most serene, and in many ways the most unconventional. Alone among Beethoven’s symphonies, it has five movements, of which the last three are played without a break. It is, and yet is not (in both cases according to the composer) ‘programme music’, just as it is and is not (again according to the composer) replete with ‘tone-painting’. The title *Pastoral* is Beethoven’s own, as is the subtitle, ‘Recollections of Country Life’. But even that he qualifies, by adding ‘more the expression of feeling than tone-painting’ And each of the movements bears a heading:

1. Awakening of Cheerful Feelings upon Arriving in the Countryside
2. Scene by the Brook
3. Merry Gathering of Country Folk
4. Thunderstorm
5. Shepherd’s Song – Happy and Thankful Feelings After the Storm

Second in length only to the *Eroica*, this was the most leisurely symphony yet written, the most artfully, daringly and winningly repetitious (in one case holding exactly the same, unchanging harmony for more than a dozen bars), and colouristically the most virtuosic and wide-ranging.

After the music itself, the most famous thing about the *Seventh Symphony* (1812) is Wagner’s

characterisation of it as ‘the apotheosis of the dance’. Certainly no symphony thus far (and that includes the Fifth) is more rhythm-based than this one, in which each movement derives its greatest unity from the almost obsessive repetition and development of certain basic rhythmic patterns. This is also the first symphony with no real slow movement. The nearest equivalent is the imposing introduction to the first movement, which was the most spacious ever written and which characteristically sows many of the seeds which come to fruition in the movement proper.

The Eighth Symphony (1812) is more compact, and its good humour abundant and contagious. Its chief significance in historical terms lies in its structure (both in the layout of its movements and within the movements themselves), but this is too complicated a tale to tell here.

After the Eighth, Beethoven abandoned the medium of the symphony for a dozen years. When he returned to it in 1824, it was with a work so colossal in scale and so revolutionary in procedure that it seemed to dwarf even the Eroica. The *Choral Symphony*, with its unheard-of choral finale (setting Schiller’s *Ode to Joy*), would have secured an important place in history even without it. Never had a symphony even approached the gigantic proportions of this one. But while much of it was truly revolutionary, it can also be seen as the culmination of the eighteenth century symphonic ideal. Beethoven still uses so-called ‘sonata form’ as the principal agent of dramatic movement, he still includes a scherzo (itself in sonata form), he still uses the opposition and eventual reconciliation of different keys as a major structural and expressive device, but he does it all on such a huge aural canvas, and with such an awe-inspiring combination of emotional and intellectual power that one easily feels like an eavesdropper at the creation of the universe. Among its many unique features (the use of soloists and chorus being the most obvious) is the fact that the massive finale contains within it not only the essential framework of classical sonata form but that of an entire classical symphony. More, perhaps, than any other single work, the *Choral Symphony* opened the floodgates of high Romanticism which all but swamped the nineteenth century, and became an object of near-obsession with such powerfully individual and creative figures as Wagner and Berlioz.

## Concertos

Beethoven's seven mature examples form the core of the concerto repertoire as we know it today: the five piano concertos, the great D major *Violin Concerto*, and the *Triple Concerto* for piano, violin and cello. Of the piano concertos, the first two were composed in 1795, during Beethoven's early years in Vienna, but published in reverse order of their composition. No. 1 in C, Op. 15, was in fact composed after No. 2, but it hardly matters. Both find Beethoven very much in the Mozartian vein, though Mozart at his most virtuosic. Both reveal his innate gift for long-spun, highly expressive melodies and his irrepressible sense of humour, which ranges from high wit to the level of a sometimes (and deliberately) heavy-handed jokiness. And while Mozart may be their stylistic godfather, the personality behind them is unmistakably Beethoven's. Both works are virtuoso vehicles, of considerably greater technical difficulty than most of Mozart's concertos, and the uniquely long cadenza in the first movement of the C major give us a hint of what Beethoven's fabled improvisations must have been like. The Third Concerto, in C minor, though not without its Mozartian debts, either, is considerably darker and more emphatically Beethovenian, with its 'fate-tinged' leading themes in the outer movements, its unusual key relations and its almost relentless intensity. The mood is altogether more dramatic (then unprecedentedly so) and the solo part takes full advantage of the recently expanded compass of the piano. The extremely slow central movement (at the time, almost certainly the slowest ever written) is in a completely unexpected key, and inhabits a quite new realm of feeling, uniquely Beethoven's.

The Fourth Concerto, in G, made history by beginning with a phrase played, unaccompanied, by the soloist before the orchestra is heard (though Mozart had come close to this in his E flat Concerto, K. 271). The answer from the orchestra, in a completely different key, is not only surprising but one of the most magical moments in all music. The whole work has a spaciousness and a prevailing serenity which make it, for many music-lovers, the most sheerly beautiful concerto ever written. As in Mozart's concertos, the integration of soloist and orchestra, so far

from the gladiatorial, rigged combat of the standard romantic concerto, enhances the broadly symphonic feel of the work as a whole.

The same can be said of the Fifth Concerto, in E flat (known only in English-speaking countries as the ‘Emperor’), though here the soloist is as grand and heroic as they come, as well as being the agent of some of the most rapt poetry ever committed to sound. After a single one-chord call-to-arms by the orchestra, Beethoven reverses tradition by beginning the work with an extended and virtuosic cadenza for the piano before giving out the magnificently noble main theme in the orchestra. In grandeur, tenderness, magic and excitement, the work remains unsurpassed to this day. And though it sounds the most difficult of them all for the soloist, it is in fact the least difficult to play.

Strange to say, it took almost 40 years for Beethoven’s one *Violin Concerto*, now almost universally held to be the greatest and most sublime ever written, to gain full acceptance by audiences. The main problem seems to have been the sheer length of the first movement, in particular, which, like so much else in Beethoven, was entirely unprecedented. Another factor may have been the fact that while it’s by no means easy to play, Beethoven at no time indulges in idle bravura display. In that respect, audiences reared on the virtuoso vehicles which gained popularity in the wake of Paganini, the ‘demon fiddler’, may well have felt themselves short-changed. No major work by Beethoven is so radiant in its serene self-confidence and lyrical impulse.

**Theatre Music.** Beethoven wrote only one opera, *Fidelio* (final version 1814), but he provided overtures and incidental music for a number of plays, most of them dramatically upstaged by Beethoven’s music [*Naxos 8.550072*]. In the case of the overtures, this was a danger even in the case of his own *Fidelio* (originally called *Leonore*, his own preferred title). Hence the fact that he wrote three different overtures before arriving at the final version. These discarded works are known as the *Leonore Overtures*, of which No. 3 is the best known, by virtue of its continuing

place as a concert work near the centre of his orchestral music as a whole. Other similarly favoured masterpieces of the same ilk are those to Goethe's *Egmont*, Heinrich von Collin's *Coriolanus*, an adaptation of Kotzebue's *The Ruins of Athens* (renamed *The Consecration of the House*) and the overture to his own ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*. Each of these is a masterpiece in its own right and is frequently performed as a self-contained concert work.

*Fidelio* had a troubled and protracted birth. Begun in 1804, it wasn't until 1814, fully a decade later, that it reached its final form, and even today it doesn't lack its critics. Few if any, however, would deny its overwhelming emotional and spiritual force. As a battle hymn for individual liberty it has no rivals. The plot is a fairly simple 'rescue' story of a kind very popular in post-Revolutionary France. The faithful Leonore disguises herself as a young man, Fidelio, and with great enterprise and courage she rescues her wrongfully imprisoned husband from death at the hands of his political opponent, the tyrannical Pizarro. To Beethoven, who craved just such a faithful and devoted wife himself, the character of Leonore came increasingly to represent the ideal woman, and the theme of individual liberty versus oppression was one which touched him very deeply. What makes *Fidelio* such an overpoweringly moving opera, however, is neither its story nor its overtly theatrical qualities, but the depth and immediacy which Beethoven finds in its underlying themes.

**Choral works.** Roughly speaking, Beethoven wrote choral works, on and off, for most of his creative life. Of these, only two have been generally accepted as unalloyed masterpieces, the tremendous *Missa Solemnis* (1823) and the *Ninth Symphony* (see p. 41). It would be a shame, however, to bypass the earlier *Mass in C*, Op. 86 (1807), or the exhilarating, uplifting *Choral Fantasy*, Op. 80 (1808) for solo piano, orchestra and chorus, which is a kind of preparation for the *Choral Symphony's* finale, but without any of the latter's forbidding aspects. Nor is the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (1803) without its treasury of riches.

Ask any soloists or chorus-members who have taken part in a performance of the *Choral*

*Symphony* and they'll tell you straight off that Beethoven's vocal writing makes next to no concessions to the nature and limitations of the human voice. His attitude to singers, particularly in his late phase, was essentially the same as that expressed in answer to the violinist Schuppanzigh, who protested that Beethoven had written beyond the instrument's capabilities. 'What do I care for your miserable fiddle,' he roared, 'when the spirit moves me?'

By common consent the *Missa Solemnis* (1823) stands with Bach's *Mass in B minor* as one of the two greatest examples of the form ever written. Of all his works, only *Fidelio* cost him more time and effort. On the one hand, it gives us Beethoven at his most complex and intellectually sophisticated, on the other it triumphantly lives up to his hopes for it. As he wrote at the time, 'My chief aim in composing this grand Mass was to awaken and permanently instil religious feelings not only into the performers but into the listeners.' This he does not only by writing some of the sublimest music ever penned but through his highly individual approach to word-setting. Among the work's most magical and ennobling touches is the exalted, soaring music for solo violin which permeates the Benedictus.

## 5 A Graded Listening Plan

It may seem strange to compile a graded listening plan for a composer widely regarded as the greatest who ever lived, especially when that composer was born more than two hundred years ago. Surely his work is accessible to everyone. I beg to differ. Some of Beethoven's greatest music is among the least accessible ever written. Or the least easily accessible. If anyone unacquainted with his work were to begin a purposeful exploration by listening to the so-called *Grosse fuge* for string quartet or the crowning fugue of the *Hammerklavier Sonata*, or even certain movements from the middle-period *Rasumovsky Quartets*, they'd probably find the going discouragingly tough – so much so that they might well abandon the quest altogether. In many ways this music is as daunting and modernistic today as it ever was. It's astounding but true that the late, great pianist Artur Schnabel, one of the most sophisticated musicians who ever lived, described the last piano sonatas (for many of us the greatest ever written) and the still later *Diabelli Variations* as 'grotesque'. In his lifetime and afterwards, Beethoven's music was widely described by critics as 'bizarre', 'incoherent', 'chaotic', 'ear-splitting' and so on. One confident prophet declared that 'if this *Eroica Symphony* is not drastically abridged it will quickly fall into disuse.' And these were sophisticated, highly educated men.

## Solo Piano Works

**The Sonatas.** With only a handful of exceptions, Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas are the most important ever written. The most famous, only partly because of its inauthentic nickname, is the so-called 'Moonlight' (though many people never hear or play more than the first movement). The first movement is indeed bewitching, the middle-movement is charming and engaging, and the last is quite simply one of the most thrilling ever written, irresistible in its driving energy, with its typically Beethovenian punchy accents. The rhythm alone is exciting enough to rivet the attention, even on a tabletop. It's interesting that the most popular Beethoven sonatas seem to be those with titles, though the titles in most cases have nothing to do with him. Indeed the 'Moonlight' is one of three sonatas (the others being the earlier *Pathétique* and the later *Appassionata*) so often recorded together [as on *Naxos 8.550045*] that today they seem almost like Siamese triplets, though they were written in widely different periods and there's no intrinsic link between them. In each there is an intensity of emotion and an almost 'orchestral' use of the piano which have no precedent in the more classically restrained sonatas of Haydn and Mozart. There's an immediacy about them all which seems to strip away traditional formality and forge a bond with the listener so universal that we can all respond, 'Yes, I know that feeling. I know exactly what you mean.' But there's also a broad dramatic sweep, and an epic integration of opposing contrasts that makes the more literal drama of the operatic stage seem almost redundant. The same is true of the spacious and almost equally famous *Waldstein Sonata*, Op. 53, though here there's no hint of the tragedy implicit in the *Pathétique*, *Tempest* and *Appassionata*. Also new to the world of the piano sonata was the sheer scale on which Beethoven operated. The early C major Sonata, Op. 2 No. 3 – a worthy forerunner of the *Waldstein* in key and mood, and not a whit less enjoyable [*Naxos 8.550150*] – is characteristically symphonic in its breadth and its Olympian virtuosity. Like the later *Waldstein*, this wonderful sonata (whose lesser popularity can only be attributed to its lack of a nickname) gives us Beethoven at his most brazenly self-confident and triumphantly manipulative. Slighter in scope, and instantly accessible, is the

delightful F major sonata, Op. 10 No. 2 [*Naxos 8.550161*], which is shot through with Beethoven's humour, from the fragmentary, start-stop opening bars onwards. Its successor in D, Op. 10 No. 3 [also *Naxos 8.550161*], is more substantial, and its slow movement is perhaps the most profound and tragic meditation that had ever been conceived for the piano up to that time, though Beethoven himself was to exceed it in a couple of the later sonatas. Of the three sonatas, Op. 31, the last [*Naxos 8.550166*] is the most instantly winning. Despite its unusually questioning beginning – doubting and poignantly plaintive – it's one of Beethoven's most assertive and exhilarating works and its ebullient energy is positively contagious. As an anti-depressant, it easily out-performs most modern chemicals. One of the most lyrically engaging and delightful of the sonatas is the F sharp major, Op. 78 [*Naxos 8.550162*]. It's one of six sonatas which have only two movements and its continuing neglect by pianists who aren't doing the complete cycle is hard to understand.

In each of the last three sonatas, Opp. 109–111 [*Naxos 8.550151*], Beethoven moves into uncharted territory, opening up realms of sound, principles of form and shades of experience never really approached by any composers before him nor, perhaps, equalled by any of his successors. The middle one, in A flat, Op. 110, is the most sustainedly lyrical, and makes perhaps the ideal gateway into the awesome mysteries and profound meditations of Beethoven's late style. The strangest is probably the first, in E major, Op. 109, with its sudden mood changes, its prophetic harmonies, and its sometimes weird, even frightening new sound-world, and the last, in C, Op. 111, is in the opinion of many people the greatest sonata ever written, tracing in its two highly contrasting movements almost the entire trajectory of Beethoven's spiritual journey, from struggle, through defiance to towering intellectual command and finally to unearthly transcendence.

Standing in many ways in a class of its own is the gigantic B flat Sonata, op. 106, the so-called *Hammerklavier*. For player and listener alike, this is the most challenging and forbidding of them all. More than even the greatest of its thirty-one companions, it demands a level of concentration

and an intellectual stamina which make it the Everest of the piano repertoire. Its immensely long slow movement is by general consent one of the most awe-inspiring and tragic musical journeys ever traced in any medium, and its massive, almost impossibly complex concluding fugue poses a continual challenge to all concerned, every new exposure revealing hitherto unglimped features of its unprecedented spiritual and intellectual landscape. In any graded listening plan, this, perhaps, should be the final port of call.

**The Variations.** Like most composers of the time, Beethoven wrote a great many sets of variations, ranging from the attractive but superficial to the greatest ever conceived for the piano. Like the *Hammerklavier*, the so-called *Diabelli Variations* (after the composer of the theme) is a major undertaking for all concerned. Lasting just under an hour, it demands almost as much concentration from the listener as from the player and is best saved for a late stage in one's voyage of discovery. An ideal introduction to Beethoven's variations is Jenő Jandó's recital on *Naxos 8.550676*, which contains the charming Variations on the duet 'Nel cor piu non mi sento' by Paisiello, the *Variations in F major*, Op. 34 (see under 'The Major Works'), the much-aired *32 Variations in C minor* and the great *Eroica Variations*, Op. 35.

## Chamber Music

**Mixed Instrumental Families.** There can be no more delightful introduction to Beethoven's unequalled treasury of chamber music than the wonderful *Septet in B flat*, Op. 20 [*Naxos 8.553090*], which was such a runaway hit when he first published it that he later wished at times he'd never composed it. In tunefulness, vigour, grace, variety and instrumental colour it's as perfect a work of its kind as any ever written. And how Beethoven catches the joy of musical conversation here. The richly varied interplay between the instruments is not only continuous and delightful but provides a perfect introductory guide to the essentially conversational nature of chamber music as a genre. The contrasting colours of wind and strings make the thematic weave

easy to follow, giving valuable pointers to the ears which come into their own in music of a more homogeneous texture, as in the case of the string quartet. Also useful in this respect, and thoroughly enjoyable from start to finish, is the *Quintet in E flat for Piano and Wind*, Op. 16 Op. 5 [*Naxos 8.550511*]

The three *Trios*, Op. 1, for piano, violin and cello [*Naxos 8.550946/7*], while not always, perhaps, quite as ingratiating as the *Septet*, are instantly winning and absorbing (and the last one very much more than that), but I'm inclined to suggest the two *Sonatas for Cello and Piano*, Op. 5 [*Naxos 8.550479*] as a kind of preparation. This is chamber music of the most joyous and approachable kind and should on no account be neglected. Neither should the *Three Sonatas for Violin and Piano*, Op. 12 [*Naxos 8.550284*]. These sonatas embrace many moods, but the overall impression is one of vigour and joy tempered by a soaring lyricism. As with the piano sonatas, the most famous of the violin sonatas are the two which have nicknames: the so-called 'Spring' *Sonata in F*, Op. 24, and the 'Kreutzer' *Sonata in A*, Op. 47 [both on *Naxos 8.550283*]. The 'Spring' is in Beethoven's most lyrical and 'pastoral' vein, with some characteristically catchy rhythmic humour in the third movement Scherzo. The 'Kreutzer' is perhaps the grandest, and certainly the most virtuosic of them all, and in some ways the most 'serious'. All the violin sonatas, however (there are ten altogether), are not only approachable but quite irresistible in their various ways – and one of the wonders of Beethoven is precisely the astonishing variety of his invention.

The most winning and perfectly proportioned (and the most frequently performed) of the five cello sonatas is *No. 3 in A major*, Op. 69, which might be described in overall feel as a kind of cross between the 'Spring' and 'Kreutzer' sonatas, except that like all Beethoven's great works it creates a world entirely its own. This was followed immediately by the two great *Piano Trios*, *Op. 70*, which are not stylistically challenging, in the way that, say, the *Diabelli Variations* are, but are of a vigour, weight and depth which place them almost in another world from the three (albeit masterly and enjoyable) Op. 1 trios. The extended slow movement of No. 1, the so-called 'Ghost' *Trio*, is one of the most amazing pieces of music ever written, but the whole trio is both gripping and great from

beginning to end. From Op. 70, one can move straight on to the last and greatest trio, the so-called ‘Archduke’, Op. 97, which stands at the gateway to Beethoven’s late period. For many, this is quite simply the greatest piano trio ever written. By this time we have long since passed out of the realm of ‘easy listening’. Like the Op. 70 trios, only more so, this is music which demands one’s full attention and should be reserved for those occasions when one can give it no less. But this isn’t ‘difficult’ music, except for the players. The same can’t be said, at least by me, of the last two *Cello Sonatas*, Op. 102. These are by general consent the greatest, but they belong firmly to Beethoven’s late period, and compared with their predecessors, they make very considerable demands of the listener. The D major, in particular, can sound rigorously intellectual and austere, and may take a good deal of ‘getting used to’ before it yields up its treasures. These belong in time and character with the piano sonatas, Opp. 101 and 106 (the *Hammerklavier*).

**The String Quartets.** Beethoven’s string quartets form the central core not only of his own chamber output but of the entire chamber repertoire from Tudor times to the present, and they range from the immediately compelling to the most monumental and forbidding, from the tenderest lyricism to perhaps the most profound meditations in the whole of human history. It would be no bad thing to approach them, as Beethoven himself did, through the three early string trios, Op. 9, which for some reason are familiar today almost exclusively to connoisseurs and string players, thanks in part to their relative neglect by record companies. But nobody who seeks them out is likely to feel disappointed. They are masterpieces, instantly attractive and consistently absorbing.

From the beginning, Beethoven seems to have reserved the string quartet for his most serious thoughts. This isn’t, of course, to suggest that his sonatas, symphonies and concertos are relatively trivial, or that the quartets are uniformly solemn or portentous. But whereas the symphonies and concertos are ‘public’ works, designed with audiences in mind, the quartets are ‘private’ works, in the sense that they are designed for players, and for connoisseurs. As listeners, we are rather in

the role of privileged eavesdroppers on conversations conducted at the highest level of civilised discourse and touching in one way or another on every shade of spiritual, emotional and intellectual experience. Except in its earliest manifestations, before Haydn and Mozart raised it to the status of the highest art, the string quartet has never been a ‘popular’ medium. It has been music for musicians, and the musicianly inclined, so to speak. Lacking the diversity of instrumental colour which ‘helps’ the ear to follow the conversation in the piano trio and the music for wind or mixed wind and strings, the string quartet, by virtue of its relative homogeneity of sound, demands more concentrated attention. In a sense which isn’t easy to define, it’s a more intimate medium – which may be one of the reasons why I always prefer to hear string quartets in the evening or late at night, when the bustle and rumble of human activity has subsided, when one can savour the experience of relative ‘silence’, when the distractions of noise have receded, allowing a more contemplative atmosphere. Only in such an atmosphere can we make ourselves fully available to the highest, the profoundest, the most refined achievements of the human spirit. There are limits to the democratisation of music. There is some music which can never be for the many. Beethoven’s quartets fall into this category, and partly for that reason I’m inclined to suggest that the whole lot, even the six ‘early’ quartets of Op. 18, be saved for the last stage of any systematic exploration of Beethoven’s music. The Op. 18 set is certainly where one should begin (see below for suggested order), but rather than proceed from them directly to the three middle period ‘Rasumovsky’ quartets, which baffled many sophisticated musicians of the time, I would suggest leap-frogging over them, so to speak, to the two individual quartets, Opp. 95 and 74 (and in that order) and only then going back to the ‘Rasumovsky’ before venturing onto the hallowed ground of the late quartets.

Each of the late quartets – Opp. 127, 130, 131, 132 & 133 – is a spiritual and emotional universe all its own. For many musicians and connoisseurs, this is unquestionably the greatest music ever written, which is one of the reasons it’s so hard to write about. One finds one’s self reaching for such terms as ‘philosophical’, even though it’s next to impossible to describe ways

in which music, so lacking in precise conceptual frames of reference, can possibly be philosophical, any more than it can communicate such specific experiences as hunger, thirst, greed, lust and so on. Of these last quartets, the most predominantly lyrical and accessible is probably the B flat, Op. 130, without its original finale, the *Grosse fuge*, which Beethoven wisely decided to let stand as an independent work in its own right (Op. 133). Next, I would put the C-sharp minor, Op. 131

### Orchestral Music

**The Concertos.** No problems here. Barring juvenilia (an early piano concerto in E flat) and one oddity (the arrangement of the great violin concerto as a piano concerto), they're all wonderful. My own suggested order of acquaintance would be to start with the most famous of them all, the Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat, known in English-speaking countries as the 'Emperor'. For sheer splendour and rapt poetry, it's simply unbeatable. Or you could start with the shortest and most lightweight, the so-called Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat, which was actually written before No. 1, and then continue in chronological order of composition, 'growing', as it were, with Beethoven himself. The *Violin Concerto in D* is generally agreed to be the greatest ever written. While not without its moments of high drama, it's perhaps the most sustainably lyrical and serene work in the whole of Beethoven's output. It's also the longest of the concertos, clocking in at just upwards of three quarters of an hour in most performances. The two *Romances* for violin and orchestra are beautiful, but not in the same league as the concerto. Less familiar to most music lovers, but well worth anyone's attention, are the so-called *Triple Concerto* (for piano, violin and cello), though it rather too easily sounds longer than it is, and the highly unconventional but glorious *Fantasia in C minor*, Op. 80 for piano, vocal soloists, chorus and orchestra – a fore-runner of the *Ninth Symphony* (the 'Choral'), and one of the most exciting and uplifting .

**The Symphonies.** It does no disservice to the great symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, any more than to those of Brahms, Mahler, Tchaikovsky and Bruckner, to describe Beethoven's nine as the summit of the entire symphonic tradition. Every one of them is a masterpiece, every one a great work of its kind. This alone makes them unique. As to the best order in which to explore them, one can either start at the beginning and follow the series chronologically, tracing Beethoven's own epic journey of discovery, or one can order them according to the demands they make of the listener, though it must be said that none of them poses anything comparable to the challenges of the *Hammerklavier Sonata*, the *Diabelli Variations* or the *Grosse fugue*. The concise and famous *Fifth*, with its fate-defying triumphalism, has always been the most popular, which makes it a natural point of departure (though I'm equally inclined to suggest beginning with *No. 2* (see below). *No. 6*, the so-called 'Pastoral', is its almost polar opposite: expansive, lyrical, rustic and quite irresistible, though its great length (almost twice that of many a standard classical symphony) was controversial in its day. The *First Symphony*, as discussed above [p. 38], demonstrates Beethoven's boundless confidence by beginning with a joke. And the giant at play remains in evidence throughout, though not without his serious moments. But in terms of its sustained quality and infectious high spirits, it might make better sense to explore the *Second Symphony* first. A sunnier and more engaging symphony it would be hard to find – and this despite the fact that it was written at one of the lowest moments of Beethoven's life, the time of the Heiligenstadt Testament [see CD 1]. The *Third Symphony (Eroica)* makes greater demands of the listener than any earlier symphony, even the greatest of those by Mozart and Haydn, and at the time of its composition was far and away the longest symphony ever written. It might be best, then, to save this one up for later and get to know, first, the *Fourth* and *Eighth Symphonies*, and maybe even the *Seventh* as well. While eminently worthy of one's entire attention, they don't unconditionally demand sustained and single-minded concentration in the way the *Eroica* does. Most demanding of all, not least in its then unprecedented length (generously topping an hour in most performances), is the *Ninth Symphony*, which was to be Beethoven's last, though not by his

intention (he had made substantial sketches for a *Tenth* at the time of his death). Again, save this up for special occasions, when you really can give it your concentrated attention. This is not music to paper walls or do the washing by.

**The Overtures.** All of Beethoven's overtures are collected together on two Naxos CDs, but they should never be listened to as a suite, starting at Track 1 and letting the discs run their course. The greatest of them – *Egmont*, *Coriolan*, *Leonore No. 3*, *Consecration of the House* – demand the same degree of attention and involvement as the symphonies, and are equally rewarding. They are major works.

**The Choral Music.** Only three of Beethoven's relatively few choral works appear with any kind of regularity in our concert halls and on disc: the *Choral Fantasy*, Op. 80 (see under Concertos), which makes an ideal starting point, the *Missa Solemnis* of 1823, which towers above all the rest of his choral music put together, and the finale of the *Ninth Symphony*, which obviously can't be considered as a separate work. Having begun with the *Choral Fantasy*, move on to the symphony, and only then take on the *Missa Solemnis*. This is another of those monumentally great Beethoven masterpieces which demand one's unflagging attention and whose greatness is apparent at once, though the full extent of its treasures can only be fully appreciated after repeated encounters. The intellectual and spiritual power behind it can be genuinely intimidating, but this shouldn't eclipse the full import of the inscription which Beethoven appended to the score: 'From the heart, may it go to the heart'.

## 6 Recommended Reading

The number of books on Beethoven would top the Tower of Pisa. The earliest biography to reach a wide readership was Anton Schindler's *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (1840), published in an English translation under the title *Beethoven as I Knew Him* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1966]. Filled with fascinating and revealing anecdotes and reminiscences, the book is highly readable but notoriously unreliable, not only in its many inaccuracies but as a result of Schindler's having suppressed much information which he felt would cast the master in an unfavourable light. The first major and unimpeachably scholarly biography, Thayer's *Life of Beethoven*, has been updated by Elliot Forbes, and though even Forbes's update is now outdated, this remains a work of absorbing interest, deriving in large part from Thayer's interviews with many of Beethoven's friends and contemporaries [Berlin: Schneider, 1866; Eng. trans. Princeton University Press, 1964]. At 1140 pages, this must be numbered, literally as well as figuratively, amongst the more heavyweight biographical studies. Still heavier, but packed with information and psychological insight is Romain Rolland's massive five-volume biography *Beethoven: Les grandes époques créatrices* (Paris: Sablier, 1928–57), which has appeared in numerous editions, cross-sections and English translations.

Among the best relatively concise introductions to Beethoven's life and music is Denis Matthews' contribution to the *Master Musicians* series, though its economy results in a curiously

detached, rather academic portrait, and for the general reader the musical commentary disproportionately outweighs the amount of biography. Longer, more absorbing, meticulously documented and psychologically assertive is *Beethoven* by Maynard Solomon [New York: Schirmer, 1977; Granada paperback, 1980]. No biographer has offered a more convincing solution to the identity of the 'Immortal Beloved', and the well-coordinated alternation of biographical and musical chapters gives a more vivid sense of Beethoven's total development than the standard ghetto-ised division into 'Life' and 'Works'. Less detailed and continuous but of the greatest value, all the same, is H.C. Robbins Landon's *Beethoven: A Documentary Study* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1970]. The linking text is sometimes frustratingly minimal, but the lavish and beautifully reproduced pictures are worth the price of admission in their own right. Also copiously illustrated, concise and highly readable is Ates Orga's *Beethoven* in the *Illustrated Lives of the Great Composers* series published by the Omnibus Press [London: 1976; 1983], but this is straight biography, without musical commentary.

Among more selective biographies, Martin Cooper's *Beethoven: The Last Decade* (Oxford University Press, 1970) can be very highly recommended, and contains an interesting appendix on Beethoven's complicated medical history. Readers interested in a more psycho-analytical treatment of the same period will find much food for thought (and probably much to take issue with) in the controversial *Beethoven and His Nephew* by Editha and Richard Sterba (New York: Pantheon 1954).

Valuable character studies include *Beethoven: Impressions by His Contemporaries*, ed. O.G. Sonneck [New York: Schirmer, 1926; Dover paperback reprint, 1967], though many of the translations now seem rather dated in style; *Beethoven: Letters, Journals and Conversations*, trans. and ed. Michael Hamburger [New York: Anchor, 1960]; and *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* by J.W.N. Sullivan [London: Jonathan Cape, 1927; paperback: George Allen & Unwin, 1964].

## 7 Personalities

**Albrechtsberger, Johann Georg** (1736–1809), esteemed German organist, composer and pedagogue, best remembered today for having instructed Beethoven in counterpoint during Haydn's absence in London.

**Bridgetower, George** (1779–1860), violinist (son of an African father and Polish mother) who met Beethoven in Vienna and Teplitz and gave the first performance with him of the famous '*Kreutzer*' *Sonata* in 1803.

**Cherubini, Maria Luigi** (1760–1842), Italian composer, resident in Paris from 1778. In 1822 he was appointed director of the Paris Conservatoire, and was greatly admired by Beethoven, who preferred Cherubini's *Requiem* to Mozart's. Renowned for his gruff conservatism, he was amusingly (and unfairly) pilloried by Berlioz in his highly readable and equally suspect *Memoirs*.

**Clementi, Muzio** (1752–1832), Italian composer and virtuoso pianist, he pioneered a truly idiomatic piano style when the instrument was only just beginning to oust the harpsichord in public favour. A teacher of both Cramer and Field, he composed a celebrated book of pianistic studies, *Gradus as Parnassum*, still widely used today.

**Cramer, Johann Baptist** (1771–1858), German pianist and composer. A pupil of Clementi, he too produced many studies for the piano, a number of which are still in use today and have considerable artistic merit.

**Czerny, Karl** (1791–1857), Austrian pianist and composer, a pupil of Hummel, Clementi and Beethoven and the teacher of Liszt. Astoundingly prolific, he had several writing desks in his study, each supporting a different work in progress. While the ink dried on one, he moved on to the next, thus becoming music's first one-man assembly line. His many studies have driven countless piano students to distraction.

**Diabelli, Anton** (1781–1858), minor composer and publisher. It was on a slight and nondescript waltz by Diabelli that Beethoven based his monumental *Diabelli Variations*, *Op. 120*.

**Fétis, François Joseph** (1784–1871), French composer, musicologist and critic. A professor at the Paris Conservatoire from 1821, he became its librarian in 1827. His *Biographie universelle des musiciens* was an important forerunner of Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and his *Histoire générale de la musique* is still a valuable reference book for scholars.

**Dussek, Jan Ladislav** (1761–1812), Bohemian pianist and composer whose works contributed significantly to the development of a truly pianistic style.

**Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von** (1749–1832), German poet, dramatist, scientist and courtier. The most renowned of all German writers, his works had an incalculable effect on the birth and early development of the Romantic movement.

**Hummel, Johann Nepomuk** (1778–1837), German-Hungarian pianist and composer, studied with

Mozart and Clementi, taught Czerny and Thalberg, and was ranked in his day only just below Mozart and Beethoven. As a pianist he was considered supreme between the death of Mozart and the emergence of Liszt, Chopin and Thalberg. His music had a pronounced effect on Chopin's own.

**Lenz, Wilhelm von** (1809–83), Russian writer on music. It was he who first divided Beethoven's work into three chronological periods. In Paris he had piano lessons from both Chopin and Liszt, and his book *The Great Pianists of Our Time* (pub. 1872) is an absorbing and valuable (though not entirely reliable) source of information on the subject.

**Lichnowsky, Prince Karl** (1756–1814), Beethoven's first Viennese patron (a friend and pupil of Mozart's). He invited Beethoven to live in his apartments and settled a generous annuity on him from 1800. A number of Beethoven's works were dedicated to him.

**Lobkowitz, Prince Franz Joseph** (1772–1816), one of Beethoven's most important patrons. He maintained his own private orchestra, which gave the first performance of the *Eroica Symphony* in his palace. The work was later dedicated to him. He was one of the three noblemen who granted Beethoven an annuity in 1809 in a successful attempt to prevent his emigration from Vienna.

**Mälzel, Johann Nepomuk** (1772–1838), best known for his invention of the metronome. It was for his mechanical orchestra, the Panharmonicon, that Beethoven originally composed his *Battle Symphony* in 1813.

**Malfatti, Dr. Giovanni** (1775–1859), esteemed Italian-born doctor. It was he who suggested that Beethoven take the waters at Teplitz and attended him in his final illness. His niece Therese was one of the long line of women who spurned Beethoven as a suitor, describing him even in his early manhood as 'half mad'.

**Moscheles, Ignaz** (1794–1870), renowned Czech-born pianist, conductor and composer, who was an early champion of Beethoven's piano works and later became his friend.

**Razumovsky, Count (later Prince) Andreas** (1752–1836), Russian ambassador in Vienna from 1792. He was a keen amateur violinist, and commissioned from Beethoven the three string quartets, Op. 59 which still bear his name.

**Reicha, Antonin** (1770–1836), Bohemian composer, violinist, pianist and teacher. He was among the first to experiment with polytonality, and knew Beethoven in his Bonn days, when they were both members the Electoral Orchestra in which Beethoven played the viola.

**Ries, Ferdinand** (1784–1838), German composer and pianist who studied the piano with Beethoven in the early 1800s and helped to compile the first collection of biographical documents relating to Beethoven's life.

**Rudolph, The Archduke** (1788–1831), son of Emperor Leopold II and an accomplished composer and pianist. He studied with Beethoven from 1803 and became one of his most esteemed and lasting friends and patrons – a fact reflected in the large number of important works which Beethoven dedicated to him.

**Salieri, Antonio** (1750–1825), Prolific Italian born opera composer, best known today for his jealousy of Mozart, as related in the play and film *Amadeus*. He was one of the very few teachers whom Beethoven greatly admired, and with whom he studied, on and off, for many years after his move to Vienna in 1792.

**Schindler, Anton** (1796–1864), Moravian-born law student turned violinist. He became

Beethoven's friend and general dogsbody after 1814 and was among his first and most unreliable biographers.

**Schuppanzigh, Ignaz** (1777–1830), notably corpulent Austrian violinist and conductor, whose girth made him the frequent butt of Beethoven's indelicate jokes. Closely associated with Beethoven's music from the mid-1790s onwards, he is thought also to have given him violin lessons. As leader of various string quartets, he supervised the first performances of most of Beethoven's works in that medium.

**Simrock, Nikolaus** (1750–1832), German horn player and later a famous music publisher. He issued the first editions of a number of Beethoven's most important works, including the '*Kreutzer*' *Sonata* and the late cello sonatas.

**Steibelt, Daniel** (1765–1823), minor German pianist and composer. whose chief stock-in-trade was his arsenal of 'shivering' tremolandos. He enjoyed widespread popularity for a number of years, though widely regarded by musicians as something of a charlatan. After being spectacularly trounced by Beethoven in a pianistic 'duel', he subsequently refused to attend any gathering at which Beethoven was likely to be present.

**Swieten, Baron Gottfried van** (1734–1803), Austrian diplomat, doctor and amateur musician. A friend of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, he was an enthusiastic scholar of 'early' music and introduced many people, Haydn and Mozart included, to numerous works by Bach and Handel. Beethoven's *Symphony No. 1* was dedicated to him.

**Thomson, George** (1757–1851), Scottish publisher and folksong collector who commissioned a number of composers, including Haydn and Beethoven, to write piano accompaniments with various ad hoc parts for other instruments.

**Weber, Carl Maria von** (1786–1826), influential German pianist and composer. He was one of the foremost exponents of Romantic opera, foreshadowing Wagner, and his most famous work, *Der Freischütz*, is still in the repertoire today.

# 8

## A Calendar of Beethoven's Life

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1770	0	Gluck's opera <i>Paride ed Elena</i> produced in Vienna; Mozart (14) writes his first string quartet, sees his opera <i>Mitridate, Re di Ponto</i> produced in Milan; Handel's <i>Messiah</i> given first American performance; births of Friedrich Hölderlin and William Wordsworth; deaths of Tartini, Tiepolo and the Japanese painter Suzuki Harunobu.
1771	1	Haydn writes his ' <i>Sun</i> ' <i>Quartets</i> (Nos 25–30) and C minor <i>Piano Sonata</i> ; Mozart (15) scores double hit in Milan: 20 performances of <i>Mitridate</i> and the production of his next opera <i>Ascanio in Alba</i> ; first edition of the <i>Encyclopædia Britannica</i> published.
1772	2	Haydn composes <i>Symphonies Nos 45–47</i> , the ' <i>St Nicholas</i> ' <i>Mass</i> and the six <i>string quartets</i> , Op. 20; Mozart visits Milan for the production of his opera <i>Lucio Silla</i> ; Handel's <i>Messiah</i> performed for the first time in Germany; first barrel-organs made in London; birth of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, English poet and philosopher.
1773	3	Maria Theresa visits Esterhaz and hears Haydn's opera <i>L'Infedeltà delusa</i> and <i>Symphony No. 48</i> ; Mozart's <i>Exsultate</i> , K. 165 performed in Milan; other works include six string quartets, K. 168–73, and the <i>Piano Concerto in D</i> , K. 175; the waltz begins its conquest of Vienna; Oliver Goldsmith's <i>She Stoops to Conquer</i> opens in London; Herder writes manifesto of the 'Sturm und Drang' movement.

## Historical Events

Citizens and British troops clash in the so-called 'Boston Massacre'; Dauphin of France marries Marie Antoinette; Industrial Revolution takes wing in England, eventually to spread across the world; the first public restaurant opens in Paris; visiting cards take root in England; James Bruce discovers source of the Blue Nile.

Russia, Austria and Prussia agree terms for the first partition of Poland; Russia completes its conquest of the Crimea; first spinning mill established in England; New York Hospital founded; Luigi Galvani discovers electrical nature of nervous impulse.

First partition of Poland; Boston Assembly, threatening secession, demands rights of American colonies; in Britain, Royal Marriages Act seeks to control royal marriages; Warren Hastings appointed Governor of Bengal; nitrogen discovered independently by Joseph Priestley and Daniel Rutherford; Inquisition abolished in France.

Boston Tea Party defies British tea duties; Provincial Committee of Correspondence appointed by Virginia House of Burgesses; births of William Henry Harrison, later ninth President of the United States, and Prince Klemens von Metternich, Austrian statesman; Joseph II expels Jesuits from Holy Roman Empire; Pope Clement XIV disbands Jesuit Order; first-ever cast-iron bridge build in England.

## Beethoven's Life

Beethoven born in Bonn  
c. 16 December; he is baptised on  
17 December.

Paternal grandfather,  
Kapellmeister Ludwig van  
Beethoven, dies at 61.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1774	4	Gluck's <i>Iphigénie en Aulide</i> produced in Paris; Haydn composes <i>Symphonies Nos 54–57</i> ; Mozart write two Masses (K. 192 & 194) and <i>Symphonies Nos 27–30</i> ; Goethe writes <i>The Sorrows of Young Werther</i> , sparking a sequence of youthful suicides in Germany; Lord Chesterfield publishes his letters to his son.
1775	5	Mozart's <i>La finta giardinera</i> produced in Munich; other works of the year include the first six <i>Piano Sonatas</i> , the five <i>Violin Concertos</i> and another opera, <i>Il re pastore</i> ; Haydn's oratorio <i>Il ritorno di Tobia</i> performed in Vienna; C.P.E. Bach composes his oratorio <i>Die Israeliten in der Wüste</i> ; births of French opera composer Françoise-Adrien Boieldieu, English painter J.M.W. Turner and novelist Jane Austen; Beaumarchais writes his influential comedy <i>The Barber of Seville</i> ; Goethe settles in Weimar; Sheridan's <i>The Rivals</i> staged in London.
1776	6	Mozart composes his ' <i>Haffner</i> ' <i>Serenade</i> , the <i>Serenata Notturna</i> for two orchestras, four <i>Masses</i> , and the <i>Concerto for Three Pianos</i> ; Haydn's opera <i>La vera costanza</i> rejected by Court Theatre in Vienna; a second fire at Eisenstadt again destroys much of his work; he composes his <i>Piano Sonatas Nos 27–32</i> ; 'Concerts of Ancient Music' begin in London (to 1848); Charles Burney publishes his <i>History of Music</i> ; births of English painter John Constable and German author and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann.

## Historical Events

## Beethoven's Life

Quebec Act secures Canada's loyalty to Britain and establishes Roman Catholicism in Canada; Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia and acts to prevent the importing of British goods; Poland expels Jesuits; Abdul Hamid I becomes Sultan of Turkey; Clive of India dies at 49; rules of cricket first drawn up.

Outbreak of the American Revolution (to 1783); the famous ride of Paul Revere; Second Continental Congress convened at Philadelphia; George Washington becomes commander-in-chief of American forces; Britain buys 29,000 mercenaries from Germany to fight in the American war; first British banks' clearing-house established in London; Captain Cook completes his second circumnavigation of the world; first Thames Regatta; James Watt completes his invention of the steam engine; Pierre-Simon Girard invents water turbine.

American Declaration of Independence; William Howe appointed commander-in-chief of British forces in America; Washington defeats Hessian troops at Trenton; American troops ousted from Canada; Treaty of Copenhagen signed by Russia and Denmark; unification of Portuguese administration in South America with Rio de Janeiro as capital; Potemkin forms Russian Black Sea fleet; American congress establishes a national lottery; military ski competitions established in Norway.

Receives his first music lessons, from his father.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1777	7	Mozart writes his first great Piano Concerto, K. 271, and the <i>Divertimento</i> , K. 334, likewise his greatest to date; Haydn writes <i>Symphony No. 63</i> ('La Roxolane'); Gluck's opera <i>Armide</i> staged in Paris; Court and National Theatre founded in Mannheim, Germany; birth of German poet Heinrich von Kleist; Sheridan's <i>School for Scandal</i> opens in London
1778	8	Mozart writes <i>Concerto for Flute and Harp</i> and a ballet, <i>Les petits riens</i> , for Noverre; other works include <i>Symphony No. 31</i> ('Paris') and seven <i>Violin Sonatas</i> , including K. 301–6; opening of La Scala, Milan – Italy's premiere opera house; deaths of Thomas Arne, Rousseau and Voltaire
1779	9	Haydn's opera <i>l'Isola disabitata</i> staged at Esterhaz; theatre in castle grounds destroyed by fire; Mozart composes <i>Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola</i> , the <i>Concerto for Two Pianos</i> , K. 365, and begins new opera, <i>Zaide</i> ; J.C. Bach's opera <i>Amadis de Gaule</i> and Gluck's <i>Iphégenie en Tauride</i> both staged in Paris; Samuel Johnson begins his <i>Lives of the Poets</i> ; Sheridan's farce <i>The Critic</i> opens in London; death of Thomas Chippendale, master cabinet maker.

## Historical Events

## Beethoven's Life

Lafayette's French volunteers arrive in America; German General von Steuben arrives as inspector-general of American forces; Stars and Stripes adopted as American Continental congress flag; Spain and Portugal settle disputes over their South American colonies; birth of future Czar Alexander I of Russia; American David Bushnell invents torpedo.

France and Holland sign treaties with American colonies; British peace offers turned down; French fleet arrives off Delaware; Indian massacres in Pennsylvania and New York; war of Bavarian succession begins; Act of Congress bans the importing of slaves to America; Captain James Cook discovers Hawaii; Viennese doctor Franz Mesmer demonstrates 'animal magnetism' in Paris.

British surrender to Americans at Vincennes; French forces capture Grenada and St Vincent in the West Indies; British attack French in Senegal, West Africa; Spain declares war on Britain; British wage war against Mahrattas in India; Peace of Teschen ends War of Bavarian Succession; first children's clinic opened in London; 'The Derby' established at Epsom racecourse in England; first 'velocipedes' in Paris; Captain Cook murdered.

Makes his first appearance as a keyboard prodigy, at Cologne, 26 March.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1780	10	New theatre at Esterhaz opens with Haydn's opera <i>La fedeltà premiata</i> ; he publishes his <i>Piano Sonatas Nos 35–39</i> ; Mozart writes <i>Mass</i> , K. 337, and <i>Symphony in C</i> , K. 338, incidental music for <i>Thamos., König in Aegypten</i> , K. 345, and is commissioned to write <i>Idomeneo</i> for Munich; Sebastien Erard makes first modern piano in Paris; Paisiello's opera <i>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</i> produced in Russia.
1781	11	Haydn meets Mozart in Vienna and composes his Op. 33 ('Russian') <i>String Quartets</i> ; his <i>Stabat Mater</i> is performed in Vienna; Mozart's <i>Idomeneo</i> produced in Munich; he begins work on <i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i> and resigns his post in the Salzburg; he remains in Vienna where he has a celebrated pianistic 'duel' with Muzio Clementi; Ferdinand Hiller founds the Gewandhaus concerts in Leipzig.
1782	12	Mozart's <i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i> produced in Vienna; he composes the ' <i>Haffner</i> ' <i>Symphony</i> , the <i>C minor Serenade</i> , K. 388, and the <i>Piano Concertos Nos 11–13</i> ; death of J.C. Bach; births of Field, Paganini, Auber and the influential French writer Lammennais; Royal Irish Academy founded in Dublin; Fanny Burney publishes her novel <i>Cecilia</i> .
1783	13	Haydn composes his opera <i>Armida</i> ; Mozart writes his <i>Mass in C minor</i> , K. 427, <i>Symphony No. 36</i> ('Linz'), <i>Horn Quintet</i> , K. 407; John Broadwood, English piano maker, patents his pedal mechanism; births of Stendahl and Washington Irving.

## Historical Events

## Beethoven's Life

British troops take Charleston, South Carolina; French troops arrive at Newport; Benedict Arnold's plot to surrender West Point; in England, Henry Grattan demands Home Rule for Ireland; Gordon Riots take place in London; serfdom abolished in Bohemia and Hungary; Joseph II accedes to Imperial throne; invention of the circular saw and the fountain pen.

The land war in America comes to an end with the surrender of the British at Yorktown and the evacuation of Charleston and Savannah; British forces capture Dutch settlement at Negapatam, Madras; serfdom abolished in Austrian dominions; construction begins of the Siberia highway; Herschel discovers the planet Uranus

Thomas Grenville and Benjamin Franklin meet in Paris for peace talks; British lose Minorca to Spain; Spain conquers Florida; the Treaty of Salbai ends Mahratta War; Tippoo Sahib succeeds Hyder Ali in Mysore; Rama I founds new dynasty in Siam; Joseph II persist in programme of tolerance, against the wishes of Pope Pius VI; Montgolfier brothers construct hot air balloon.

American Revolution ends with the Peace of Versailles, Britain recognising independence of the U.S.; Joseph II makes German language compulsory in Bohemia; Potemkin captures Crimea for the Russians; famine in Japan; Bank of Ireland founded; first paddle-wheel steamers.

Leaves school to devote himself entirely to music.

Becomes assistant harpsichordist in the court orchestra and composes *Three Keyboard Sonatas*, WoO 47.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1784	14	Mozart collaborates with Haydn in music-making both private and public; he composes <i>Piano Concertos Nos 14–19</i> , as well as <i>Quintet for Piano and Wind</i> and his <i>String Quartet</i> , K. 458; deaths of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and Samuel Johnson; birth of Louis Spohr; Salieri's <i>Les Danaïdes</i> produced in Paris; Beaumarchais writes his comedy <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> .
1785	15	Mozart composes his six string quartets dedicated to Haydn, and begins work on <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> ; Haydn proclaims him 'the greatest composer known to me'; death of Italian composer Baldassare Galuppi (b. 1706); Joshua Reynolds paints <i>The Infant Hercules</i> ; Houdon sculpts <i>George Washington</i> ; Immanuel Kant publishes <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Ethics</i> ; births of authors Jakob Grimm and Thomas de Quincey; Emerald Buddha Chapel built in Bangkok.
1786	16	Mozart's <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> staged in Vienna; Haydn composes his 'Paris' <i>Symphonies</i> ; birth of Carl Maria von Weber; Goya designs tapestries for <i>The Seasons</i> ; Reynolds paints <i>The Duchess of Devonshire</i> ; death of German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (grandfather of Felix); Berlin Court Theatre opens; Goethe begins Italian journey; Robert Burns publishes poems in Scottish dialect; birth of German author Wilhelm Grimm.

## Historical Events

Turkey formally cedes Crimea to Russia; British make peace with Tipoo Sahib of Mysore; East India company comes under government control; Bengal Asiatic Society formed to promote the study of Sanskrit; Joseph II suppresses feudal rights in Hungary; first school for the blind opened in Paris; Denmark abolishes serfdom; first patent lock constructed.

Frederick the Great of Prussia forms Der Fürstenburg (League of German Princes) against Emperor Joseph II, and signs commercial treaty with the United States; Marie-Antoinette discredited after diamond Necklace Affair in Versailles; Russians settle in Aleutian Islands in the North Pacific; *The Times* of London first published; invention of the seismograph for measuring earthquakes; invention of chemical bleaching in France; Johann Campe reforms education in Germany

Lord Cornwallis made Governor-General of India; Penang ceded to Britain by Rajah of Kedah; death of Frederick the Great, who is succeeded by his nephew Frederick William II; birth of future Ludwig I of Bavaria; experiments with indoor gas lighting in England and Germany; William Gerschel publishes *Catalogue of Nebulae*; German chemist Klaproth discovers uranium

## Beethoven's Life

In the reorganisation of the court's musical life after the death of Elector Maximilian Friedrich, Beethoven is appointed second organist.

Composes *Three Piano Quartets*, WoO 36.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1787	17	Mozart composes the <i>String Quintets</i> , K. 515 & 516 and <i>Eine Kleine Nachtmusik</i> ; <i>Don Giovanni</i> produced in Prague; Haydn composes his <i>Six String Quartets</i> , Op. 50; Luigi Boccherini becomes court composer in Berlin; death of Gluck (b. 1714); Reynolds paints <i>Lady Heathfield</i> ; Goethe writes <i>Iphigenie auf Taurus</i> ; Schiller writes <i>Don Carlos</i> .
1788	18	Mozart composes his final, great trilogy of symphonies, Nos 39-41, and discovers the music of Bach and Handel for the first time; Haydn composes his <i>Symphonies Nos 90 &amp; 91</i> ; deaths of C.P.E. Bach, and the painters Gainsborough and Latour; Goethe writes his tragedy <i>Egmont</i> , later to inspire Beethoven; births of the poets Rückert, Eichendorff and Byron.
1789	19	Mozart composes his <i>Clarinet Quintet</i> ; Haydn publishes <i>Quartets</i> , Opp. 54 & 55 and composes <i>Symphony No. 92</i> ('Oxford'); Charles Burney completes his <i>History of Music</i> ; William Blake writes <i>Songs of Innocence</i> ; death of the Bohemian composer Franz Xaver Richter.
1790	20	Mozart's <i>Così fan tutte</i> produced in Vienna; he composes <i>String Quartets</i> K. 589 & 590; Haydn retires from service after the death of Prince Nicholas Esterhazy, publishes his Op. 64 string quartets and is invited to visit London; first musical competition held in the United States; Royal Literary fund founded in England.

## Historical Events

Louis XVI summons States-General in France, acceding to the demands of the Parlement of Paris; Turkey declares war on Russia; Catherine II of Russia visits the Crimea; New York imposes duties on imported goods; Pennsylvania granted statehood; Philadelphia convention draws up American constitution; dollar currency introduced.

American constitution comes into force; New York declared federal capital of U.S.; British parliament moves to abolish slave trade; insanity of King George III provokes regency crisis in Britain; Austria declares war on Turkey; Parlement of Paris presents list of grievances to Louis XVI; bread riots in France; first German cigar factory opens.

Outbreak of French Revolution with the storming of the Bastille; George Washington inaugurated as first President of the United States; first U.S. Congress meets in New York; Austrian Netherlands declare independence; first steam-driven cotton factory opened in Manchester, England.

William Pitt of Britain refuses to recognise independence of Belgium; Austria suppresses Belgian revolution; Joseph of Austria dies and is succeeded by his brother Leopold II; Poland cedes Danzig to Prussia; in India, the Third Mysore War breaks out; Britain forms alliance with the Nizam of Hyderabad; Philadelphia becomes (briefly) capital of the U.S.A.; Washington, D.C. founded; Jews granted civil liberties in France; first steam-powered rolling mill opened in England.

## Beethoven's Life

Visits Vienna and plays to Mozart (who predicts great things for him) but quickly returns to Bonn on the death of his mother (40) on 17 July.

Meets the first of his major patrons, Count Waldstein.

Acts as head of family and draws half his father's salary; becomes viola player in court orchestra.

Composes his 'Joseph' and 'Leopold' Cantatas; meets Haydn, who visits Bonn *en route* to England.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1791	21	Mozart composes <i>Die Zauberflöte</i> ('The Magic Flute'), <i>La Clemenza di Tito</i> , his last <i>Piano Concerto</i> , K. 595, and the <i>Requiem</i> , which remains unfinished; he dies on 5 December, aged 35; Haydn receives a hero's welcome in London, for which he writes his <i>Symphonies Nos 95 &amp; 96</i> , and is awarded an honorary doctorate by Oxford University.
1792	22	Haydn composes <i>Symphonies Nos 93, 94, 97 &amp; 98</i> for London, and his <i>Sinfonia Concertante</i> ; death of Sir Joshua Reynolds; births of English poets John Keble and Percy Bysshe Shelley; Rouget de Lisle composes <i>La Marseillaise</i> ; Gioacchino Rossini born.
1793	23	Haydn composes <i>String Quartets</i> Opp. 71 & 74, also <i>Symphony No. 99</i> ; Paganini (11) makes sensational debut as violin virtuoso in Genoa; Canova sculpts <i>Cupid and Psyche</i> , David paints <i>The Murder of Marat</i> ; the Louvre in Paris becomes national art gallery; Marquis de Sade publishes <i>La philosophie dans le boudoir</i> .
1794	24	Haydn makes a second visit to London; writes <i>Symphonies Nos 100 &amp; 101</i> and <i>Piano Sonatas Nos 60–62</i> ; Goya paints <i>Procession of the Flagellants</i> ; Thomas Paine publishes <i>The Age of Reason</i> ; William Blake writes <i>Songs of Experience</i> ; Drury Lane Theatre opens in London; Jean Paul writes <i>Hesperus</i> .

## Historical Events

## Beethoven's Life

Louis XVI attempts to flee from France but is apprehended and returned to Paris; Mirabeau elected President of the French Assembly; Massacre of the Champ de Mars in Paris; first ten amendments to the U.S. constitution ratified; Wilberforce's motion for abolition of the slave trade passed in British parliament.

Revolutionary Commune established in France; French royal family imprisoned and Republic is declared; Denmark becomes first country to abolish slave trade; two political parties, the Republicans and the Federalists, formed in the USA.

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette executed; Danton establishes Committee of Public Safety in France; Reign of Terror begins; Roman Catholicism outlawed in France; Napoleon captures Toulon; Holy Roman Empire declares war on France; United States declares neutrality; Second Partition of Poland takes place; Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin.

Commune in Paris dissolved; mass executions in Paris, the victims including Danton, Desmoulins, Robespierre and St-Just; Jacobin Club closed down; U.S. Navy established; Habeus Corpus Act suspended in Britain; slavery abolished in French colonies; first telegraph established between Paris and Lille; Erasmus Darwin publishes *Zoonomia*, or *The Laws of Organic Life*.

Publication of his *Righini Variations*; he composes music for *Ritterballet*.

Leaves Bonn for Vienna, where he begins studies with Haydn and composes *Octet* and *Rondino for Wind*, and the *String Trio*, Op. 3; his father dies at 52.

Friendship with Prince Lichnowsky and many of Vienna's musicians; lives with the Lichnowskys and takes secret lessons from Schenk while continuing studies with Haydn.

Takes counterpoint lessons from Albrechtsberger, who prophesies that he will never amount to anything.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1795	25	Haydn completes his twelve <i>London Symphonies</i> ; Paris Conservatoire de Musique founded; birth of German composer Heinrich Marschner; Goya paints <i>The Duchess of Alba</i> ; Goethe writes <i>Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre</i> .
1796	26	Haydn composes his <i>Heiligmesse</i> and 'Kettledrum' Mass; birth of German composer Karl Loewe; Goya paints <i>Los Caprichos</i> ; birth of French painter Jean Baptiste Camille Corot; Fanny Burney writes <i>Camilla</i> ; death of Robert Burns.
1797	27	Haydn composes <i>Die Schöpfung</i> ('The Creation') and the 'Emperor' Quartet; Donizetti and Schubert born; Cherubini's <i>Medée</i> staged in Paris; Turner paints <i>Millbank</i> , <i>Moon Light</i> ; birth of Japanese painter Ando Hiroshige; Coleridge writes <i>Kubla Khan</i> , Goethe <i>Hermann und Dorothea</i> , Hölderlin <i>Hyperion</i> ; A.W. von Schegel begins his monumental translation of Shakespeare into German.
1798	28	First performances of Haydn's <i>Die Schöpfung</i> and the 'Nelson' Mass; the English poets Wordsworth and Coleridge publish <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> ; birth of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz.

## Historical Events

White Terror and bread riots in Paris; Napoleon appointed commander-in-chief in Italy; Austria, Russia and Prussia carve up Poland in Third Partition; French occupy Mannheim and Belgium; Austria signs armistice with France; French take Luxembourg; first horse-drawn railway opened in England; hydraulic press invented; Appert designs jar for preserving foods.

Napoleon establishes Lombard and Cispadane Republics in Italy and defeats Austria at Arcol; plot to restore French constitution of 1793 fails; in America, George Washington declines a third term; John Adams succeeds him as president; death of Manchu Emperor Kau-Tsung in China; import of opium into China forbidden.

Napoleon seizes Mantua and advances on Vienna; Peace of Campo Formio between France and Austria; Napoleon arrives in Paris to plan invasion of England; Talleyrand appointed French Foreign Minister; Frederick William II of Prussia dies and is succeeded by his son Frederick William III; copper pennies first minted in England, as first pound notes are printed; Fath Ali becomes Shah of Persia; carriage lathe invented in England.

French capture and proclaim republics in Rome, Geneva and Bern; King Ferdinand of Naples declares war on France but is soon defeated; French seize Malta and invade Egypt; Britain's Admiral Nelson defeats French fleet at Abukir Bay; Britain signs treaty with the Nizam of Hyderabad.

## Beethoven's Life

Makes public Viennese debut as pianist in his *Piano Concerto in B flat*, Op. 19; publishes his *Three Piano Trios*, Op. 1 and completes his *Three Piano Sonatas*, Op. 2.

Composes Op. 5 *Cello Sonatas*, the operatic scene *Ah! Perfido* and the *Quintet in E flat for Piano and Wind*, Op. 16.

Publishes the song *Adelaide*, which achieves great popularity, and his *Piano Sonata No. 4 in E flat*, which remains the longest ever written until the *Hammerklavier Sonata* of 1818.

Publishes the *Three String Trios*, Op. 9 and the *Three Piano Sonatas*, Op. 10.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1799	29	Haydn composes <i>Theresienmesse</i> and Op. 77 <i>String Quartets</i> ; Op. 76 <i>Quartets</i> published; David paints <i>The Rape of the Sabine Women</i> ; French painter Eugene Delacroix born; births of Balzac and Pushkin.
1800	30	Haydn writes oratorio <i>Die Jahreszeiten</i> ('The Seasons'); Boieldieu's <i>Calife de Bagdad</i> and Cherubini's <i>Les Deux Journées</i> produced in Paris; David paints <i>Madame Récamier</i> , Goya his <i>Portrait of a Woman</i> ; Schiller writes <i>Maria Stuart</i> , Madame de Staël <i>On Literature</i> and Maria Edgeworth the Gothic novel <i>Castle Rackrent</i> .
1801	31	First performance of Haydn's <i>Die Jahreszeiten</i> ; Bellini born; Goya paints <i>The Two Majas</i> ; Hegel and Schelling publish the <i>Critical Journal of Philosophy</i> ; Schiller writes <i>Die Jungfrau von Orleans</i> .

## Historical Events

Napoleon consolidates gains in Egypt, advances in Syria and defeats Turks; Austria declares war on France; George Washington dies; discovery of Rosetta Stone in Egypt leads to deciphering of hieroglyphics; a perfectly preserved mammoth is found in Siberia.

Napoleon, now established as First Consul, conquers Italy; plot to assassinate Napoleon foiled in Paris; British capture Malta; Washington, D.C. becomes permanent federal capital of the United States; Thomas Jefferson elected President; letter post introduced in Berlin; Royal College of Surgeons founded in London; discovery by William Herschel of infrared solar rays; practice of phrenology established.

Great Britain and Ireland united by Act of Parliament; Holy Roman Empire comes to an end with the Peace of Lunéville; Czar Paul I is assassinated; he is succeeded by Alexander I; Nelson defeats Danish off Copenhagen; British enter Cairo; Turks regain Egypt from French; Prussians take Hanover; Bank of France founded; the Union Jack becomes official flag of the United Kingdom; Robert Fulton builds the first submarine.

## Beethoven's Life

Publishes Op. 12 *Violin Sonatas* and composes *Piano Sonatas* Opp. 13 ('Pathétique') & 14; works on Op. 18 *String Quartets*; makes the acquaintance of Cramer and Hummel when they visit Vienna.

Composes his *Septet*, Op. 20, *First Symphony*, the *Piano Concertos in C major* and *C minor* (now known as Nos 1 & 3), the *Horn Sonata*, Op. 17, and the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*; defeats Steibelt in pianistic 'duel' and takes on Czerny as a pupil.

*Creatures of Prometheus* produced in Vienna; Op. 18 *String Quartets* published; he composes the *Violin Sonatas*, Opp. 23 and 24 ('Spring'), the *Piano Sonatas*, Opp. 26–28 and the *String Quintet*, Op. 29; falls in love with Giulietta Guicciardi, writes distraught letters to two friends revealing his growing deafness

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1802	32	Johann Forkel publishes his great work <i>The Life of Johann Sebastian Bach</i> ; Canova sculpts <i>Napoleon Bonaparte</i> ; G.F. Grotefund deciphers cuneiform; birth of Victor Hugo.
1803	33	Haydn (71) receives diploma from the citizens of Vienna; J.M.W. Turner's <i>Calais Pier</i> goes on show; Hector Berlioz and American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson born.

## Historical Events

Peace of Amiens between Britain and France; Napoleon becomes President of Italy; France suppressed black rebellion in Santo Domingo; Debrett's *Peerage* first published in London; horse-racing introduced to Goodwood in England; London's West India Docks built; John Dalton introduces atomic theory into chemistry; William Herschel discovers binary stars; the term 'biology' first coined, by German naturalist Gottfried Treviranus.

The Louisiana Purchase: in the greatest land sale in history, the U.S. pays France 15 million dollars for an area of 828,000 square miles, incorporating the entire Mississippi valley, and doubling the country's size at a stroke; Ohio becomes a state of the USA; Swiss cantons regain their independence; Britain wins Second Mahratta war in India; Shrapnel invents gun shell.

## Beethoven's Life

Writes the despairing *Heiligenstadt Testament* in response to his worsening deafness yet composes his sunny *Second Symphony*, the Op. 31 *Piano Sonatas* (including the 'Tempest') and the *Variations*, Opp. 34 & 35 (the so-called 'Eroica Variations').

Composes oratorios *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, and the 'Kreutzer' *Sonata* for violin and piano; completes *Third Piano Concerto* and publishes the *Piano Variations*, Opp. 34 and 35; he lives for a time in the Theater an der Wien in order to compose an opera, *Vestas Feuer*, which he then abandons

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1804	34	Births of Russian composer Mikhail Glinka, Johann Strauss II ('The Waltz King'), American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, the German poet Eduard Mörike and the French writer George Sand (née Amantine Dupin); Schiller writes <i>William Tell</i> ; English Water Colour Society founded in London.
1805	35	Paganini begins touring Europe as a violin virtuoso; Boccherini dies; Turner paints <i>Shipwreck</i> , Goya his portrait <i>Doña Isabel cobos de Procal</i> ; births of Hans Christian Andersen and the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville.
1806	36	Rossini's <i>Demetrio a Polibio</i> staged in Rome; publication of <i>Des knaben Wunderhorn</i> (the first major collection of German folksongs); Brera Gallery opened in Milan; Pestalozzi school opened at Yverdun in Switzerland; Institut de France founded in Paris.

## Historical Events

Napoleon crowned Emperor in Paris; Francis I becomes Emperor of Austria; Spain declares war on Britain; Alexander Hamilton, former American Secretary of the Treasury, is killed in a duel; death of the philosopher Immanuel Kant; Hobart, Tasmania, founded; first dahlias grown in England; Thomas Bewick publishes his *History of British Birds*; British and Foreign Bible society founded in London.

Napoleon crowned King of Italy in Milan Cathedral; he defeats Austrian and Russian forces at the Battle of Austerlitz Britain, Austria and Russia allied against France in the Treaty of St Petersburg; Bavaria and Württemberg become kingdoms after the Peace of Pressburg; Mehemet Ali proclaimed Pasha in Egypt; Rift between USA and Britain over trade with West Indies; rockets introduced into British army arsenal.

Prussia declares war on France; Britain blockades French coast; Napoleon takes Berlin and issues decree closing all continental ports to British ships; Saxony becomes a kingdom with the Peace of Posen; confederation of the Rhine formed; Napoleon establishes special organization for Jews in France; official end of the Holy Roman Empire; Sir Francis Beaufort designs scale, still in use today, for measuring wind strength.

## Beethoven's Life

Composes his *Triple Concerto*, for violin, cello and piano, the *Waldstein Sonata* for piano, and the *Eroica Symphony*.

Composes his epoch-making *Appassionata Sonata* and completes his first version of his opera *Leonore*, soon to be recast as *Fidelio*; its first production is withdrawn after three performances, partly due to the French occupation of Vienna.

Completes the *Rasumovsky Quartets*, Op. 59, and composes his *Fourth Piano Concerto*, the *Fourth Symphony* and the *Violin Concerto in D*; another attempt at *Fidelio* flounders after only two performances; his brother Caspar Carl marries Johanna Reiss, already pregnant with Karl.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1807	37	Wordsworth writes <i>Ode on Intimations of Immortality</i> , Lord Byron <i>Hours of Idleness</i> ; Spontini's opera <i>La Vestale</i> produced in Paris; Turner paints <i>Sun Rising in a Mist</i> ; Ingres begins <i>La Source</i> , his most famous painting; Hegel publishes <i>Phanomenologie des Geistes</i> ; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow born
1808	38	Goethe writes Part 1 of <i>Faust</i> ; Goya paints <i>Execution of the Citizens of Madrid</i> , Ingres <i>La Grande Baigneuse</i> ; John Dalton publishes <i>New System of Chemical Philosophy</i> , Schlegel <i>Von der Sproache und Weisheit der Inder</i> ; birth of Honoré Daumier
1809	39	Haydn dies in Vienna at 77; Mendelssohn born; Goethe writes <i>Die Wahlverwandtschaften</i> ; Washington Irving writes <i>Rip van Winkle</i> ; births of writers Nikolai Gogol, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Nikolai Gogol and Edgar Allan Poe; Constable paints <i>Malvern Hill</i> ; Spontini's <i>Fernand Cortez</i> produced in Paris.

## Historical Events

Treaty of Tilsit signed by Napoleon, the Tsar and the King of Prussia; Sultan Selim III of Turkey deposed, succeeded by Mustafa IV; U.S. Embargo Act against Britain and France; emancipation of serfs in Prussia; England prohibits slave trade; first gas lighting in streets of London; France invades Portugal; royal family flees to Brazil

U.S. prohibits import of slaves; French army occupies Rome, invades Spain and takes Barcelona and Madrid; Napoleon abolishes Inquisition in Spain and Italy; Source of the River Ganges discovered; Archaeological excavations begun at Pompeii; Men's pigtailed recede from fashion; Goethe and Napoleon meet at Erfurt.

Austria declares war on France; Vienna taken by French army who are defeated in turn at Wagram; Peace of Schönbrunn; Napoleon annexes Papal States and takes Pope Pius VIII prisoner; Arthur Wellesley defeats French at Oporto and is created Duke of Wellington; Metternich becomes Chief Minister of Austria; Ecuador wins independence from Spain; Abraham Lincoln born.

## Beethoven's Life

Composes *Coriolan Overture*; First performances of *Fourth Symphony*, *G major Piano Concerto* and *Mass in C*; Clementi visits Beethoven and arranges for publication in London of the 'Rasumovsky' Quartets, the *Violin Concerto* and all of the above works

Composes '*Pastoral*' *Symphony*, *Choral Fantasy*, Op. 80, *Piano Trios*, Op. 70, *Cello Sonata No.3* in A, Op. 69; first performance of the *Triple Concerto*; *Fourth Symphony* published

Composition of *Piano Sonatas Nos 25–26*, the *Piano Concerto No. 5* and *String Quartet*; Archduke Rudolph and the princes Kinsky and Lobkowitz settle triple annuity on Beethoven to ensure his continued residence in Vienna. Now financially secure, Beethoven seeks a wife.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1810	40	Robert Schumann and Otto Nicolai born; Beethoven composes <i>Egmont</i> ; Scott writes <i>The Lady of the Lake</i> ; Hannamahn founds homeopathy; revolutions in much of Latin America
1811	41	Beethoven composes his 'Emperor Concerto'; Weber's opera <i>Abu Hassan</i> produced in Munich; Franz Liszt born in Raiding, Hungary; Rossini composes his opera <i>Cambiale</i> ; Jane Austen writes <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> ; English novelist William Makepeace Thackeray born
1812	42	Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde founded in Vienna; Elgin marbles brought from Greece to England; German philosopher Hegel publishes <i>Die objektive Logik</i> ; births of authors Charles Dickens, Zygmunt Krasinski and J.I. Kraszewski; English poet Robert Browning born; Lord Byron writes <i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage</i>

## Historical Events

Napoleon at his zenith; Venezuela wins independence from Spain; Durham miners' strike in Britain; Krupp founds munitions works in Germany

Napoleon annexes Oldenburg; Russians capture Belgrade; Paraguay gains independence from Spain; British forces occupy Java; George III of England pronounced insane; Regency begins; Luddites sabotage machinery in North of England

Napoleon retreats from Moscow and returns to Paris, his troops depleted by 550,000; USA declares war on Britain; Wellington takes Madrid; Louisiana becomes part of the USA; Madison elected President; J.L. Burckhardt discovers the Great Temple of Abu Simbel; Philippe invents machine for spinning flax

## Beethoven's Life

Composes incidental music for Goethe's *Egmont*; and the *F minor String Quartet*; begins work on 'Archduke' Trio; proposes marriage to Therese Malfatti without success, but presents her with his soon-to-be-famous bagatelle, *Für Elise*; suffers increasing depression over his growing deafness.

Completes 'Archduke' Trio and composes incidental music for *King Stephen* and *The Ruins of Athens*; visits Teplitz on medical advice.

Completes *Seventh* and *Eighth Symphonies* and the *Violin Sonata*, Op. 96; revisits Teplitz and meets Goethe there; writes but does not send his letter to the 'Immortal Beloved'; one of his patrons, Prince Kinsky, who had settled on him a generous annuity, is killed in a riding accident.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1813	43	Births of Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi; London Philharmonic Society founded; Rossini's <i>L'Italiana in Algeri</i> produced in Venice; waltz craze spreads throughout Europe; J.M.W. Turner paints <i>Frosty Morning</i> ; birth of the French composer Charles-Valentin Alkan
1814	44	Schubert (17) initiates his incomparable series of great Lieder with <i>Gretchen am Spinnrade</i> ; Irish composer John Field publishes his first <i>Nocturnes</i> ; Mälzel invents the metronome; Jane Austen publishes <i>Mansfield Park</i> ; Byron writes <i>The Corsair</i> ; birth of Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov
1815	45	Beethoven writes his Op. 102 Cello Sonatas and the cantata <i>Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt</i> , dedicated to Goethe; Schubert (18) composes two symphonies (2 & 3), four operas, two masses and roughly 150 songs; advent of the 'Biedermeier' period in Vienna

## Historical Events

Austria and Prussia declare war on France; ‘Battle of Nations’ at Leipzig; Wellington victorious at Vittoria; Simon Bolivar becomes absolute ruler of Venezuela; Mexico declares its independence; Anglo-American war continues in USA and Canada

Napoleon banished to Elba; Louis XVIII assumes French throne; Congress of Vienna opened; Anglo-American war ends with the Treaty of Ghent; Hanover declared a kingdom; advent of gas lighting in Westminster, London; first practical steam locomotive constructed in England; Pope Pius VII restores the Inquisition

Louis XVIII flees; Napoleon returns to France, initiating the ‘Hundred Days’, which end with his banishment to St Helena after losing the Battle of Waterloo to Blücher and Wellington; England suffers post-war economic crisis; first steam warship built in the USA

## Beethoven’s Life

Completes final version of his opera *Fidelio*, but composes little else; deeply distressed, he is thought to have attempted suicide; meeting with Johann Mälzel leads to the *Battle Symphony*, which meets with extravagant success, restoring Beethoven’s popularity.

Revises *Fidelio*, but composes little else, save for the *Piano Sonata No. 27 in E minor* and a cantata, *Der glorreiche Augenblick*; makes final public appearance as pianist, in disastrous performance of the ‘Archduke’ *Trio*.

Composes the cantata *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*, dedicated to Goethe, and the Op.102 *Cello Sonatas*; his brother Caspar Carl dies; Beethoven claims legal custody of Karl.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1816	46	Schubert (19) writes Symphonies 4 & 5, another mass, a string quartet, most of his first opera and over 100 songs; Rossini (24) completes <i>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</i>
1817	47	Rossini completes <i>La Gazza Ladra</i> and <i>La Cenerentola</i> ; Clementi publishes his influential book of piano studies <i>Gradus ad Parnassum</i> ; Schubert (20) writes many important songs, six piano sonatas, one symphony and two 'Italian' overtures; Lord Byron writes <i>Manfred</i> ; Jane Austen publishes <i>Emma</i>
1818	48	Schubert completes Symphony No. 6; Rossini's <i>Mosè in Egitto</i> produced in Naples; Donizetti's <i>Enrico, Conte di Borgogna</i> produced in Venice; Jane Austen's <i>Persuasion</i> and <i>Northanger Abbey</i> published; Byron writes <i>Don Juan</i> ; John Keats writes <i>Endymion</i> ; Mary Shelley publishes <i>Frankenstein</i> ; Russian author Ivan Turgenev born
1819	49	Schubert composes his 'Trout' Quintet; births of Offenbach and Clara Schumann (née Wieck) in Germany; Liszt plays his first concert; first Sanskrit-English dictionary published; Byron writes <i>Mazeppa</i> , which is later to have a profound influence on Liszt; Keats writes <i>Hyperion</i> , Shelley <i>The Cenci</i>

## Historical Events

## Beethoven's Life

First German constitution granted by Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar; Argentina declares independence from Spain; Metternich opens Diet of German Federation; Java restored to Dutch Empire; Indiana becomes state of the USA; invention of the stethoscope

Riots in England against low wages; construction of the Erie Canal begins in USA; Simon Bolivar establishes independent government in Venezuela; Mississippi becomes a state of the USA; Turkish government grants partial autonomy to Serbia; Evangelical Union formed by Lutheran and Evangelical Churches in Prussia

Chile declares independence; first professional horse-racing in the USA; Karl Marx born; Prussia abolishes internal customs; constitutions proclaimed in Bavaria and Baden; border agreed between the USA and Canada; Illinois becomes state of the USA; first Atlantic crossing by steamship; Bessel's *Fundamenta Astronomiae* catalogues 3,222 stars; Berzelius catalogues molecular weights of 2,000 chemical compounds

East India Company establishes British settlement in Singapore; constitutions granted in Württemberg and Hanover; USA purchases Florida from Spain; Alabama becomes state of the USA; 11 killed, 400 injured in 'Peterloo' Massacre in Britain; freedom of the press established in France

Completes *Piano Sonata*, Op. 101, and song-cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*; Lobkowitz dies; Karl sent to boarding school and begins piano lessons with Czerny.

Makes preliminary sketches for the *Ninth Symphony*.

Begins work on '*Hammeklavier*' *Sonata*, Op. 106 and the *Missa Solemnis*; Karl is removed from his boarding school and sent to the Gymnasium, but runs away to his mother.

Completes '*Hammerklavier*' *Sonata* and continues work on the *Missa Solemnis* and the *Ninth Symphony*.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1820	50	Schubert composes his opera <i>Die Zauberharfe</i> ; his several unfinished works of this year include <i>Lazarus</i> and the <i>Quartettsatz</i> ; Keats writes <i>Ode to a Nightingale</i> , Shelley <i>Prometheus Unbound</i> , Pushkin <i>Ruslan and Ludmilla</i> ; Venus di Milo discovered
1821	51	Weber's <i>Der Freischütz</i> staged in Berlin; Schubert composes many Goethe settings; Goethe publishes <i>Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre</i> ; Constable paints <i>The Haywain</i> ; Keats dies at 26; births of Baudelaire, Dostoevsky and Flaubert
1822	52	Schubert composes 'Unfinished' Symphony, 'Wanderer' Fantasy, Mass in A flat and many songs; Royal Academy of Music founded in London; deaths of Shelley and E.T.A. Hoffmann; Pushkin writes <i>Eugene Onegin</i>
1823	53	Schubert writes incidental music to <i>Rosamunde</i> , song cycle <i>Die Schöne Müllerin</i> and Piano Sonata in A minor, D. 784; Weber's <i>Euryanthe</i> staged in Vienna; Erard builds the first 'double-escapement' piano, allowing increased rapidity of repeated notes; Oxford Union Society founded in England

## Historical Events

Revolutions in Spain and Portugal; Duc de Berry assassinated in France; in the 'Missouri Compromise', Maine enters USA as a free state, Missouri as a slave state; platinum discovered in Russia's Ural Mountains; Ampère establishes Laws of Electrodynamical Action

Napoleon dies; revolution in Piedmont; Victor Emmanuel abdicates Italian throne; Peru, Guatemala, Panama and Santa Domingo declare independence from Spain; Reign of Terror in Greece and Turkey; first demonstration of sound reproduction; Faraday discovers and experiments with electromagnetic rotation

War between Greece and Turkey; Brazil gains independence from Portugal; first iron railroad bridge built in England; gas lighting installed in Boston, Massachusetts; Congress of Verona opened

Mexico becomes a republic; Switzerland refuses political asylum to refugees; Monroe Doctrine brings curtain down on further colonisation of North America by European powers; death penalty for more than 100 crimes abolished in England; Babbage attempts to build a calculating machine; Mackintosh invents waterproof fabric; rugby football invented in England

## Beethoven's Life

Completes his *Piano Sonata in E*, Op. 109, but composes little else; litigation of custody of Karl continues; Archduke Rudolf enthroned as Archbishop of Olmütz.

Completes *Piano Sonata in A flat*, Op. 110 but work on *Missa solemnis* hampered by ill health.

Composes the overture *Consecration of the House* and begins work on his last piano sonata; *Fidelio* revived; meets Rossini.

Completes *Missa Solemnis* and *Ninth Symphony* and publishes the *Diabelli Variations*; considers writing a second opera, *Melusine*, to a libretto by the poet Grillparzer.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1824	54	Schubert writes <i>Death and the Maiden</i> , A minor String Quartet, Octet in F major and Grand Duo; births of Bruckner, Cornelius and Smetana; National Gallery founded in London; Byron dies in Greco-Turkish war
1825	55	Schubert writes 'Unfinished' Piano Sonata in C; birth of Johann Strauss II and death of Salieri in Vienna; Pushkin writes <i>Boris Godunov</i> ; death of the highly influential Romantic writer 'Jean-Paul' (Johann Paul Friedrich Richter)
1826	56	Schubert: G major String Quartet and G major Piano Sonata; Mendelssohn (17) writes his <i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Overture; Weber dies

Schubert writes his two Piano Trios, his two books of Impromptus and

## Historical Events

Outbreak of First Burmese War; British capture Rangoon; Egyptian forces conquer Crete; Greco–Turkish War continues; Russia and USA sign frontier treaty; John Quincy Adams becomes President of the USA; Simon Bolivar declared Emperor of Peru; British workers granted the right to form unions; RSPCA founded in London

Crushing of Decembrist revolt in Russia; sacrilege becomes a capital offence in France; first passenger railway inaugurated in England; horse-drawn buses appear in London; Trades Union movement gains strength in England; Chinese tea roses first imported to Europe

Russia declares war on Persia; Burmese war ends; Pan-American congress held in Panama; Thomas Jefferson dies; first railway tunnel in England; University College, London, and University of Munich founded; London Zoo established

## Beethoven's Life

*Missa Solemnis* performed in St Petersburg; *Ninth Symphony* given its premiere in Vienna; *String Quartet*, Op. 127, composed.

Composes his *A minor Quartet*, Op. 132; Karl (19) enters Polytechnic; plans to visit London fall through largely due to failing health.

First performance of the *String Quartet in B flat*, Op. 130, with *Grosse fuge* as finale; composition of his last quartets; Karl attempts suicide; Beethoven's health declines rapidly.

Year	Beethoven's Age	Arts and Culture
1827	56	his greatest song-cycle, <i>Winterreise</i> ; Bellini's <i>Il Pirata</i> staged in Milan; Chopin writes <i>Variations on Mozart's 'La ci darem la mano'</i> (reviewed by Schumann with the famous phrase 'Hats off, gentlemen! A genius'); death of William Blake; Nash designs Carlton House Terrace, Westminster, London

## Historical Events

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Turks enter Athens in Greco–Turkish war; Russia, France and Britain agree in Treaty of London to force truce on the Sultan of Turkey; Sultan rejects Allied moves; Russia defeats Persia; Peru secedes from Colombia; Plymouth Brethren founded in America; sulphur-tipped matches invented; screw-propeller for steamships invented in Austria; Ohm’s Law of electrical currents formulated; aluminium first obtained from clay

## Beethoven’s Life

Karl joins the army; Beethoven confined to bed; receives generous gift of £100 from the London Philharmonic Society; receives many visitors, including Schubert and Hummel; receives last rites on 24 March and dies two days later; more than 20,000 people gather to mourn his passing.

## 9 Glossary

accelerando	getting faster
accidental	a flat, sharp or 'natural' not present in the prevailing scale
adagio	slow
agitato	turbulent, agitated
Alberti bass	a stylized accompaniment popular in the later eighteenth century, it is based on the triad, 'spelled out' in the order bottom-top-middle-top (as in C-G-E-G etc.)
allegretto	moderately fast, generally rather slower than allegro
allegro	fast, but not excessively
allemande	traditionally the first movement of a Baroque suite – a dignified dance in 4/4 time, generally at a moderate tempo
alto	the second highest voice in a choir
andante	slowish, at a moderate walking pace
aria	solo song (also called 'air'), generally as part of an opera or oratorio
arpeggio	a chord spelled out, one note at a time, either from bottom to top or vice versa (C-E-G-C ; F-A-C-F etc.)
articulation	the joining together or separation of notes, to form specific groups of notes; when notes are separated, that is to say when slivers of silence

	appear between them, the effect is often of the intake of breath, and like the intake of breath before speech it heightens anticipation of what is to follow; when they are joined together, the effect is of words spoken in the expenditure of a single breath; see also 'legato' and 'staccato'
augmentation	the expansion of note-values, generally to twice their original length
bar, measure	the visual division of metre into successive units, marked off on the page by vertical lines; thus in a triple metre (the grouping of music into units of three, as in 3/4, 3/8 etc.), the three main beats will always be accommodated in the space between two vertical lines
bass	the lowest, deepest part of the musical texture
beat	the unit of pulse (the underlying 'throb' of the music)
binary	a simple 2-part form (A:B), Part 1 generally moving from the tonic (home key) to the dominant (secondary key), Part 2 moving from the dominant back to the tonic
cadence	a coming to rest on a particular note or key, as in the standard 'Amen' at the end of a hymn
cadenza	a relatively brief, often showy solo of improvisatory character in the context of a concerto, operatic aria or other orchestral form. In concertos, it usually heralds the orchestral close to a movement, generally the first
canon	an imitative device like the common round ( <i>Frère Jacques</i> , <i>Three Blind Mice</i> , <i>London's Burning</i> ) in which the same tune comes in at staggered intervals of time
cantabile	song-like, singingly
cantata	a work in several movements for accompanied voice or voices (from the Latin <i>cantare</i> , to sing)
chorale	a generally simple (and usually Protestant) congregational hymn; almost

	all of Bach's many cantatas end with a chorale; chorales are also frequently used as a basis for instrumental variations
chord	any simultaneous combination of three or more notes; chords are analogous to words, just as the notes which make them up are analogous to letters
chromatic	notes (and the using of notes) which are not contained in the standard 'diatonic' scales which form the basis of most western music; in the scale of C major (which uses only the white keys of the piano), every black key is 'chromatic'
clef	a symbol which indicates the positioning of notes on the staff; thus the C-clef shows the placement of Middle C, the G clef (better known as 'treble clef') the location of G above middle C, and the F-clef (bass) the positioning of F below middle C
coda	an extra section following the expected close of a work or movement by way of a final flourish
codetta	a small coda
concerto grosso	a popular Baroque form based on the alternation of orchestra (known in this context as the <i>ripieno</i> or <i>concerto</i> ) and a small group of 'soloists' ( <i>concertino</i> ); the most famous examples are Bach's six <i>Brandenburg Concertos</i>
concerto	a work for solo instrument and orchestra, generally in three movements (fast-slow-fast)
continuo	a form of accompaniment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which a keyboard instrument, usually a harpsichord, harmonizes the bass line played by the cello
contrapuntal	see 'counterpoint'

counterpoint	the interweaving of separate ‘horizontal’ melodic lines, as opposed to the accompaniment of a top-line (‘horizontal’) melody by a series of ‘vertical’ chords
counter-tenor	a male alto, using a falsetto voice, which seldom bears any resemblance to the singer’s speaking voice
crescendo	getting louder
cross-rhythms	see ‘polyrhythm’
decrescendo	see ‘diminuendo’
diminuendo	getting softer
development section	the middle section in a sonata form, normally characterized by movement through several keys
diatonic	using only the scale-steps of the prevailing key notes of the regular scale
diminution	the contraction of note-values, normally to half their original length
dotted rhythm	a ‘jagged’ pattern of sharply distinguished longer and shorter notes, the long, accented note being followed by a short, unaccented one, or the other way around. Examples are the openings of the <i>Marseillaise</i> and <i>The Star-Spangled Banner</i> ; better still, <i>The Battle Hymn of the Republic</i> : ‘Mine eyes have seen the glo-ry of the coming of the Lord’
double-stopping	the playing of two notes simultaneously on a stringed instrument
duple rhythm	any rhythm based on units of two beats, or multiples thereof
dynamics	the gradations of softness and loudness, and the terms which indicate them (pianissimo, fortissimo etc.)
exposition	the first section in sonata form, in which the main themes and their relationships are first presented
fantasy, fantasia	a free form, often of an improvisatory nature, following the composer’s fancy rather than any pre-ordained structures. But there are some

	Fantasies, like Schubert's <i>Wanderer Fantasy</i> and Schumann's <i>Fantasia in C</i> for the piano, which are tightly integrated works incorporating fully-fledged sonata forms, scherzos, fugues etc.
finale	a generic term for 'last movement'.
flat	a note lowered by a semitone from its 'natural' position, i.e. the nearest lower neighbour of any note
forte, fortissimo	loud, very loud
glissando	literally, 'gliding'; a sliding between any two notes, producing something of a 'siren' effect
Gregorian chant	see 'plainchant'
ground bass	a short bass pattern repeated throughout a section or entire piece; a famous example is 'Dido's Lament' from Purcell's <i>Dido and Aeneas</i>
harmony, harmonic	the simultaneous sounding of notes to make a chord; harmonies (chords) often serve as expressive or atmospheric 'adjectives', describing or giving added meaning to the notes of a melody, which, in turn, might be likened to nouns and verbs
harmonics	comparable to the falsetto voice of the male alto, or counter-tenor, the term refers to the production on an instrument, generally a stringed instrument, of pitches far above its natural compass. Thus the naturally baritone cello can play in the same register as a violin, though the character of the sound is very different
homophony	when all parts move at once, giving the effect of a melody (the successive top notes) accompanied by chords
interval	the distance in pitch between two notes, heard either simultaneously or successively; the sounding of the first two notes of a scale is therefore described as a major or minor 'second', the sounding of the first and third

	notes a major or minor third, etc.
largo	slow, broad, serious
legato	smooth, connected, the sound of one note ‘touching’ the sound of the next; as though in one breath
major	see ‘modes’
measure	see ‘bar’
metre, metrical	the grouping together of beats in recurrent units of two, three, four, six, etc.; metre is the pulse of music
minor	see ‘modes’
modes	the names given to the particular arrangement of notes within a scale; every key in western classical music has two versions, the major and the minor mode; the decisive factor is the size of the interval between the key note (the tonic, the foundation on which scales are built) and the third degree of the scale; if it is compounded of two whole tones (as in C–E [C–D / D–E]), the mode is major; if the third tone is made up of one and a half tones (C to E flat), the mode is minor; in general, the minor mode is darker, more ‘serious’, more moody, more obviously dramatic than the major; the so-called Church modes prevalent in the Middle Ages are made up of various combinations of major and minor and are less dynamically ‘directed’ in character; these appear only rarely in music since the Baroque (c. 1600–1750) and have generally been used by composers to create some kind of archaic effect
modulate, modulation	the movement from one key to another, generally involving at least one pivotal chord common to both keys.
motif, motive	a kind of musical acorn; a melodic/rhythmical figure too brief to constitute a proper theme, but one on which themes are built; a perfect

	example is the beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: ta-ta-ta <i>dah</i> ; ta-ta-ta <i>dah</i>
natural	not a sharp or flat
nocturne	'invented' by the Irish composer John Field and exalted by Chopin; a simple ternary (A-B-A) form, its outer sections consist of a long-spun melody of a generally 'dreamy' sort, supported by a flowing, arpeggio-based accompaniment; the middle section, in some ways analogous to the development in a sonata form,) is normally more turbulent and harmonically unstable
octave	the simultaneous sounding of any note with its nearest namesake, up or down (C to C, F to F etc.); the effect is an enrichment, through increased mass and variety of pitch, of either note as sounded by itself
oratorio	an extended choral/orchestral setting of religious texts in a dramatic and semi-operatic fashion; the most famous example is Handel's <i>Messiah</i>
ostinato	an obsessively repeated rhythm or other musical figure
pedal point	the sustaining of a single note (normally the bass) while other parts move above and around it
pentatonic	based on a five-note, whole-tone scale, as in the music of the Orient (analogous to the black keys of the piano)
phrase	a smallish group of notes (generally accommodated by the exhalation of a single breath) which form a unit of melody, as in 'God save our Gracious Queen,' and 'My Country, 'tis of thee'
phrasing	the apportionment of the above
piano, pianissimo	soft, very soft
pizzicato	plucked strings
plainchant, plainsong	also known as Gregorian chant; a type of unaccompanied singing using

	one of the Church modes and sung in a ‘free’ rhythm dictated by the natural rhythm of the words
polyphony	music with interweaving parts
polyrhythm	a combination comprising strikingly different rhythms, often of two or more different metres
prelude	literally, a piece which precedes and introduces another piece (as in the standard prelude and fugue); however, the name has been applied (most famously by Bach, Chopin and Debussy) to describe free-standing short pieces, often of a semi-improvisatory nature
presto	very fast
recapitulation	the third and final section in sonata form, where the ideas of the exposition return, but in a different key
recitative	especially characteristic of the Baroque era, in an oratorio or opera; it is a short narrative section normally sung by a solo voice accompanied by continuo chords, usually preceding an aria; the rhythm is in a free style, by the words
resolution	when a suspension or dissonance comes to rest
rest	a measured ‘silence’ (or to be more accurate, a suspension of sound) in an instrumental or vocal part
rhapsody	the name given to a number of highly disparate works in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries comprising a single movement of a generally Romantic and mostly virtuosic character; the best-known examples are Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies and Gershwin’s <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i>
rhythm	that aspect of music concerned with duration and accent; notes may be of many contrasting lengths and derive much of their character and definition from patterns of accentuation and emphasis determined by the

	composer
ripieno (concerto)	the orchestral part in a concerto grosso
ritardando, ritenuto	getting slower
ritornello	a theme or section for orchestra recurring in different keys between solo passages in an aria or concerto
scale	from the Italian word <i>scala</i> ('ladder'). A series of adjacent, 'stepwise' notes (A-B-C-D-E-F etc.), moving up or down; these 'ladders' provide the basic cast of characters from which melodies are made and keys established
sharp	a note raised by a semitone from its 'natural' position, i.e. the nearest upper neighbour of any note
sotto voce	quiet, as though in a whisper
staccato	separated, the opposite of legato
syncopation	accents falling on irregular beats, generally giving a 'swinging' feel as in much of jazz
tempo	the speed of the music
tone colour, timbre	that property of sound which distinguishes a horn from a piano, a violin from a xylophone, etc.
tremolo	Italian term for 'trembling', 'shaking'; a rapid reiteration of a single note through back-and-forth movements of the bow; equally, the rapid and repeated alternation of two notes
triad	a three-note chord, especially those including the root, third and fifth of a scale (C-E-G, A-C-E etc.) in any order
triplets	in duple metre, a grouping (or groupings) of three notes in the space of two (as in 'One-two / Buckle-my-shoe')
una corda	literally, 'one string'; using the soft pedal on the piano

unison	the simultaneous sounding of a single note by more than one singer or player, as in the congregational singing of a hymn
vibrato	a rapid, regular fluctuation in pitch, giving the note a ‘throbbing’ effect
variation	any decorative or otherwise purposeful alteration of a note, rhythm, timbre, etc.
vivace, vivacissimo	fast and lively, extremely fast and lively
vocalise	a wordless piece for solo voice; the most famous example is Rachmaninov’s
whole-tone	an interval comprising two semitones, as in C–D on the piano; much of the music of the Orient, as well as of numerous folk cultures around the world, is built on whole-tone scales (see ‘pentatonic’ above)

# 10 Discography

**Music excerpts are taken from the following discs, available from Naxos.**

**Piano Sonatas No. 8 ‘Pathétique’,  
No. 14 ‘Moonlight’ & No. 23  
‘Appassionata’**

Jenő Jandó

*Naxos 8.550045*

**Overtures (Egmont / Coriolanus / Leonora  
No. 3 / Fidelio / Creatures of Prometheus /  
Ruins of Athens / Consecration of the  
House)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra / Stephen  
Gunzenhauser

*Naxos 8.550072*

**Piano Concertos Nos. 2 & 5 ‘Emperor’**

Stefan Vladar / Capella Istropolitana / Barry  
Wordsworth

*Naxos 8.550121*

**Violin Concerto • Romances Nos. 1 & 2**

Takako Nishizaki / Slovak Philharmonic  
Orchestra / Kenneth Jean

*Naxos 8.550149*

**Piano Sonatas Nos. 1, 2 & 3**

Jenő Jandó

*Naxos 8.550150*

**Piano Sonatas Nos. 30–32**

Jenő Jandó

*Naxos 8.550151*

**Piano Sonatas Nos. 11 & 29**

**‘Hammerklavier’**

Jenő Jandó

*Naxos 8.550234*

**Violin Sonatas Opp. 23 and 96 • Mozart**

**Variations**

Takako Nishizaki / Jenő Jandó

*Naxos 8.550285*

**Mödlinger Dances • Contredanses •**

**German Dances • Minuets**

Capella Istropolitana / Oliver Dohnányi

*Naxos 8.550433*

**Piano Trios ‘Archduke’ and ‘Ghost’**

Jenő Jandó / Takako Nishizaki / Csaba Onczay

*Naxos 8.550442*

**Prisoners’ Chorus form Fidelio**

(German Operatic Choruses)

Various artists

*Naxos 8.550507*

**Piano Trios Op. 1, No. 3, Op. 44, WoO 38,  
Hess 48**

Stuttgart Piano Trio

*Naxos 8.550947*

**Chamber Music for Horns, Wind and  
Strings**

**Septet, Op. 20 • Quintet, H. 19 • Sextet, Op.  
81b**

Various artists

*Naxos 8.553090*

**Symphonies Nos. 1 & 6 ‘Pastoral’**

Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia / Béla Drahos

*Naxos 8.553474*

**Symphonies Nos 2 & 5**

Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia / Béla Drahos

*Naxos 8.553476*

**Symphonies Nos 4 & 7**

Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia / Béla Drahos

*Naxos 8.553477*

**Symphony No. 9 ‘Choral’**

Hasmik Papian, Soprano / Ruxandra Donose,

Mezzo-Soprano / Manfred Fink, Tenor /

Claudio Otelli, Bass-Baritone / Nicolaus

Esterházy Sinfonia and Chorus / Béla Drahos

*Naxos 8.553478*

**String Quartets (Complete) Vol. 4**

**Op. 59, No. 1 ‘Razumovsky’ & Op. 95,**

**‘Quartetto serioso’**

Kodály Quartet

*Naxos 8.554181*

An excerpt is also taken from the Cavatina of Beethoven’s String Quartet in B flat, Op. 130 (Catalogue No. 454 070-2, available from Philips)

## Spoken Text 11

① If that old saying ‘in vino veritas’ (‘In wine, truth’) is reliable, then the sounds we’ve just heard should herald a revelation. And indeed they do. But of what? Well, to find that out, we’ll have to uncork another bottle.

② Music: Symphony No. 7 in A (finale)

Part of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony – music, by the composer’s own intention, to get drunk on. But to a purpose. Beethoven wasn’t a man to take his pleasures lightly. ‘Music,’ he said (or anyway is reported to have said – and it sounds like him) ...

Music is the wine which incites us to new creation; and I am the Bacchus who presses this glorious wine for mankind – and grants them drunkenness of the spirit. When they are again sober, they will have fished up much which they may take with them onto dry land.

In the course of this journey into Beethoven’s life and work we’ll have the opportunity to drink deeply of that wine, and to get acquainted with the self-styled Bacchus who created it. If now and again he seems to lack humility, there’s no denying his credentials.

I am well aware that God is nearer to me in my art than to others. I consort with Him without fear. I have always recognised and understood Him. Nor am I in the least anxious about the fate of my music. Its fate cannot be other than happy. Whoever succeeds in grasping it shall be absolved from all the misery that bows down other men.

Quite a claim. But Beethoven wasn't in fact being arrogant there – or at least not as arrogant as it sounds. He was talking about his own experience – not with the hollow condescension of a complacent priest, but as a survivor – a man who knew the difference between real joy and mere pleasure. In one way or another, most of the music he wrote proclaims that joy – yet much of it, maybe even most, was the product of immeasurable suffering.

Put at its most simplistic, Beethoven's life can be seen as a heroic battle against adversity, in which defiance gave way to submission, and, ultimately, to a transcendent vision in which such attitudes seem all but irrelevant. And in his music we may come as close as it's possible to get to solving the age-old riddle about the irresistible force meeting an immovable object.

③ Music: Hammerklavier Sonata, op. 106 (excerpt)

Beethoven the titanic wrestler, in the so-called 'Hammerklavier Sonata' – a mould-breaking work from the last decade of his life. But if we're to discover the nature of the immovable object in Beethoven's case, and if we're to understand the irresistible force with which it co-existed, we have to go back to the time and place of his birth. And almost at once we're confronted by the unusual.

④ Ludwig van Beethoven (also known as Louis, Luis, and even Luigi) was born in the smallish German town of Bonn in 1769, 1770 and 1772 (he was obviously destined to become original!). In fact, the first Ludwig was born in 1769, but like so many other children of that time, he died in his early infancy. The second Ludwig – of the same parentage – followed on some twenty

months later; and the third Ludwig never really existed, except in the fabrications of his alcoholic father.

Johann van Beethoven, a small-time, mediocre, alcoholic Court musician, saw in his obviously talented son the chance of some kind of worldly salvation for himself, and he ruthlessly set about trying to produce a second Mozart – Mozart, who had been the most flabbergasting (and the most profitable) child prodigy in the history of music. From the beginning, Beethoven paid dearly for his father's ambitions. More than one visitor to the house saw the little boy weeping as he practised.

I remember seeing him often, this tiny boy, standing on a footstool in front of the clavier, to which the implacable severity of his father had so early condemned him.

Beethoven's father frequently used violence when it came to making him start his musical studies. There were few days when he was not beaten in order to compel him to the piano. His father was not merely strict, but cruel, often locking him up in the black damp of the cellar, and often depriving him of food.

Upon returning drunk from the tavern at the midnight hour, he would frequently shake the sleeping child awake and force him to the piano, where he was compelled to practise until dawn.

But even then, Beethoven's stubbornness and resilience were deeply entrenched. He became an excellent pianist for his age, but he was certainly no second Mozart. So, his father, still clinging to the hope that his cynical ambitions might bear late fruit, appears to have reduced his son's age by two years. Hence Ludwig the third. Well, even that didn't do the trick. Ludwig the third seems to have known, well before anybody else did, that he was, plain and simple, Ludwig the only.

Even in childhood, Beethoven's attitude to tradition was something quite new in music, and it was later to change the course of history. With all the ruthlessness of genius, he took from the legacy of his elders only what made sense to him in terms of his own inner experience, and he discarded the rest. It made him very hard to teach, of course – students aren't supposed to know

so clearly what they want – and it made a mockery of his father’s crass ambitions for him. But these, in any case, were fading fast. Even with an expediently adjusted birth-date, Ludwig was growing up. And then, when he was seventeen, just after he’d met and played for Mozart, his mother died. She was only forty years old and had recently given birth to another child, a girl this time, bringing the number of children up to four (Beethoven also had two brothers). But ill-health and the wear and tear of years with an alcoholic, often abusive husband had left her prematurely aged. According to the disquieting testimony of those who knew her in her later years, she’d never once been seen to laugh. Nor had she ever lavished any obvious affection on her eldest son. Maternal hugs were not her style. But Beethoven adored her (and compared with her husband she must have seemed like an angel straight from heaven), and he’d been deeply moved and disturbed by her long and quiet suffering. With his father no longer of use to anyone, Beethoven, not yet eighteen, now took over full responsibility for the the family.

After a period of genuine poverty, bad health and bouts of menacing despair, this short, stubby, swarthy young genius began to discover his powers in earnest. He made new friends, including the first in a long line of influential noblemen, Count Waldstein, and he established himself as a pianist without rivals.

⑤ Music: Sonata in C, op. 2 No. 3 (finale)

⑥ To be a pianist without rivals in Bonn was one thing. In Vienna it was quite another. When Beethoven moved there in the early 1790s, the city housed more than three hundred professional pianists and upwards of six thousand piano students. Beethoven was determined to vanquish them all, and made no bones about it. He had a powerful competitive streak, and he entered, or in some cases actually engineered, a whole series of pianistic duels in which he toppled Vienna’s pianists from their perches, one after another. Among these was Joseph Gelinek, who scarcely knew what had hit him.

Satan himself must be hidden in that young man! I have never in my life heard anyone play like that! He improvised on a theme which I gave him as I never heard even Mozart improvise. Then he played some of his own compositions which are in the highest degree remarkable and magnificent. He overcomes all difficulties and draws effects from the piano such as the rest of us couldn't even allow ourselves to dream about.

Another virtuoso, Daniel Steibelt, was so mortified by his pianistic trouncing at Beethoven's hands that he fled the room before Beethoven had finished and refused from then on to attend any gathering at which Beethoven might also be present. And so it went.

Beethoven's piano-playing wasn't simply 'better' than anyone else's – that kind of thing is always going to be very personal and subjective – it was different in kind from everyone else's. Carl Czerny, who later became one of his pupils and a great connoisseur of piano-playing, was much struck by the contrast between Beethoven's playing and Mozart's.

Mozart favoured clear and markedly brilliant playing, based more on staccato than legato, and with a witty and lively execution. The pedal was rarely used and never necessary. The outstanding feature of Beethoven's playing, on the other hand, was a characteristic and passionate strength, alternating with all the charms of a smooth cantabile. He drew entirely new and daring sounds from the piano, partly by his use of the pedal, but also through the strict legato of his chords, which created a new type of singing tone and many other previously unimagined effects. His playing was spirited, grandiose and, especially in adagio, very full of feeling, and romantic. His performances, like his compositions, were tone-paintings of a very high order and conceived only for a total effect.

And as often as not, that total effect was emotional dynamite. This was particularly true when Beethoven improvised.

His improvisation was most brilliant and striking. In whatever company he might chance to be, he knew how to achieve such an effect upon every listener that frequently not an eye remained dry, while many would break out into loud sobs, for there was something wonderful in his expression in addition to the beauty and originality of his ideas and his spirited style of rendering them. After ending an improvisation of this kind, he would burst into loud laughter and banter his hearers on the emotion he caused in them. ‘You are all fools!’ he would cry.

Not an easy man – and certainly no diplomat. And in his exuberance he could be as thoughtless of his pianos as he often was of his friends. The composer Antonín Reicha discovered this to his cost.

He once asked me to turn pages for him. But I was mostly occupied in wrenching the strings of the piano which snapped, while the hammers stuck among the broken strings. Beethoven insisted on playing to the end, so back and forth I leapt, jerking out a string, disentangling a hammer, turning a page ... I worked harder than Beethoven.

But Beethoven was very much more, even in these earlyish days, than just a pianist and piano composer. He’d written a couple of cantatas, and a good deal of chamber music in which the piano plays no part and in 1795 he received what was then considered the very great honour of being commissioned to write the dances for the annual charity ball at the famous Redoutensaal. What few people knew at the time is the curious fact that he found it far easier to write such music than to dance to it.

⑦ German Dance, WoO 8, No. 4

⑧ One of the dances written by the 25-year-old Beethoven for the annual charity ball at Vienna’s Redoutensaal.

Dancing in Vienna, more, probably, than in any other city in the world, was almost an obsession in those days, and it was one of the things which helped to perpetuate the city's reputation as a citadel of genteel (and sometimes decidedly not genteel) frivolity. Ballrooms and dance halls were almost as common as the numerous cafes, taverns and beer halls. They were frequented by members of every class, often wearing masks to disguise their identity, because, as one upright historian indignantly proclaimed,

Many of these establishments, notwithstanding their decorous exteriors, are plainly institutions for more infamous purposes.

Prostitution was rife, and at every level – something which the young Beethoven deplored, warning his brother to be on guard against what he described as ‘the whole tribe of wicked women’. When someone put it to the Emperor that he should establish licensed brothels, he replied,

The walls would cost me nothing, but the expense of roofing would be quite ruinous, for I should have to cover the entire city.

Entertainments, on the streets and in the theatres were dominated by jugglers, puppeteers, rope dancers, acrobats and so on. The prevailing taste was for trivia rather than substance, escapism rather than philosophy, pleasure in preference to education. As one commentator of the time put it,

Good cheer is pursued in every quarter, and mirth worshipped in every form. What succeeds most here is buffoonery, and even the bettermost part of the reading public is satisfied with plays, romances and fairy tales.

But if there was escapism, there was much to escape from. Beneath the surface of gaiety lay the workings of a ruthless police state. Dissidents were commonly arrested, flogged and imprisoned, while hundreds of government spies had infiltrated almost every level of society. Beethoven had few illusions about the sort of place he'd moved into. In the summer of 1794, he wrote to a friend in Bonn,

We are having very hot weather here; and the Viennese are afraid that soon they will not be able to get any more ice cream. As the winter was so mild, ice is now scarce. Here various important people have been locked up; it is said that a revolution is about to break out – but I believe that so long as an Austrian can get his brown ale and his little sausages, he is not likely to revolt. People say that the gates leading to the suburbs are to be closed at 10 p.m. The soldiers have loaded their muskets and you dare not raise your voice here or the police will take you into custody.

In time to come, Beethoven himself would raise his voice, but for the moment he kept silent. Not because he was afraid to speak out, but because for the present he felt broadly content with the situation as it was. He had no basic quarrel with the nobility, who were his most important patrons, both present and prospective, and what he valued at least as much as his career was the sense of 'belonging'. In many ways, the noble and aristocratic families who welcomed him into their midst gave him a sense of comfort and security (and of being valued for himself) which he'd rarely felt within his own family.

There was also a curious, unspoken alliance between the repressive authorities and the broader world of culture. As in many despotic regimes, the police fully appreciated the pacifying effect which the arts could have. It was the police, of all unlikely people, who prevented the closure of one of Vienna's principal theatres. To quote from their official memorandum:

The people are accustomed to theatrical shows. In times like these, when the character of individuals

is affected by so many sufferings, the police are more than ever obliged to cooperate in the diversion of the citizens by moral means. The most dangerous hours of the day are the evening hours. These cannot be filled more innocently than in the theatre.

Unless it was in the home, playing music with friends. And there, even more than in the ballroom, Beethoven was ready and willing to provide the wherewithal. Far more interesting, among his non-piano works of the time – and far more engaging, too, than his dance music – is some of the chamber music he wrote for wind instruments, and for wind and strings combined. This too was entertainment, but here there was real musical conversation, with themes taken up and exchanged and developed, and all with a masterly deployment of instrumental tone colour.

⑨ Sextet in E flat, op. 81b (first movement)

⑩ Beethoven experienced much of his early Viennese life as a kind of liberation. Whereas in Bonn, as the unofficial head of the family, he'd had in many ways to subordinate his own life to the needs of others, in Vienna he could live for himself, he could savour the fruits of a kind of enlightened self-centredness. Now, for the first time, he could put himself first, and his prime duty was to fulfil what he increasingly accepted as his destiny. It didn't hurt, of course, that despite his somewhat coarse exterior and his provincial manners, he'd rapidly become the darling of the aristocracy, the wielders of power, and the talk of the town, first as a pianist, now, increasingly, as a composer. But he was well aware that all this had the potential to corrupt him as an artist. In his journal he would urge himself not to be deflected from what he now began to regard, and refer to, as his 'divine art'.

Courage! In spite of all bodily weaknesses my spirit shall rule ... This year must determine the complete man. Nothing must remain undone.

And that meant admitting, at least in theory, that in spite of his genius (which he freely acknowledged), there were aspects of his craft which he still needed to learn.

In the earliest phases of his Viennese life, Beethoven seems to have had lessons from practically everyone, if only to demonstrate how little he needed them. One of these, the esteemed pedagogue Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, is most memorable today for his magnificent verdict on Beethoven's future. Writing to a colleague, he warned,

If I were you, I shouldn't have anything to do with him. He has learned nothing and will never amount to anything.

The most notable of Beethoven's teachers at this point was none other than the greatest and most famous composer in the world, Joseph Haydn – 'From whom,' Beethoven loudly proclaimed,

From whom I learned absolutely nothing.'

In the music of this heady period in his life, doubt doesn't get much of a look-in. Humour, on the other hand, does.

#### ☐ Trio in C minor, op. 1 no. 1 (finale)

Music from one of the three Trios, Op. 1. When they were first performed, Haydn was in the audience. He quite liked the first two but the Third worried him. He felt the presence in it of a potentially destructive element. And was Beethoven humbled or discouraged by this reaction from the world's most famous and admired musician? Not a bit of it. The fault, as far as he was concerned, was entirely Haydn's, who in any case (so said Beethoven) was quite obviously motivated by envy and malice. Haydn malicious? Not likely. But that was the Beethoven of

those early triumphs: ambitious, arrogant, invincible and strangely naive, almost childlike. Well, there was no ‘almost’ about it. Many of Beethoven’s friends and contemporaries, throughout his life, remarked on the childlike element in his make-up.

Before God – his sense of that which was greater than Man – Beethoven was genuinely humble. He was genuine to a fault in everything he did or felt. For Humanity, with its inescapable suffering and its dauntless resilience, he felt a passionate, if largely symbolic love. But for the generality of Man, represented from an early age by his father, Beethoven felt on the whole a contempt which he did little to conceal. ‘The devil take you!’ he once wrote.

Don’t talk to me about your ethics and your moralising. Power. Power is the morality of men who stand above the rest. It is also mine.

And elsewhere, speaking of men who thought of themselves as his intimate friends,

I consider them mere instruments, on which I play when it pleases me. I value them according as they are useful to me.

Well, perhaps. But particularly at this time of his life, he seemed to value them for very much more. In his dizzying rise to the pinnacles of artistic power and social prestige, he really did appear to delight in the company of his friends. And they in his. By all accounts, he relished conversation and laughter, be it in taverns or in palaces, and he discovered that against the odds, he was intensely attractive to women. Well, some women – and very highborn ladies they often were. But Beethoven’s charms, like his sense of etiquette, were not always instantly obvious.

Whenever he came to visit, he used to stick his head in the doorway and make sure that there was no one there whom he disliked. He was small and very plain-looking, with an ugly red, pock-marked face.

His hair was dark and hung shaggily around his face. His clothes were commonplace in the extreme. Moreover, he spoke in a strong dialect and in a rather common manner. In general, his whole being did not give the impression of any particular cultivation; in fact, he was unmannerly in both gesture and demeanour. He was also very haughty. I myself have seen the mother of Prince Lichnowsky, Countess Thun, going down on her knees to him as he lolled on the sofa, and begging him to play something. But Beethoven continued stubbornly to refuse.

An elderly Countess on her knees before an uncouth piano-player in his middle twenties – and a Countess, what's more, who'd been a patron of Mozart, Haydn and Gluck. And another noble, Prince Lichnowsky, gave his household staff strict instructions that if ever he and Beethoven should arrive at the door together, it was Beethoven who should be attended first.

Beethoven's almost wholesale adoption by the nobility of Vienna was something as new as his music. Haydn, by contrast (he was now in his middle sixties), had only recently discarded the servants' livery which he'd worn for decades in the service of the Esterhazy family. It's obvious from all the contemporary documentation that Beethoven had real charm and could be wonderful company. But when it came to observing the trappings of nobility he showed an almost aggressive disdain.

Etiquette and all that goes with it was something Beethoven never learned or wanted to learn; thus his behaviour often caused great embarrassment to the suite of the Archduke Rudolph when Beethoven first attended him. They attempted to force him to learn the formalities he was expected to observe, but he found this insupportable. He did, at one time, promise to improve in this – but that was as far as it went. The Archduke gave orders that Beethoven should be allowed to go his own way without hindrance. That, he explained, was simply the way he was.

From the outset of his relations with Viennese nobility, Beethoven insisted, not by stating as much

but simply through his behaviour, that he be treated on equal terms. As he later put it, to one of his several royal patrons,

Prince! Prince? What you are, you are by circumstance and birth. What I am, I am through myself. Of princes there have been and will be thousands. Of Beethovens there is only one.

And the princes knew it. But here we come to one of the stranger aspects of Beethoven's biography. Whether he himself started it we're never likely to know but it was widely rumoured that he was not in fact the son of the provincial, alcoholic Johann van Beethoven at all but the illegitimate offspring of a Prussian king. A Prussian king? The Prussian king – Frederick the Great, no less. This bizarre story flourished for years and found its way into several dictionaries and encyclopedias, and Beethoven himself remained silent on the subject until the last few years of his life.

The most curious thing about Beethoven's 'pretence' of nobility is the fact that it was so unnecessary. Almost from the moment of his arrival in Vienna he'd been embraced and celebrated by the highest aristocracy in the land, to whom it was completely immaterial whether he was nobly born or not. They were as impressed by his nobility of spirit as he himself was. They revelled in his genius, they delighted in his exuberant self-confidence, and given his obviously incorruptible integrity and his almost superhuman ability to manipulate the feelings of his listeners, many of them must actually have felt flattered by his attentions. But none of this would have been so, or certainly not to this degree, if it weren't for his irrepressibly irreverent sense of humour. They loved his jokes. They loved the fact that he was so utterly unfazed by their rank. They loved his power. And his gift for friendship paid rich dividends at almost every social level. Indeed, the Beethoven of these early Viennese years seems, for the first time in his life, to have been almost intemperately happy. All things considered, he was having a very good time.

12 Music: Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat (finale)

13 As the eighteenth century drew to a close, Beethoven, now in his mid 20s and riding the crest of the wave, made a discovery which truly terrified him. For some time – the better part of two years – he kept it to himself, though it brought about changes in his behaviour that must have baffled his friends. The first time he divulged his terrible secret was in a letter to a friend in Bonn – a doctor, as it happened.

You want to know something about my present situation. Well, on the whole it is not at all bad. Indeed I am very pleasantly situated. But that jealous demon, my health, has thrown a mean spoke in my wheel: for some time my hearing has been growing progressively weaker - on top of which my ears now hum and buzz continuously day and night. And my abdomen, which was ever in a wretched state, has also grown steadily worse. The truth is that in spite of my great successes I have been leading a most miserable existence. For two years I have avoided almost all social gatherings because it is impossible for me to say to people, 'I am deaf'. If I belonged to any other profession it would be easier, but in my profession it is a truly dreadful state.

Dreadful enough to have driven a number of similarly afflicted musicians insane (Smetana, in a later generation, was a particularly famous case). However much Beethoven may have tried to conceal his deafness, it was only a matter of time before it would be obvious to everyone. Ferdinand Ries, a pupil and close friend, recalled with a terrible poignancy the day he first noticed it.

Beethoven took particular pleasure in wandering through the countryside. One day we set out happily together and soon found ourselves in lonely woods on the beautiful mountain slopes of Baden. After having walked for about an hour, we sat down to rest in the grass. Suddenly, from the slope on the other

side of the valley, came the sound of a shepherd's pipe, whose unexpected melody under the clear blue sky, in the deep solitude of the woods, made a remarkable impression on me. Since Beethoven was sitting next to me, I commented on this. The sounds continued so bright and clear that it was not possible to miss a single note. He listened, but I was able to see from his expression that he had heard nothing. In order not to sadden or alarm him, I pretended that I too could no longer hear them. But the sweet fascination which these sounds had exercised on me at first now turned into a feeling of the most profound sadness. Almost without realising it, I walked along silently, sunk in sad thoughts, at the side of my great master, who, as before, was occupied with his own inner meditations, continued to hum indistinguishable phrases and tones, and to sing aloud. When after several hours we returned home, he sat down impatiently at the piano and exclaimed, almost angrily, 'Now I shall play something for you.' With irresistible fire and mighty force he played what was later to become the Allegro of the great Sonata Appassionata. That is a day which will remain forever etched upon my mind.

<sup>14</sup> Music: Sonata in F minor, Op. 57 'Appassionata' (finale)

<sup>15</sup> Almost as though it had been planned from on high, the dawn of the nineteenth century saw a major upswing in Beethoven's fortunes as a composer. By comparison, the successes of the previous decade now began to seem like little more than a glorious introduction. In 1800, he was relieved of financial anxieties by an annuity from Prince Lichnowsky, in whose home he was then living. In the Spring of that year he gave an immensely successful concert of his own works, one of which, the delicious Septet, became, as Beethoven saw it, so disproportionately popular that he began to wish he'd never written it.

<sup>16</sup> Music: Septet in B flat (Scherzo)

Part of the Septet in B flat, composed in 1800. Other works of that year included the First

Symphony, the A minor Violin Sonata, Op. 23 and the still little-known but wonderful sonata for the unusual combination of piano and horn. And the harvest of major works in the next year was richer still, and larger. Almost more important, though, in the short-term interests of Beethoven's career, was the catalogue of his works which were now in print. As he wrote to a friend, he was doing very nicely out of it:

My compositions now bring in a considerable amount, and I can truthfully say that I receive more offers of commissions than I can possibly accept. Moreover, for every composition I have six or seven publishers and could have more if I should want them. People no longer bargain with me: I state my price and they pay.

Despite the sale of his works and the generous annuity from Lichnowsky, Beethoven devoted a certain amount of his time to teaching, and it was at around this time that the ten-year old Carl Czerny was taken to audition for him.

After gaining admission to the house in which Beethoven was living, my father and I climbed up, as if in a tower, to the sixth floor, where a rather grubby-looking servant announced us to Beethoven and then showed us in. We found ourselves in a very barren-looking room, papers and clothes strewn all over the place, a few boxes, bare walls, hardly a single chair, save for a rickety one by the piano. Beethoven was dressed in a jacket of some shaggy dark grey cloth, and trousers of the same material, so that he immediately reminded me of Robinson Crusoe, which I had just then read. The coal-black hair, cut rather in the style of a Roman emperor, stood up around his head. His black beard, unshaven for several days, darkened the lower part of his already dark-complexioned face. Also, I noticed at a glance, as children are wont to do, that his ears were stuffed with cotton wool which seemed to have been dipped in some yellow fluid. Yet at the time not the slightest sign of deafness was apparent. His hands were very hairy, and his fingers, especially at the tips, were unusually broad ... I played to him his own Pathétique

Sonata, after which he turned to my father and said ‘The boy has talent. I will teach him.’

The so-called ‘Pathétique’ Sonata was in some ways the most revolutionary and strikingly original work Beethoven had yet produced. Enough so to alarm the more conservative of Vienna’s many piano teachers. For many of their more advanced pupils, on the other hand, it was the most exciting keyboard work yet written. One of these was Ignaz Moscheles.

At this time I heard from some of my fellow pupils that there was a young composer in Vienna who wrote the most extraordinary stuff, which no-one could either play or understand; a highly developed music in conflict with all the rules. This composer’s name, I learned, was Beethoven. When I went to the circulating library in order to satisfy my curiosity about this eccentric genius, I found his Pathétique Sonata. Since my pocket money did not suffice to buy it, I secretly copied it out. The novelty of the style fascinated me, and I was seized by such an enthusiastic admiration of it that I went so far as to forget myself and tell my teacher about my new discovery. This gentleman reminded me of his instructions and warned me against playing or studying such wild and eccentric productions. I paid no notice, and found in Beethoven’s music such consolation, pleasure and excitement as no other composer had ever given me.

**[7]** Music: Sonata Pathétique, op. 13 (Exc.)

**[8]** Whatever the state of Beethoven’s hearing, it doesn’t seem to have affected his piano playing yet. According to Anton Schindler, its transformational magic remained intact – at least for the moment.

What the Sonata Pathétique was in Beethoven’s hands was something one had to hear repeatedly in order to be quite certain that it was the same already-well-known work. Every single thing became in

his hands, a new creation, in which his always legato playing, one of the particular characteristics of his execution, played an important part.

If the harvest of works in 1800 was impressive, it was all but dwarfed by Beethoven's output in the following year. He scored his greatest hit yet with his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, he composed the famous *Spring Sonata* for violin and piano, the six brilliant string quartets, Op. 18, and four of his ground-breaking piano sonatas, including the so-called 'Funeral March', the famous 'Moonlight' and the 'Pastoral', which for some time was his favourite piano work to date. This was not entirely unrelated to the fact that he was in love. As he wrote to a friend that autumn:

I am now living a more agreeable life, inasmuch as I go about more among my fellow men. You cannot imagine how empty, how sad my life has been for the last two years. My weak hearing haunted me everywhere, like a ghost, and so I avoided people. The change has been brought about by a lovable charming girl who loves me and whom I love. So after two years I enjoy a few happy moments, and this is the first time I feel that marriage could bring happiness with it. Unfortunately, I am not of her class, and now – I naturally could not marry – I must somehow keep going as best I can.

The 'lovable, charming girl' was the very beautiful Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, and she was all of seventeen. Beethoven was often in love, but almost invariably it was with women who were unavailable, whether it was a matter of class, or age, or the more usual fact that they were already married. There's no documentary evidence that Giulietta was also in love with Beethoven, but more than twenty years later he returned to the subject and was more insistent than ever

It is perfectly true. I was very much loved by her – far more than her husband ever was.

It must be said that Beethoven's notions of courtship were as individual as everything else about

him. Giulietta was his pupil – this is how they came to know each other – and years later she recalled her lessons with him as though they'd been yesterday.

He allowed me to play his compositions, but he was exceedingly severe with me until my interpretation was correct to the very last tiny detail. He insisted on a light touch, but he himself was often violent, throwing the music around and tearing it up. He was also very ugly – but noble, sensitive and cultured. Most of the time he was shabbily dressed.

Beethoven was deeply shocked by her early marriage, which she announced to him herself, and he would have derived cold comfort from learning that it was a disastrous match. As it is, he immortalised her name by dedicating to her what's probably the most famous sonata ever written.

<sup>[19]</sup> Music: Piano Sonata in C sharp minor, op. 27, no. 2 (exc.)

Part of the so-called 'Moonlight' Sonata. Not so-called by Beethoven but by a German critic who remarked that the first movement reminded him of moonlight reflected on the surface of Lake Lucerne.

<sup>[20]</sup> Beethoven's prolific output of one masterpiece after another suggests that his return to society, spurred by his love for Giulietta, and what he took to be her love for him, acted on him like a bracing tonic. As a composer, he was on a winning streak, and he exulted in it.

Ah! I feel that my youth is just beginning! My physical strength has for some time past been steadily gaining, and with it my mental powers. Each day I move a little further towards the goal which I sense but cannot describe. Grant me but half freedom from my affliction, and you will see me as happy as it is possible to be!

In 1802, the winning streak continued. From it come the ebullient and humorous Piano Sonata in B flat, op. 22, the great Op. 30 Sonatas for Violin and Piano, the String Quintet, Op. 29, the so-called ‘Eroica’ Variations the first set of Bagatelles for the piano – and one of the sunniest, most high-spirited works he ever wrote, the Symphony No. 2 in D:

☐<sup>21</sup> Music: Symphony no.2 in D, finale (exc.)

☐<sup>22</sup> Music is often said to be a window on the soul, and if that were reliably so, then we should be pretty safe in identifying that symphony as the work of an exuberant young genius, brimming over with the sheer joy of being alive and at the peak of his incomparable powers. If we look for further evidence in the writing of the same composer at the same period, but this time in the medium of words, then by the same token we should find our impression confirmed. Well. Do we?

Among the papers found in Beethoven’s house after his death is a very strange document indeed, written to his brothers at around the same time as he composed the Second Symphony. It’s been known ever since as the ‘Heiligenstadt Testament’, Heiligenstadt being the suburb of Vienna where Beethoven was staying at the time. It’s an immensely long letter, amounting in effect to a will, and in many ways it’s the most significant, revealing and disturbing verbal document he ever wrote. And its strangeness is already evident in its opening words. ‘Oh ye men,’ he writes (a curious way of addressing his brothers) ...

Oh ye men, who consider me to be hostile, obstinate or misanthropic, how unjust you are to me, for you do not know the secret cause of that which makes me seem so to you. My heart and my soul, since my childhood, have ever been filled with tender feelings of good will: I was even ready to perform great deeds. But consider that for six years now I have been afflicted with an incurable condition, made worse by incompetent physicians, deceived for year after year by the hope of an improvement and now

obliged to face the prospect of a permanent disability, the healing of which may take years or may even prove to be quite impossible. Born with an ardent, lively temperament, and also inclined to the distractions of society, I was, at an early age, obliged to seclude myself and to live my life in solitude. If, once in a while, I attempted to ignore all this, oh how harshly would I be driven back by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing; yet it was not possible for me to say: speak louder, shout, for I am deaf. Alas, how would it be possible for me to admit to a weakness of the one sense that should be perfect to a higher degree in me than in others, the one sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection that few others of my profession have ever possessed. No, I cannot do it. So forgive me if you see me draw back from your company which I would so gladly share. My misfortune is doubly hard to bear, inasmuch as I will be misunderstood. For me there can be no recreation in the society of others, no intelligent conversation, no mutual exchange of ideas; only as much as is required by the most pressing needs can I venture into society. I am obliged to live like an outcast. If I venture into the company of men, I am overcome by a burning terror, inasmuch as I fear to find myself in the danger of allowing my condition to be noticed. What humiliation when someone standing next to me could hear from a distance the sound of a flute whereas I heard nothing. Or, someone could hear the shepherd singing, and that also I did not hear. Such experience brought me near to despair. It would have needed little for me to put an end to my life. It was art only that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me to be impossible to leave the world before I had brought forth all that I felt destined to bring forth. Almighty God, Thou lookest down into my innermost being; Thou knowest that the love mankind and the desire to do good dwell therein. Oh men, when you once shall read this, reflect then that you have wronged me. You, my brothers, as soon as I am dead, if Professor Schmidt be still alive, request him in my name to describe my malady, and let him attach this written document to the report of my ailment, so that, as far as possible, the world may be reconciled with me after my death.

23 Music: Symphony No. 3 in E flat 'Eroica' (Funeral March)

Part of the immense slow movement from Beethoven's Third Symphony, the so-called 'Eroica'. And that music is not irreconcilable with the dark night of the soul. There (even in the formalised ritual of a funeral march) we can at least glimpse the bleak spirit which fills the 'Heiligenstadt Testament'.

[24] The immediate cause of Beethoven's despairing words in the 'Heiligenstadt Testament' was obviously the loss of his hearing. And though no-one could reasonably doubt the reality of his suffering, it should be mentioned, if only for historical accuracy, that until his final few years, almost up to his last year, in fact, Beethoven's deafness was nothing like as absolute as posterity has chosen to believe. Nevertheless, it was, of course, a cruel and deeply unsettling affliction, and there's evidence, not only in the 'Heiligenstadt Testament' but in the testimony of his friends, that it may well have driven him to the brink of suicide.

As leaves in the autumn fall and wither, likewise has hope faded for me ... O Providence! Do but grant me one day of pure joy. For so long now, the inner echo of real joy has been unknown to me ... It is only virtue – and my art – that have stayed my hand when I should otherwise have put an end to my life.

Some claim that he did actually try, but the evidence is slim. What seems beyond argument is the fact that, like most of us, Beethoven's attitudes to death were confused and often contradictory.

Whenever it shall come, I go to meet it joyfully. If it comes before I have had the opportunity to fulfil all my artistic destiny, then, despite my hard fate, it shall have come too soon, and I shall wish that it had come later. Nevertheless, I shall be content, for will it not free me from a condition of endless suffering? Come when thou wilt, I go bravely to meet thee. Farewell, but pray my good brothers, do not forget me wholly. I deserve it from you, since in life I have often given thought of how to make you happy. Be ye so.

First he's addressing death in person, as it were; then, with no transition, he's addressing his brothers again. Well there are simply no two ways about it. Whatever one makes of the 'Heiligenstadt Testament', it's clear beyond doubt that Beethoven was going through an inner crisis of gigantic proportions.

And all this brings us back to, and beyond, the strange apparent lack of connection between a composer's work and his or her state of mind at the time of writing it. If the 'Testament' and the Second Symphony tell conflicting stories about Beethoven's innermost feelings, what can we safely deduce from the 'Eroica' – not just the Funeral March but the whole work? Well, thereby hangs a tale which no survey of Beethoven's career can easily leave out.

Beethoven originally wrote the work in tribute to Napoleon, whom he then admired practically to the point of reverence, and the symphony was to bear his name in its title. When Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor, though, in 1804, Beethoven, like many of his distinguished contemporaries, felt both outraged and betrayed. His friend and pupil Ferdinand Ries takes up the story:

I was the first person to inform him of Bonaparte's proclamation. Beethoven at once flew into a fearful rage, crying out, 'So he too is nothing but an ordinary mortal. Now he will trample underfoot all the Rights of Man and indulge only his ambition. He will now set himself on high, like all the others, and become a tyrant!' With these words he crossed to his desk, seized the title-page from the top, tore it up completely, and threw it on the floor. The first page was written out again, and it was only now that that the work received the title *Sinfonia Eroica*.

In the light of what we know about Beethoven's life at the time, it seems clear that the real hero of the symphony, consciously or otherwise, wasn't Napoleon in the first place but Beethoven himself. Or put it another way: that the central preoccupation of the work isn't with any individual hero but with the nature of heroism itself, as perceived and acknowledged by Beethoven in the

light of his own recent experience. The ‘Eroica’ can be seen as Beethoven’s own answer to the ‘Heiligenstadt Testament’. And if its four huge movements follow any specific ‘programme’, as nineteenth-century critics seem to have insisted that it must, it has to do with the heroism of confronting and overcoming despair.

Whatever its ‘meaning’ – if music can be said to have such a thing beyond itself – the ‘Eroica’ was a major landmark not only in Beethoven’s life but in the history of music. Never before had music been so obviously and overwhelmingly rooted in the individual experience of its composer, never had it assumed such epic proportions (the first movement alone is as long as many complete symphonies in the 18th-century). Nor had unflinching intellect and passionate emotion ever been married with such inescapable logic. The sketchbooks in which Beethoven slowly, even painfully, groped his way to the ultimate truth and power of the ‘Eroica’ is itself a kind of heroic document. Despite the immensity of his genius, Beethoven wasn’t a composer like Mozart or Schubert from whom inspired ideas seemed to flow with perfect ease. From the very beginning, he was wrestler, a man who knew that in order to succeed you need the courage to fail; if you want to be right, you need the courage to be wrong. Some of his early sketches are, in fact, breathtakingly ordinary. In some of them you’d scarcely even recognise talent, let alone genius. But slowly, laboriously, Beethoven bends these unpromising materials to his purpose. For Beethoven struggle and composition were almost synonymous. What makes the ‘Eroica’ heroic is its demonstration of the sheer indomitable triumph of the human will.

☞ Music: Symphony No. 3 in E flat ‘Eroica’ (finale)

☞ A composer changing the course of musical history is bound to encounter opposition along the way, and it was with the ‘Eroica’ that Beethoven began to lose much of his hitherto loyal and enthusiastic audience. The critic for the *Allgemeine Musicalische Zeitung* spoke for many when he wrote:

This long and extremely taxing work is actually a protracted, daring and wild fantasy. There is no lack of striking and beautiful passages, which reveal the energy and talent of their creator, but more often the work appears to lose itself in anarchy ... This reviewer undoubtedly belongs to Beethoven's most sincere admirers, but he must admit to finding too much here that is bizarre and shrill. An overall view is all but impossible to form, and a sense of unity is almost entirely missing.

The sheer length and concentration of the work baffled many an otherwise sympathetic listener, and the same large-scale architectural plan began to be a feature of Beethoven's work generally. It wasn't just the fickle Viennese audience, either, who had trouble following Beethoven through his latest, uncompromising phase. Such close musical colleagues as the violinist Schuppanzigh, for instance, were baffled by the three great string quartets which Beethoven wrote for the Russian Count Rasumovsky in 1807. Again the span of the works was unprecedented (almost twice the average length of a quartet by Haydn), so was the sustained emotional intensity. At 38, Beethoven was already writing, as he once put it, 'for a later age'. He was writing pure music, straight from the heart and refined with a ruthless concentration and intellectual control. Indeed to an extent which no previous composer had dared dream of, he was writing not for but beyond the players of his own time. When Schuppanzigh complained that a passage in one of the quartets was unplayable, Beethoven was unmoved.

What do I care for your miserable fiddle when the spirit moves me?!

Like athletes and scientists through the ages, he was pushing the frontiers of the possible beyond their known limits. He was consciously forcing the pace of musical evolution. And today, of course, fiddlers (miserable and otherwise) can play everything he wrote. But the technical, the instrumental challenges of Beethoven's great quartets are as nothing compared with the emotional and spiritual experience which they were designed to convey. In the slow movement of the second

‘Rasumovsky’ quartet, itself almost a quarter of an hour in length, Beethoven seems to speak of his own inner loneliness with an immediacy which can make the listener feel almost intrusive.

<sup>27</sup> Razumovsky Quartet No. 1 , pp. 59 no. 1, Adagio (exc.)

<sup>28</sup> Not long before he wrote that music, Beethoven had experienced his third rebuff by a woman to whom he either proposed marriage, or at least desired it. And at this point in his life he seems to have liked to keep it all within the family, as it were. Their family, not his, of course. Having lost one countess, Giulietta, he now fell in love with another, her cousin Josephine. Still later, he would fall in love with her sister, Therese – but for the moment that’s another story.

Josephine, forced into an unhappy marriage but recently widowed, had suffered a nervous breakdown following the birth of her fourth child. At around this time she also started having piano lessons with Beethoven, whose chivalrous instincts quickly developed into an intense, romantic passion. Whether she ever actively reciprocated it we don’t know, but from a characteristically clumsy letter, explaining his recent state of mind, there’s no doubt whatever that he believed she did.

It is true that I haven’t been as active as I should have been – but a great inner unhappiness has for a long time robbed me of my usual buoyancy, ever since my feelings of love for you, O desirable J., began to spring up within me, and this increased further. When we are together, undisturbed, then you shall be told all about my real suffering and of the struggle which has gone on within me for some time between life and death. A fact which for a long time made me doubt whether there can really be any happiness at all in life on this earth – now it is not half so desperate - for I have won your heart! Oh, I know for certain what this will mean to me. My activity will increase once again and – and this I promise you by all I hold highest and most precious, in a short time I will be there, worthier of myself and of yourself. Oh, if only you would be willing to establish my happiness through your love – to

increase it. Oh, my beloved, it is not a desire for the opposite sex which draws me to you. No, you, your whole self, with all your characteristics, have fettered all my feelings, my entire sensitivity, to you. When I came to you I had made the firmest decision not to allow even the tiniest spark of love to light up within me. You overwhelmed me, whether you did it willingly or unwillingly. O Heavens, what more could I not tell you – how I think of you – what I feel for you – but how weak, how poor in spirit is this language – at least mine.

Let our love endure for a long, long time. It is noble – based so much on mutual respect and friendship – indeed the very similarities in so many things – in thinking and feeling. Oh let me hope that your heart will long beat for me. Mine can only cease beating for you when it no longer beats at all. O my beloved, keep well! But I also hope that you may be happy through me. Otherwise I would be – selfish.

Love letters rarely bring out the best in their writers, linguistically speaking, but Beethoven's letters to Josephine show him at his most inarticulate. No-one was more aware than he that words were not his strong point, but in the case of these particular letters, the inarticulate sometimes borders on the incoherent.

Oh why is there no language which can express what is far above all mere regard - far above everything – that we can never describe – Oh, who can name you – and not feel that however much he could speak about you - that would never attain – to you – only in music – Alas, am I not too proud when I believe that music is more at my command than words – You, you, my all, my happiness – alas, no – even in my music I cannot do so, although in this respect thou, Nature, hast not stinted me with thy gifts. Yet there is too little for you. Beat, thou, in silence, poor heart - that is all you can do, nothing more – for you – always for you – only you – eternally you – only you until I sink into the grave – my refreshment – my all. Oh, Creator, watch over her – bless her days – rather let all calamities fall on me – Only you – Even if you had not fettered me again to life, yet you would have meant everything to me.

And what were Josephine's feelings for the man who wrote these heartfelt outpourings? It's hard to say. Her affection and admiration no-one could doubt. But letters like these, and an undated letter from Josephine herself, presumably written at roughly the same time, suggest a certain confusion of mind on her part. But the overall message comes through loud and clear.

My own spirit, which was enthusiastic for you even before I knew you, received nourishment from your inclination. A feeling which lies deep within my heart and is not capable of expression, made me love you. Before I met you, your music made me enthusiastic for you – the goodness of your character, your inclination towards me increased my enthusiasm – this prerogative which you granted me, the pleasure of being with you, could have been the greatest jewel of my life – if you loved me less sensually. Because I cannot satisfy this sensual love you are angry with me – but I would have to destroy sacred bonds if I were to give heed to your desires. Believe me that the fulfilment of my duties causes me the greatest suffering – and that surely the motives which guide my conduct are noble.

Well maybe. But the letter isn't entirely convincing. The 'sacred bonds' she mentions concern a vow of chastity she claimed to have taken on her unloved husband's death, but such a vow seems unlikely in the light of what we know about her character and conduct both before and after, and her apparently chaste discomfort with Beethoven's sensuality can't be as straightforward as she makes it sound. It's quite clear from the diaries of Therese that both sisters were given to bouts of promiscuity, in which Josephine alone gave herself (these are Therese's words) 'freely and unconcernedly'. It would be nice to think (and it's certainly possible) that Beethoven didn't know that.

As things gradually cooled between Beethoven and Josephine, his intimacy with her sister Therese steadily increased. During this period he seems at least partially to have come to terms with his deafness. On a page of sketches for the Rasumovsky quartets, he wrote in pencil, 'Let your deafness no longer be a secret – even in art.' Accordingly, he now turned out one masterpiece

after another, many of them radiating a kind of triumphant serenity. Among them was the great Violin Concerto in D, which most people are agreed remains the greatest ever written.

29 Music: Violin Concerto in D, Op. 61, First movement (exc.)

Part of the almost symphonic Violin Concerto in D major, which had its first performance two days before Christmas in 1806.

Few great works have had a more inauspicious unveiling. The soloist, one Franz Clement, has gone down in history not so much because he gave the first performance (which he apparently read at first sight) but because, in the process, he entertained the audience, mercifully between movements, by playing on one string with the fiddle held upside down.

30 In 1808, Beethoven mounted another, long-awaited concert at which he unveiled a number of his most recent works. The programme took four hours and included the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Choral Fantasy for piano, orchestra, soloists and chorus, a solo improvisation by Beethoven himself, the aria ‘Ah! Perfido’ and two movements from the Mass in C. To say that the evening was a mixed affair is to put it mildly. An eyewitness to it was the composer-conductor Louis Spohr.

Beethoven was playing a new concerto of his, but already at the first tutti, forgetting that he was the soloist, he jumped up and began to conduct in his own peculiar fashion. At the first big accent he threw out his arms so wide that he knocked over both lamps from the music stand of the piano. The audience laughed, and Beethoven was so beside himself over this disturbance that he stopped the orchestra and made them start again. Seyfried, worried for fear that this would happen again in the same place, took the precaution of ordering two choirboys to stand next to Beethoven and to hold the lamps in their hands. One of them innocently stepped closer and followed the music from the piano part. But when

the fatal moment burst upon us once more, the poor boy received from Beethoven's right hand such a sharp slap in the face that in sheer terror he dropped the lamp on the floor. The other, more wary boy, who had been anxiously following Beethoven's movements, succeeded in avoiding the blow by ducking in time. If the audience had laughed the first time, they now indulged in a truly Bacchanalian riot. Beethoven broke out in such a fury that when he struck the first chord of the solo he broke six strings. Every effort of the true music-lovers to restore calm and attention remained unavailing for some time; thus the first Allegro of the Concerto was completely lost to the audience. After this accident, Beethoven wanted to give no more concerts.

Not surprising. It's a strange fact that away from the piano – and sometimes at it, as we've heard – Beethoven was one of the clumsiest men who ever lived.

Beethoven was most awkward, even bungling, in his behaviour; his clumsy movements were entirely lacking in grace. It often seemed that he could scarcely pick anything up without dropping or breaking it. Everything in his rooms appeared to have been knocked over, soiled or destroyed. How he ever managed to shave himself at all remains difficult to understand, even considering the frequent cuts on his cheeks. A further peculiarity is that, try as he might, he could never learn to dance in time with the music.

It's hard to believe, but there are many other witnesses who tell the same story. From this, it comes as no great surprise that Beethoven as a conductor was ... well, to say the least, individual.

When it came to conducting, our Beethoven could in no way be called a model, and the orchestra had to pay heed lest it be misled by its mentor, for he thought only of his tone-poems, and was ceaselessly engaged in calling attention to their authentic expression by means of manifold gesticulations. He was accustomed to indicate a diminuendo by trying to make himself smaller and smaller, and at the

pianissimo he would slip down under the conductor's desk, so to say. As the tonal masses increased in volume, he too seemed to swell, as though out of a stage trap door, and with the entrance of the entire body of instrumental tone he would rise up onto the very tips of his toes, until swaying in the air with his arms, he seemed to be trying to float up into the clouds. He was all active movement, no organic part of him was idle, and the whole man might be compared to a perpetuum mobile. When he observed that the players were entering into his intentions and playing together with increasing ardour, inspired by the magical power of his creations, his face would be transfigured with joy.

And given the unhappinesses, even tragedies, of his personal life, it's very easy to miss the fact that joy is not only a central feature of Beethoven's music, but perhaps even the dominant one. And this transcendent joy is one of the lynchpins of his enduring reputation as the greatest composer who ever lived.

At the time of that marathon concert in 1808, Beethoven, not yet forty, was probably the most popular, certainly the most widely known composer in the world. Controversial, of course. No revolutionary is ever universally loved. To many conservatives, in fact, he was a monster, a wilfully destructive menace to the noble traditions of Mozart and Haydn. And their presumption was sometimes breathtaking.

All impartial musicians and music lovers are agreed that there was never anything so incoherent, shrill, chaotic and ear-splitting as Beethoven's music. The most piercing dissonances clash in a truly atrocious harmony, and a few puny ideas only increase the disagreeable and deafening effect.

All impartial musicians and music lovers indeed!

The groundswell of what Moscheles described as 'Beethoven fever' swept right across the Habsburg Empire, particularly amongst the younger generation. No serious composer was enjoying better sales than Beethoven, no composer of such comparative youth appeared so

regularly on concert programmes. Yet Beethoven looked on all this with a curious, and apparently quite irrational sense of foreboding. Despite his success, he became obsessed by financial anxieties and fearful for his immediate future. As he confessed to a friend:

Sometimes I feel that I shall soon go mad in consequence of my unmerited fame. Fortune is seeking me out and for that very reason I almost dread some fresh calamity.

But none came. At least not yet. In 1809, his groundless financial worries were laid to rest when the Archduke Rudolf, along with the Princes Kinsky and Lobkowitz, settled on him a comfortable annuity designed to keep him in Vienna. Beethoven, in turn, honoured the Archduke in particular by dedicating to him some of his greatest works, including the magnificently assertive E flat Concerto known in English-speaking countries to this day as the ‘Emperor’.

81 Music: Piano Concerto in E flat ‘Emperor’ (Finale)

82 Beethoven, in the view of many people is the most universal of all composers, in the sense that his music apparently speaks more directly, and more deeply, to more of mankind than anyone else’s. None of which would have surprised him. Beethoven was perhaps the first great composer who from the very beginning of his career wrote quite consciously and deliberately for posterity. And it’s an historical fact that through the power of his vision and the sheer force of his personality Beethoven seems to have unlocked feelings and awarenesses which listeners all over the world have recognised as common to all of humanity. His music has lead many people to experience, at the highest level, a sense of community which far transcends the comforts simply of company. Apart from anything else, it’s music of towering strength.

83 Music: Overture ‘Coriolan’

□ The greatness of Beethoven's music lies way beyond the power of analysis to explain, whether it's musical or psychoanalysis (a number of twentieth-century biographers have tried the latter and it doesn't work). It can be demonstrated, though, by the testimony of listeners from all walks of life through two centuries. Among the many things which make Beethoven's music unique – never mind that we can't explain them – are its overpoweringly moral force and its extraordinary capacity to inspire courage. And you don't have to know anything about his life and circumstances to feel this. In some ultimately mysterious way, he makes us feel, through his example, that we can confront reality without fear. And the key word there, of course, is 'feel'. We don't actually lose our fears, anymore than he did. Fear, after all, is as much a part of life as suffering and the capacity for joy – both of which Beethoven had in an almost cruel abundance. What's so uniquely life-enhancing about Beethoven is his response to fear, not his lack of it. And not merely his response to fear but his attitude to suffering.

By the standards of our modern industrial societies, with their in-built materialism, Beethoven's views were distinctly old-fashioned. Today there's a widespread tendency to regard suffering as an undesirable, and at least potentially curable, manifestation of life. For Beethoven it was neither desirable nor avoidable. It was an implacable fact, and his changing attitudes to it, from childhood to death, form the central drama of his life, and, by extension, of his music.

In childhood, as in the later crisis over his hearing, his first response was to withdraw. But this was never a mere withdrawing from. It was a withdrawal into a world of imagination and fantasy where he could roam undisturbed. And where he was in control. In this sense, it was no withdrawal at all but an entry into resources and regions of the mind which often remain closed to the rest of us. He escaped into music.

In matters of sexual or romantic love, his response, as we'll see, was generally to plunge himself into unremitting hard work. Among the many paradoxes of Beethoven's character was his almost obsessive longing for a wife and family on the one hand, and his seemingly infallible knack for falling in love with women who in one way or another were ultimately unavailable.

The response to his encroaching deafness was more complicated. His immediate instinct was to retreat into a kind of tormented isolation.

I must withdraw from everything. And my best years will rapidly pass away without my being able to achieve all that my talent and my strength have commanded me to do. Indeed I shall be cut off from everything that is most dear to me.

And in this first phase, we find something very like shame. He reveals his plight to two friends only, both far removed from Vienna – and he enjoins them to secrecy:

I implore you to keep what I have told you about my hearing in the strictest confidence, to be entrusted to no one, whoever he may be.

But Beethoven was a born fighter. Retreat was never really his game. The first positive response, predictably, was defiance.

I will take Fate by the throat!

And take it by the throat he did. In the famous Fifth Symphony, Fate, to use Beethoven's own imagery, is heard to knock menacingly at the door.

📖 Music: Fifth Symphony, first movement (opening)

... but no sooner is it across the threshold, so to speak, than it gets the drubbing of its life.

Music: Fifth Symphony, first movement

Not for nothing is that the most famous symphony ever written. Well before the end of it, Beethoven is stamping with a kind of wild joy, and Fate has slunk away with its tail firmly tucked between its legs.

☞ Music: Fifth Symphony, finale (exc.)

☞ The heroic courage of Beethoven's response is endlessly exciting, no question, but Fate, or the inevitability of suffering, or call it what you will, is too fundamental an adversary to be dealt with even by Beethoven's once-beloved 'morality of power' (his phrase, remember, not mine). It wasn't enough to rebel against it, however heroically. Rebellion couldn't alter the facts, anymore than it could be maintained indefinitely. As with most conflicts, the solution lay in a coming to terms, which naturally required time, and involved a measure of contradiction.

Many times have I cursed my Creator and my own existence. But Plutarch has shown me the path of resignation ... Resignation! ... What a wretched resource! Yet it sometimes seems that this is all that is left to me.

Later, resignation was replaced by something less passive, something which required an act of will, even if the desired end was still a form of retreat. But to judge from some of the strangely disjointed entries in his journal, his mind was still in some confusion:

Submission, absolute submission to your fate, only this can give you the sacrifice ... to the servitude – oh, hard struggle! – Turn everything which remains to be done to planning the long journey – you must yourself find all that your most blessed wish can offer, you must force it to your will – keep always of the same mind ... O God, give me the strength to conquer myself!

What he came to understand, and what can be heard with overpowering clarity when you study his music, is that suffering isn't something external but an essential part of human experience. Before he could transcend it, it was necessary for Beethoven to accept it, to embrace it, even, as a part of his own wholeness.

🔊 Music: Seventh Symphony, first movement (exc.)

The opening bars of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. And from the few simple seeds sown in that Introduction grows much not only of the opening movement but of the work as a whole.

Now if that were no more than a technical observation, of interest only to musicians and so-called 'analysts', we'd be justified in saying 'So what?' But its meaning, its symbolism, if you like, goes way beyond the technical. The organic unity of Beethoven's greatest music – the psychological, the emotional unity of it – is something which is instinctively felt by people all over the world, people who may not know the first thing about sonata structure or key relations or the history of the scherzo. And its message, whether Beethoven intended one or not, is of hope – of a triumphant faith in the power of human resilience. From the lonely questionings of that opening comes this:

Music: Seventh Symphony, first movement (exc.)

🔊 Just after the completion of that great work, the two greatest giants in the world of art – Beethoven and Goethe – met for the first time, at the spa town of Teplitz, and were strangely disappointed in each other. 'Goethe,' Beethoven wrote...

Goethe is too fond of the atmosphere of the royal courts, more than is becoming to a poet. Why laugh at the absurdities of virtuosos when poets, who ought to be the first teachers of a nation, forget everything for the sake of glitter.

## And Goethe's impression of Beethoven?

A more self-contained, energetic, sincere artist I never saw. His talent amazed me. Unfortunately he is an utterly untamed personality, not altogether in the wrong in holding the world to be detestable, but who does not make it any the more enjoyable, either for himself or others, by his attitude. He is very excusable, on the other hand, and much to be pitied, as his hearing is leaving him

And there were few things in personal relations that Beethoven loathed more than to be pitied. Some might say, uncharitably, that his own self-pity left little room for the pity of others, and there are certainly numerous instances where he describes himself to friends as 'God's most unhappy and miserable creature' and so on. In his journal, too, he frequently invokes the Almighty.

God help me. Thou seest me forsaken by all Mankind. O harsh fate, O cruel destiny, no, no, my miserable state will never end.

To the world at large, though, and in his relations with individuals encountered in day to day affairs he could present a very different face from the 'untamed personality' described by Goethe. Another impression from the same period, and the same place, might almost be of another man altogether. Our witness is Karl von Ense:

In that summer at Teplitz, I made Beethoven's acquaintance and found this allegedly wild and unsocial man to be the most magnificent artist with a heart of gold, a glorious spirit and a friendly disposition. What he has refused to princes he granted to us at first sight: he played for us on the piano. I was soon on intimate terms with him, and his noble character, the uninterrupted flow of a godlike spirit which I always seemed to feel with an almost reverential awe when in his very silent presence,

drew me closely to him, to such an extent that day after day, I did not ever feel the burden of his company, which, on account of his deafness, most people found rather exhausting.

<sup>40</sup> Unlike many composers, Beethoven was quite ready to talk about his method of composing, which gives a fascinating insight into the workings of his mind.

I carry my ideas about with me for a long time, often for a very long time, before I write them down. In doing so, my memory is so trustworthy that I am sure I will not forget, even after a period of years, a theme I have once committed to memory. I change a great deal, eliminate much and begin again, until I am satisfied with the result; then the working-out, in extension, in diminution, in height and in depth begins in my head, and since I know what I want, the basic idea never leaves me, it mounts and grows, I hear and see the work in my mind in its full proportions, as though already accomplished, and all that remains is the labour of writing it out; this proceeds quickly, depending on the time I have available, since I often have several pieces in the works at once; I am certain, however, not to confuse one with another. If you ask me where I get my ideas, that I cannot say with any certainty. They generally come unbidden, indirectly, directly. I could grasp them with my hands; in the midst of nature, in the woods, on walks, in the silence of the night, in the early morning, inspired by moods that translate themselves into words for the poet and into tones for me, that sound, surge, roar, until at last they stand before me as notes.

What both Goethe and von Ense failed entirely to perceive that summer - and to Beethoven's considerable credit – is that this was a man in crisis.

<sup>41</sup> In addition to his worsening deafness and his chronic abdominal problems, which left him for much of the time in a good deal of pain, he continued to be unlucky in love. Although as a young man he'd been fiercely attractive to women, he now found himself drifting in and out of love

with a sequence of women who regarded him with sympathy and admiration, even awe, but who couldn't begin to imagine themselves as his wife. Often they came from the aristocracy, complete with noble titles, or they were already married, or they were simply too young. In 1810, after rebuffs from two countesses with whom he may or may not have had an affair, he was refused in his proposal of marriage by the young niece of his doctor. Therese Malfatti was a mere 18 years of age, and the thought of being married to this swarthy, rough-mannered little man (already reputed in some circles to be half mad) was clearly not for her, genius or no genius. And you can see her point. Beethoven's outer aspect at this point in his life could be distinctly off-putting:

Beethoven could not have been much more than 5 feet 4 inches tall. His body was thick-set, with large bones and a strong muscular system; his head was unusually large, covered with long, unkempt almost completely grey hair, giving him a somewhat savage aspect, enhanced even more when his beard had grown to an immoderate length, which was quite often the case. His forehead was high and broad, his brown eyes small, almost retreating into his head when he laughed. They could, however, suddenly become unusually prominent and large, either rolling and flashing – the pupils almost always turned upwards – or not moving at all, staring fixedly ahead when one idea or another took hold of him. When that happened, his whole appearance would suddenly and conspicuously alter, with such a noticeably inspired and imposing look that his small figure would loom before one as gigantically as his spirit. These moments of sudden inspiration often befell him in even the most jovial company, but also in the street, which generally attracted the close attention of passers-by. His mouth was well formed, the lips not quite even, the lower predominating somewhat, the nose rather broad. With his smile a most benevolent and amiable air spread over his whole face; this was of special benefit when he conversed with strangers, for it encouraged them. His laughter, on the other hand, often burst out immoderately, distorting the intelligent and strongly marked features; the huge head was wont to swell, the face would become still broader, and the whole effect was often that of a grimacing caricature.

In the aftermath of his rejection by Therese Malfatti, Beethoven, as usual in such situations, threw himself into a bout of intensive hard work, and much of the music he wrote reflects the white heat of his creative fire. This was not a man to be trifled with.

<sup>[42]</sup> *Serioso* Quartet, Op. 95, first movement

The opening movement of the Quartet in A minor, Op. 95. That was written shortly after Beethoven's rejected proposal of marriage to Therese Malfatti, and quite unnecessarily, he entitled it 'Serioso' (the 'Serious' Quartet), as though anyone could possibly mistake it for a frivolous one.

<sup>[43]</sup> In the catalogue of Beethoven's relations with women, one name stands out from all the others – or rather the absence of her name does. Among the papers discovered amongst Beethoven's belongings after his death was a long, three-part letter to a woman he addressed as his 'Immortal Beloved' but without ever naming her. It was clearly never sent, nor does it contain any reference as to where or even in what year it was written. From the tone of the letter it seems virtually certain that she reciprocated his love for her and was prepared to make great sacrifices to enter into union with him. As with the mysterious 'dark lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets, her identity has posed one of the greatest puzzles in the history of biography. Several names, and many theories, have been put forward, of which one, and perhaps only one, seems entirely convincing. In his 1978 biography of Beethoven, the American scholar Maynard Solomon identifies her as Antonie Brentano, the wife of one of Beethoven's most constant and valued friends. But this time it seems it is Beethoven who draws back at the critical moment – Beethoven, whose craving for a wife and family had been at times almost an obsession. Nobody familiar with Beethoven's letters, and this letter in particular, can doubt the sincerity of the anguish and confusion expressed here. Far more elusive is its meaning.

Morning, 6th July. My angel, my all, my other self, just a few words today, and in pencil (your own). Only tomorrow shall I know for certain where I am to stay, a worthless waste of time and such. But why this deep sorrow when necessity speaks? Can our love exist other than by sacrifices, through not demanding everything from one another? Can you help it that you are not entirely mine, that I am not wholly yours? Oh God, look at the loveliness of nature and comfort your heart with that which must be – love demands everything, and perfectly rightly, thus it is to me with you, and to you with me – except that you forget so easily that I must live for me and for you. If we were wholly united you would feel the pain of it as little as I ... My heart is so full of things to tell you – oh, there are moments when I feel that speech is nothing whatever. I cannot share with you the thoughts I have had during these last few days touching my own life. Ah if only our hearts were always close together, I would have none of these. Try to be cheerful, remain my faithful, my one and only treasure, my everything, as I am yours; the Gods must send us the rest, what for us must and shall be.

Your ever faithful, Ludwig

Evening, July the sixth. You are suffering, my dearest one – but oh, wherever I am, there are you also. I will make it possible, for both of us, that we can live together – and oh how we shall live!!! ... I weep when I think that you will probably not receive my first news until Saturday. However much you love me, I love you more – but never hide yourself from me. Goodnight. Since I am taking the waters I must go to sleep. Oh God, so near, so far; our love is surely a celestial thing – and as strong as the vault of heaven itself.

At this point, Beethoven abruptly changes gear and goes on to a bit of metaphysical musing which at times is almost incoherent, suggesting a very considerable confusion of mind.

What a life!!!! thus!!!! without you – pursued by the goodness of mankind hither and thither – which I as little want as I deserve it – Humility of man towards man – it pains me – and when I consider

myself in relation to the universe, what am I and what is He – whom we call the greatest – and yet – herein – lies the divine in man.

The third part of the letter seems to have been written almost as soon as he opened his eyes on awakening.

Good morning on July the seventh!

While still abed my thoughts turn to you, my Immortal Beloved, some of them happy, some sad, waiting to see whether fate will hear us. I can live only completely with you or not at all; I have decided to wander away from you, in the distance, until I can fly to your arms and can regard you as my homeland, and can send my soul, enveloped by you, into the realm of spirits. Yes, unhappily it must be so. You can compose yourself, all the more so since you know my faithfulness towards you; never can another possess my heart, never, never – oh God, why must one leave what one loves so, and yet my life in Vienna is wretched as it is now. Your love makes me at once the happiest and unhappiest of men – at my age, I need a certain uniform steadiness to my life – can this exist in our relationship? ... Let us be calm; only by seeing our situation calmly can we attain our goal of living together. Be calm, love; today, yesterday – what longing with tears for you – you – you – my life, my everything, my all – farewell, oh, go on loving me – never misjudge the true heart of your beloved.

Ever thine; Ever mine; Ever ours – L.

It seems beyond doubt that this affair caused Beethoven far more pain than his rejection by Therese Malfatti, but there is one other possibility, though not perhaps a very likely one, and that's that the whole thing is an elaborate fantasy – that the Immortal Beloved is not a woman but Woman, that she represents the sum total of Beethoven's hopes, desires and fears of women generally, and marriage in particular. And there's another interesting point here. The letter has been convincingly traced to the summer of 1812, yet it has no musical counterpart. Almost the

opposite. In the music he composed in its immediate aftermath, Beethoven the titanic wrestler gives way to a particular kind of gentleness and serenity which is something new in his music – as though this crisis, at least, had finally been resolved, had left him with a newly clarified and comforting sense of his own identity.

<sup>44</sup> Violin Sonata in G, Op. 96, first movement

<sup>45</sup> If this hard-won serenity was welcome, it was also brief. Following the completion of that work and the supremely positive Eighth Symphony, Beethoven's fortunes took a sharp downward turn.

He now entered a new phase of composition whose challenges proved too much for the concert-going public, and too difficult even for some of his colleagues. For the moment, at least, apart from a few sympathetic and influential aristocrats, Beethoven had effectively lost much of his public. Fortunately, he still had his three princely annuities, but, in 1813, though, with the death of one patron and the unexpected bankruptcy of another, the financial security supposedly guaranteed by these went up in smoke. Beethoven fell into a deep depression which brought his creative energies to their lowest ebb ever. And such sexual energies as survived in him were spent joylessly in brothels and were succeeded by a sense of guilt and bouts of self-loathing which only intensified his inner loneliness. That summer, according to some, he made a genuine attempt to take his own life. For more than a year he composed almost nothing of any consequence, and his friends were alarmed to find him in what some of them described as 'deplorable condition' – so unkempt and unhygienic that guests in various inns and taverns went out of their way to avoid sitting anywhere near him. And as the Baron de Trémont discovered, a visit to Beethoven's lodgings only confirmed the impression:

Picture to yourself the extreme of dirt and disorder: pools of water decorating the floor, and a rather ancient grand piano on which dust competed for room with sheets of written or printed notes. Under it

– I do not exaggerate – an unemptied chamber pot ... Most of the chairs had straw seats and were decorated with clothes and with dishes full of the remains of the previous day's supper.

To his once loyal and enthusiastic audience in Vienna, Beethoven looked like becoming something of a forgotten man. All that changed, though, in the autumn of that year, when Beethoven met one Johann Mälzel – the inventor, among other things, of the metronome. And among those other things was an extraordinary contraption which he called the Panharmonicon – an entirely mechanical orchestra-substitute for which he hoped Beethoven would write something. And not just a trifle, either, but a grandiose piece of programme music depicting the Duke of Wellington's victory over Napoleon in the Battle of Vittoria. Well, Beethoven obliged, and while he was about it he made a conventionally orchestrated version for more normal performance. In the virtually unanimous judgement of posterity, the resultant so-called 'Battle Symphony' is the worst piece of music Beethoven ever wrote.

#### 46 Music: Battle Symphony (exc.)

Well, posterity may not have liked it, but it caused a sensation in Vienna. It had four spectacular performances in quick succession, and the forgotten man was transformed once again into a local hero. Happily, this ironic change in Beethoven's fortunes paved the way for Vienna's acceptance of his most recent genuine symphonies – the Seventh and the Eighth – and it brought him in a lot of much-needed money. But far the most important result, from Beethoven's point of view, was the successful staging of his only opera, *Fidelio*, which he'd now thoroughly revised after two earlier, unsuccessful productions.

The plot of the opera is a fairly simple 'rescue' story of a kind very popular in post-Revolutionary France. The faithful Leonore disguises herself as a man, *Fidelio*, and with great enterprise and courage she rescues her wrongfully imprisoned husband from death at the hands

of the tyrannical Pizarro. To Beethoven, who craved just such a faithful and devoted wife himself, the character of Leonore came increasingly to represent the ideal woman, and the theme of individual liberty versus oppression was one which touched him very deeply. What makes *Fidelio* such an overpoweringly moving opera, though, is neither its story nor its overtly theatrical qualities, but the depth and immediacy which Beethoven finds in its underlying themes. And the scene in which the prisoners, at Leonore's request, are allowed briefly to emerge from their dungeons, as Beethoven himself had emerged from the jaws of despair ... this is, surely, one of the great moments in the whole history of opera.

<sup>47</sup> Prisoner's Chorus from *Fidelio*

<sup>48</sup> Music: Archduke Trio

That music comes from what's certainly the most famous and probably the greatest Piano Trio ever written, the so-called 'Archduke' Trio - so-called because it was written for Beethoven's long-standing friend, patron and pupil, the Archduke Rudolf of Austria. And its first performance, in 1814, marked Beethoven's last public appearance as a pianist. At the age of 44, his hearing had deteriorated so far that according to the composer Louis Spohr,

There was scarcely anything left of the virtuosity which had formerly been so greatly admired. In the strongest passages, the poor man pounded on the keys till the strings jangled, and in the quieter ones he played so softly that whole groups of notes were omitted, so that the music was quite unintelligible.

<sup>49</sup> The end of his performing career was a melancholy, if predictable, milestone in Beethoven's career, but it paled into relative insignificance compared to an event that took place some eighteen months later. On the fifteenth of November, 1815, Beethoven's brother Caspar Carl

died, leaving behind him a hornet's nest of family tensions which led to an attempted suicide and very nearly cost Beethoven his sanity. For some, there was no 'nearly' about it.

Beethoven had never approved of his brother's marriage, or of his wife Johanna, who gave birth to a boy, Karl, less than four months after the wedding. From the beginning, the marriage was an unhappy one, leading at one point to a public denunciation in which Caspar Carl accused his wife of embezzling money. The fact that the money was actually hers to begin with – a part of the dowry she'd brought to the marriage – was overlooked and she was convicted and sentenced to a month's house arrest. This one event was to play a significant role in a three-way tragedy largely precipitated by Beethoven himself.

In his dying days, Caspar Carl specified in his will that the guardianship of the boy was to be shared by Johanna and Beethoven. Somehow Beethoven persuaded him to redraft the will, leaving the mother out and entrusting the boy's care and education entirely to Beethoven. At first, he complied, but within a matter of hours, he thought better of it and wrote a codicil to the will which made his original intentions unequivocally clear.

Having learned that my brother, Ludwig van Beethoven, desires after my death to take wholly to himself my son Karl, and wholly to withdraw him from the supervision and training of his mother, and inasmuch as the best of harmony does not exist between my brother and my wife, I have found it necessary to add to my will that I by no means desire that my son be taken away from his mother, but that he shall always and so long as his future career permits remain with his mother, to which end the guardianship of him is to be exercised by her as well as my brother. Only by unity can the object which I had in view in appointing my brother guardian of my son be attained, wherefore, for the welfare of my child, I recommend compliance to my wife and more moderation to my brother. God permit them to be harmonious for the sake of the child's welfare. This is the last wish of the dying husband and brother.

Less than a day later he was dead.

From that moment onwards, Beethoven lost no opportunity to blacken Johanna's name (he frequently referred to her as 'the Queen of the Night' (after the villainness of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*) and gave his almost entire attention to proving her legally, morally and intellectually unfit to have any say in the boy's upbringing. In effect he was seeking the legal sanction of a kidnapping. Naturally he brought up her conviction for embezzlement; he also managed to convince himself – and the lawyers – that she was little better than a common whore.

Last night the 'Queen of the Night' was at the Artist's Ball until three a.m., exposing not only her mental but also her bodily nakedness – it was whispered that she – was willing to hire herself – for 20 gulden! Oh most horrible!

In fact there was no justification for the claim, any more than there was for Beethoven's obsessive suspicion that she'd poisoned her husband. He likewise had fantasies that she was having him watched and that she was bribing his servants. In his own mind, he was engaged on a sacred quest – to 'rescue' the hapless child from the forces of evil, just as Leonore in *Fidelio* rescues her unjustly imprisoned husband from the clutches of the wicked Pizarro. But he had to bolster his determination with strange exhortations in his journal. 'Ignore all gossip,' he wrote to himself,

... all gossip, and all pettiness, for the sake of this Holy cause. These circumstances are very hard for you, but He who is above exists. Without Him there is nothing. In any case, the token has been accepted.

Just what token is unclear.

Within two months of his brother's death, and in direct contradiction of his last wishes, Beethoven actually succeeded in his campaign to gain sole legal charge of the boy. Accordingly,

on 2nd February 1816, the nine year-old Karl was forcibly taken from his mother and ensconced by his uncle in a private school for boys. Beethoven and the headmaster then appealed to the court for an injunction banning all communication between the boy and his mother. Two days later he wrote to a friend in terms of jubilation.

I have fought a battle for the purpose of wresting a poor, unhappy child from the clutches of his unworthy mother, and I have won the day! Te Deum laudamus!!!

Needless to say, the ‘poor, unhappy child’ had not been consulted. But as Beethoven was soon to discover, the case was far from over. Whatever else may be said of her, Karl’s mother was no pushover. She too went to court, repeatedly, and for the next five years the boy became a human shuttlecock and the subject of endless litigation between two strong-minded adults, neither of whom was cut out for the role of parenthood but only one of whom could truly call him by the name of son. To begin with, even Beethoven granted that.

But along with his several paranoid fantasies about Johanna went another which put their relationship, and his relationship to Karl, into a new and unexpected light. In May 1816, he wrote unassumingly to a friend,

I now regard myself as Karl’s father.

Four months later it was no longer a matter of self-regard. As he bluntly put it in another letter:

I am now the real, physical father of my dead brother’s child.

And what did this bizarre delusion mean to his relationship with Johanna. It’s probably not a question he asked himself. For the moment, it only fanned the flames of his hostility to her. His

letters, his journal, his conversations are a furnace stoked by innumerable unjustified accusations and the bitterest attacks on her character. Music at this unhappy stage hardly gets a look-in. Karl is continuously indoctrinated against his mother and is roundly applauded whenever he contributes a few missiles of his own to the relentless barrage of slanders directed at this justly outraged woman. What Beethoven belatedly discovered, though, was that mother and son had several times contrived to meet in secret. When he did eventually learn of this, he was predictably enraged.

I had been noticing signs of treachery for a very long time; and then one day I received an anonymous letter the contents of which filled me with terror; but they were little more than suppositions. Karl, whom I pounced on that very evening, immediately disclosed a little, but not all. As I often give him a good shaking, but not without valid reason, he was far too frightened to confess everything. But the servants, who had often witnessed me chastising him, overheard us – and that old traitress, my housekeeper, actually tried to prevent him from confessing the truth. But everything came to light. Karl has done wrong, but one must grant that a mother – even a bad mother – is still a mother ... Everything here is in a state of great confusion. Still, it won't be necessary to take me to the madhouse.

Maybe not – but increasing numbers of people began to believe that Beethoven was indeed going mad – and not just those who knew him.

☐ Beethoven's outward appearance, due to his quite peculiar neglect in the matter of dress, had something uncommonly conspicuous about it in the street. Usually lost in thought, and humming to himself, he often gesticulated with his arms when walking by himself. When in company, he would speak quite animatedly and loudly, and since his companion then had to write his rejoinder in the conversation book, an abrupt halt would have to be made; this was conspicuous in itself, and was still more so when the rejoinder was communicated in mime.

And so it happened that most of the passers-by would turn around to stare at him; the street urchins also made their gibes and shouted after him. For that reason, his nephew Karl refused to go out with him and once told him straight out that he was ashamed to accompany him in the street because of his ‘comical appearance.’

The double lorgnette, which he wore for his short-sightedness, hung loose. The coat-tails were rather heavily laden: apart from a pocket handkerchief, which often showed, they contained a thick, folded quarto music notebook and a conversation book with a thick carpenter’s pencil, for communicating with friends and acquaintances he might happen to meet; and at an earlier period, so long as it was of any use, an ear-trumpet. The weight of the music notebook lengthened one coat-tail considerably, and the pocket was often turned inside out when the notebook and conversation book were extracted from it.

Nor was it only on the street that Beethoven was regarded by the public as being a little mad. His conduct indoors, too, could be positively alarming

Beethoven was sometimes extremely violent. One day we were dining at the Swan; the waiter brought him the wrong dish. Beethoven had scarcely said a few choice words about it, which the waiter had answered perhaps not quite as politely as he might have, when Beethoven laid hold of the dish – a kind of roast beef with lots of sauce – and flung it at the waiter’s head. The poor fellow still had on his arm a large number of plates containing various dishes (a dexterity which Viennese waiters possess to a high degree) and could do nothing to help himself; the sauce ran down his face. He and Beethoven shouted and cursed at each other, while all the other guests laughed out loud. Finally Beethoven too began laughing at the sight of the waiter, who lapped up with his tongue the sauce that was dribbling down his face, tried to go on hurling insults, but had to go on lapping instead, pulling the most ludicrous faces the while – a picture truly worthy of Hogarth.

Beethoven's violence, like almost every other aspect of his life and character, was a powerful and revolutionary part of his music too. The sheer number of sudden, sometimes stabbing accents in his music was completely unprecedented. No composer before him ever made such a feature of the contrasts between loud and soft. From which it follows that no other composer was better suited to the depiction of storms. The one that blows up in his so-called 'Pastoral' Symphony is a sensational case in point.

☐<sup>1</sup> Music: Symphony No. 6 'Pastoral'

☐<sup>2</sup> Violence was one of the facts of life that Beethoven grew up with. He was regularly beaten and abused not only by his father but by his schoolmasters, at least one of whom was notorious for the savagery of his punishments, often for the most trivial offences. Just as many child abusers today were themselves abused children, so Beethoven quite readily allowed (even occasionally encouraged) Karl's teachers to beat him into obedience. But the physical punishment meted out to Karl was trivial in comparison with the psychological suffering he was made to endure. One of the reasons for Beethoven's rage when he discovered that secret meetings had taken place between Karl and his mother wasn't just the disobedience but the fact that his own determined attempts to keep them apart had failed. Very early on in his so-called guardianship he wrote to Karl's headmaster,

It will certainly be best to remove the boy from Vienna as soon as possible and send him to some place where he will neither see nor hear anything more of his beastly mother, and where everything about him is strange. That way, he will have fewer people to lean upon and will have to win love and respect by his own efforts alone.

Yet while planning to send this already troubled nine-year-old boy to a foreign city, he was still able to write in his journal:

What is a boarding school compared with the immediate sympathetic care of a father for his child? A thousand beautiful moments vanish when children are in wooden institutions, whereas at home, with good parents, they could be receiving impressions full of deep feeling, which endure into the most extreme old age.

But here he was hardly speaking from experience. If pressed, he probably couldn't have come up with a thousand beautiful moments from his own childhood. Two closely related self-images dominated Beethoven life, both of them justified, and both of them abused. On the one hand he saw himself as a victim, on the other as a hero – usually a hero on behalf of life's victims. And it often seemed that the one was needed to fuel the other – as though he had a vested interest in being misunderstood or cheated, even when there was no evidence for either. No hero exists in a vacuum, after all. Heroism requires an adversary. If none presents itself, then it must be manufactured.

Oh, I am a man harried on all sides like a wild beast, misunderstood, and often treated in the basest way! I, who am saddled with so many cares, with the constant battle against this monster of a mother, who always attempted to stifle good. She has continually induced my beloved Karl to dissimulate, to bribe my servants, to tell lies. She has even given him money in order to arouse lusts and desires which are harmful to him. Under her care he became completely perverted and was encouraged to deceive his own father. I confess that I myself am better fitted than anyone else to inspire my nephew by my own example with a desire for virtue and zealous activity.

This juxtaposition of self-pity and self-congratulation runs through Beethoven's letters and journals like a pair of twin tributaries, and his actions and attitudes often followed suit, veering from one extreme to the other with a suddenness which must often have been as bewildering to him as to those around him. There was no consistency even in his behaviour to the much-reviled

Johanna – his ‘Queen of the Night’. At one moment he would be doing everything in his power to prevent all contact between mother and son, at the next he’d be co-operative, sometimes almost friendly, taking her himself to see Karl at school, or arranging meetings at his lodgings. The continuous alternation between vindictiveness and a sense of natural justice can only have sent the most confusing possible signals to Karl – not least when Beethoven presumed to speak for both of them as one. Johanna, on the other hand, would have read between the lines exactly as Beethoven intended

Alas, our many occupations made it quite impossible for Karl and me to send you our best wishes on New Year’s Day. But I know that without this explanation you are fully assured of both my own and Karl’s wishes for your welfare. As for your need of money, I would gladly have helped you out with a sum. But unfortunately I have too many expenses and debts ... so that I cannot prove to you at once and on the spot my readiness to help you. Meanwhile I assure you now in writing that henceforth and forever you may draw Karl’s half of your pension ... Both Karl and I wish you all possible happiness.

And at the time he undoubtedly meant it. It seems clear that he did sometimes feel pangs of guilt, or doubt anyway, which he then did his best to justify, not to others, but to himself, in his journal. Whether he still felt that he stood closer to God than most people, it was to God that he frequently addressed himself – often in a state of some confusion.

I have done my part, O Lord! It might have been possible without offending the widow, but it was not. Only Thou, Almighty God, canst see into my heart, knowest that I have sacrificed my very best for the sake of my dear Karl: Bless my work! Bless the widow! Why cannot I obey all the prompting of my heart and help the widow? God, God! my refuge, my rock, O my all! Thou seest my innermost thoughts and knowest how it pains me to be obliged to compel others to suffer by my good labours for my precious Karl!!!!

But the ‘precious Karl’, too, was often the victim of his uncle’s wild mood swings. When he once ran away to rejoin Johanna, Beethoven’s reaction was swift and categorical.

He is unloving, ungrateful and callous. He is most fit for the company of his own mother and my pseudo-brother. Nay, he is a monster. My love for him is gone. He needed my love. I do not need his.

Yet in the very same letter he adds:

You understand, of course, that this is not what I really think. I still love him as I used to, but without weakness. In truth, I often weep for him.

And with good reason – better reason, perhaps, than Beethoven himself may have understood. His conversation books, where his companions and associates wrote rather than spoke their own contributions, contain pages of the most pathetic entries from Karl, and some of considerable courage.

I beg of you once more not to torment me as you are doing; you may come to regret it, for I can stand much but too much I cannot endure.

You treated your brother the same way today with no reason. You must remember that other people are human too.

Will you let me go out for a little today? I need recreation. I will come back later.

I only want to go to my room.

I am not going out, I only want to be alone for a little.

Won’t you please let me go to my room?

It could reasonably be suggested that in ‘weeping for Karl’, Beethoven was actually weeping for

himself. There were certainly times when he seems to have rued the day he ever embarked on his supposed rescue mission. And when he seems to hold Karl responsible – as though Karl were imprisoning him.

God is my witness, I dream only of getting completely away from you and from this wretched brother and that horrible family which has been thrust upon me. May God grant my wishes, for I can no longer trust you...

Unfortunately your father - or, better still, not your father ...

And what was the poor boy supposed to make of that? This from the man who had effectively stolen him from his own mother, expressly against the dying wishes of his father. True to form, Beethoven would later be overcome with remorse and would all but beg for forgiveness. It was the pattern of almost every friendship or relationship he ever had. According to his own testimony there were only two friends in his life whom he hadn't succeeded in alienating, and each of them, not coincidentally, lived far away and communicated almost exclusively by letter.

When he wasn't being abusive, Beethoven frequently used his well-exercised self-pity as an agent of emotional blackmail. During one summer when he was taking the waters at Baden, Karl, now nineteen and a student at the Polytechnic, was expected to visit him every Sunday. He didn't. Beethoven's response was to try and inspire guilt for his (as he saw it) unwarranted neglect. 'I am getting thinner and thinner,' he wrote to Karl,

... and am feeling ailing rather than well. I have no doctor, not a single sympathetic soul at hand. If you can come to visit me on Sunday, please do. But I don't want to interfere in your plans ... It seems I must learn to give up everything ... oh! where have I not been wounded, nay more, cut to the heart!

Such tactics – and such melodramatic overplaying – were (unsurprisingly) counter-productive.

Karl's impulse was to stay away. But when Beethoven heard that he'd been seeing his mother again instead, he changed tack. He now threatened to provoke a show-down, forcing Karl to choose between his mother and his uncle, or rather his self-styled 'father'. 'If the bond is to be broken,' he wrote, 'so be it.'

... but you will be detested by all impartial people when they hear of your ingratitude.

Which, of course, they would only do from Beethoven himself. And there's no evidence that he was keen to publicise the matter.

As usual after his more emotional outbursts, he was soon overcome by regret, and did all he could to repair the damage as soon as possible.

Not a word more, my dearest Karl. Not one word more. Only come to my arms, you won't hear a single hard word. For God's sake do not abandon yourself to misery. You will be welcomed here as affectionately as ever. We will lovingly discuss what has to be considered and what must be done for the future. On my word of honour you shall hear no reproaches, since in any case they would do no good. All that you may expect from me is the most loving care and help – only come, come to the faithful heart of your father, Beethoven.

The faithful heart? Beethoven may have believed that; it's unlikely that Karl did. It was certainly not with Beethoven's faithful heart in mind that in a ruined castle near Baden, on the 30th July 1826, he shot himself in the head. Or was it? He was found fully conscious, and taken to his mother's lodgings nearby. True, he was a notoriously bad shot, but to shoot one's self in the head and not even lose consciousness suggests not so much a bad aim as a very clear message to his uncle. And the fact that he was delivered into his mother's care rather than to Beethoven's, was surely not pure chance. When he was asked by the local magistrate what had led him to this

desperate act, his answer was unequivocal: 'Because my uncle tormented me too much, and I was weary of imprisonment.' Beethoven tried to hush up the incident, but he was too late. And Karl had the satisfaction (if that is indeed how he felt about it) of seeing his uncle age twenty years practically overnight. From then on, Beethoven both looked and felt like an old man, and often described himself as such, though he was only fifty-five when the incident took place. Shocked he may have been, and guilty too, but with only minor improvements, his treatment of Karl, and Johanna, continued much as before. It was, therefore, a great relief for all concerned when Karl announced his intention to join the army. There he would be strictly supervised and free at last from the endless wrangling of his mother and uncle.

By this time, Beethoven's love affair with Vienna and the Viennese had long since become a thing of the past, at least on his part. Dr. Karl von Bursy met him only once, and was surprised to find him so voluble on the subject.

He told me a lot about his life and about Vienna. He was venomous and embittered. He raged about everything, and is dissatisfied with everything, and he curses Austria and Vienna in particular. He speaks quickly and with great vivacity. He often banged his fist on the piano, and made such a noise that it echoed around the room. He is not exactly reserved; for he told me much about his personal affairs and related much about himself and his family. He complains about the present age, and for many reasons. Art, he says, no longer occupies a position high above the commonplace, and is no longer held in such high esteem and particularly not as regards recompense. Beethoven complains of bad times in a pecuniary sense. Can one believe that such a giant can have grounds for such complaints?!

'Why, then,' I asked him, 'do you remain in Vienna when every foreign potentate would be glad to give you a place at his court or next to his throne?' 'There are certain conditions that keep me here,' he replied, 'but everything here is mean and dirty. Things could hardly be worse. From top to bottom, everything here is shabby. You can't trust anyone. What is not written down in black and white, no one

will honour. They want your work and then pay you a beggar's pittance, not even what they at first agreed to pay.'

It's some measure of the esteem in which he was held by the Viennese in general, and of his reputation for extreme, if harmless, eccentricity, that the police in Metternich's spy-ridden Vienna were prepared to disregard Beethoven's most indiscreet diatribes. As the travelling Englishman Sir John Russell makes plain, he hardly looked like a dangerous enemy of the state.

The neglect of his person gives him a quite wild appearance. His hair, which neither comb nor scissors seem to have visited for years, overshadows his broad brow in a quantity and confusion to which only the snakes round a Gorgon's head offer a parallel. His general behaviour accords with the unpromising exterior. Except when he is with his chosen friends, kindness or affability are not his characteristics. The loss of his hearing has deprived him of all the pleasure which society can give and perhaps soured his temper. He used to frequent a particular tavern, where he spent the evening in a corner, beyond the reach of all the chattering and disputation of a public room, drinking wine and beer, eating cheese and red herrings, and studying the newspapers. One evening a person took a seat near him whose countenance did not please him. He looked hard at the stranger, and spat on the floor as if he had seen a toad, then glanced at the newspaper, then again at the intruder, and spat again, his hair bristling into more shaggy ferocity, till he closed the alternation of spitting and staring, by fairly exclaiming 'What a scoundrelly phizz!' and rushing out of the room.

Yet this was the man who at that very period was at work on the *Missa Solemnis*, the Ninth Symphony and the last of his 32 piano sonatas, which seems to encapsulate in its two unique movements the whole of Beethoven's spiritual journey, from the defiant fist in the face of fate, through the almost superhuman struggle with his destiny, on to the stillness of acceptance and finally to a transfiguring serenity in which all struggle and suffering seem to have been transcended

53 Music: Piano Sonata No. 32 in C, Op. 111

54 It comes as no surprise to learn that in the throes of creating these late, transcendent works, Beethoven seemed to have lost almost all touch with the practicalities of day to day existence. Fortunately, he had servants to look after him. Unfortunately (but not surprisingly), he found most of them intolerable, with the result that there was a rapid turnover. One afternoon, at around four p.m., Anton Schindler and a friend arrived at Beethoven's lodgings to visit him.

As soon as we entered we learned that in the morning both servants had left, and that there had been a quarrel after midnight which had disturbed the neighbours – both servants had gone to sleep and Beethoven found the food which they had prepared earlier uneatable. In the living room, which was locked, we heard the master singing, howling, stamping. After listening to this almost terrifying performance for a long time, we were about to leave when the door opened, and Beethoven stood before us, his features so distorted that it was enough to inspire fear ... His first utterances were confused, as if he had been disagreeably surprised by our overhearing him. Describing the events of the day he obviously controlled himself. 'Pretty doings here,' he said, 'everyone has run away and I have had nothing to eat since yesterday lunch.'

Beethoven's manner and behaviour were often so appalling that it's easy to overlook his redeeming features: not only his capacity for lasting friendship but the loyalty he inspired, his generosity to others, and the sheer pleasure friends and acquaintances took in his company.

His talk and his actions were often one long chain of eccentricities, some of them most peculiar, yet they all radiated a truly childlike amiability, carelessness and confidence in all who approached him. Even his barking tirades, such as those against his Viennese contemporaries, were only explosions of his fanciful imagination and his momentary excitement. They were uttered without any haughtiness,

and for the most part without any feeling of bitterness or resentment, simply blustered out lightly and good-humouredly ... He often showed that to the person who had grievously injured him, or whom he himself had just violently denounced, he would be willing to give his last thaler, if that person should need it.

As long as it wasn't Johanna – but even with her, as we've seen, he had his moments. Nevertheless, given the wealth of written evidence that's come down to us, it's hard not to believe that some of Beethoven's friends, at least, gave a simplistically sanitized picture of his character. Ignaz von Seyfried, for instance.

Beethoven was much too straightforward, open and tolerant to give offence to another by disapprobation or contradiction; he was wont to laugh heartily at what did not please him and I confidently believe that in all his life he never consciously made an enemy. He was often misunderstood, to be sure, but only by those who hadn't the patience to get acquainted with this apparent eccentric.

But it was Ferdinand Ries, perhaps, who summed him up most concisely:

On the whole he was a thoroughly good and kind man, on whom his moods and impetuosity played the most shabby tricks.

Beethoven's many letters, even the jokier ones, reveal his sometimes rather strenuous good humour but very little in the way of charm. Words, as he often said himself, were not his medium – indeed he once said 'music is the only thing I do well. Everything else I do either badly, or stupidly, or both.' We've already encountered his physical clumsiness and his inability to dance in time. Among the most surprising of his other shortcomings though was his apparent failure to master

basic arithmetic. He could add but not multiply, even at comparatively low levels. Ask him what four times fifteen comes to and he would laboriously write out  $15 + 15 + 15 + 15$  and arrive at the answer in three separate stages. The more one studies the lives of great creative artists the more it begins to seem that genius derives, in part, from the clash, or at least the friction, of opposites.

☞ In his attitudes to the performance and publication of his own music, Beethoven went to bewildering extremes. On the one hand he was a deeply principled composer of unyielding integrity, an artist, as he himself once wrote, ‘who prefers to hear his work performed exactly as it is written’; on the other, he was prepared, at times anyway, to regard some of his greatest music with an abandonment of artistic principles which boggles the mind. It can persuasively be argued that his colossal ‘Hammerklavier’ Sonata is as great, and as revolutionary, as anything he ever wrote. Yet in discussion with an English publisher he seems ready to have it chopped up any which way, like so much sausage meat,

Should this sonata not be suitable for London, I could send another one, or you could omit the Largo altogether and begin straight away with the Fugue, which is the last movement; or you could use the first movement and then the Adagio, and then for the third movement the Scherzo – and omit entirely no. 4 – or you could just take the first movement and the Scherzo and let them form the whole sonata. I leave it to you to do as you think best.

☞ It’s almost incredible – like a great writer giving his publisher permission to print the chapters of a novel in any order.

No such liberties were sanctioned in the case of the Ninth Symphony, which had its long-awaited première on 7th May 1824. But it was a strange and in some ways tragic occasion, as the orchestral violinist Josef Böhm explained:

Beethoven himself conducted. That is, he stood in front of a conductor's stand and threw himself back and forth like a madman, flailing about with his hands and feet as though he wanted to play all the instruments and sing all the chorus parts. The actual direction was in the hands of Duport; we musicians followed his baton only. Beethoven was so excited that he saw nothing that was going on around him, paying no heed whatever to the bursts of applause, which his deafness prevented him from hearing in any case. He had always to be told when it was time to acknowledge the applause, which he did in the most ungracious manner imaginable.

But the applause was spontaneous and prolonged and broke out long before the now-famous choral finale. The Scherzo, with its dramatic use of the kettledrums, was applauded even as the music was being played.

57 Music: Symphony No. 9 (Scherzo)

58 The Ninth Symphony was by a wide margin the most colossal orchestral work ever written. And with its long and completely unprecedented choral finale, complete with four vocal soloists, it paved the way for the massive choral symphonies of Mahler some seven decades later. It was also to be Beethoven's last symphony, though he didn't intend it to be. At the time of his death he'd already made substantial sketches for a Tenth Symphony. Written more or less in tandem with the Ninth was the almost equally colossal *Missa Solemnis*, three movements of which shared the billing with the Ninth at that same historic concert in May which had marked the symphony's unveiling.

For Beethoven to have gone out in such a blaze of glory, splendour and triumphant affirmation would have made a climax worthy of the biggest Hollywood blockbuster. But he didn't. Instead, he turned to one of the most intimate forms of music making yet devised: the string quartet. And his six final contributions to that medium, which he'd already done so much to develop, are

judged by many people to constitute the greatest music ever written - to this day. They take us into hitherto uncharted realms of spiritual experience which lie way beyond the powers of analysis to explain or to describe. And the violinist Carl Holz, one of the closest friends of his last years, leaves us in no doubt that Beethoven fully recognised this.

For him, the crowning achievement of his quartet writing, and his favourite piece, was the E-flat Cavatina from the Quartet in B flat major. He actually composed it in tears of melancholy (in the summer of 1825) and confessed to me that his own music had never had such an effect on him before, and that even thinking back to the piece cost him fresh tears.

59 String Quartet in B flat, Op. 130 ('Cavatina')

60 Beethoven never recovered from the decline of his health in the aftermath of Karl's suicide attempt, and the peace and serenity which can be found in his last music had no very significant counterpart in his personal relations. In their last month together before Karl joined the army, Beethoven was mostly confined to bed, and for much of that time Karl was at his side. The old quarrels, suspicions and reproaches seemed at last to have been laid to rest, though Beethoven's obsession with Johanna's dangerous influence persisted.

After Karl went off to join his regiment on 2nd January, 1827, Beethoven's condition declined sharply. For the next three months he grew steadily more emaciated. Trembling and shivering, he was often bent double with pain, and his feet became grotesquely swollen. He endured four operations which brought him no more than temporary relief, and as March drew to a close, his friends, among them Anton Schindler, could hardly doubt that Beethoven too was near his end.

His death was rapidly approaching, and we could only wish to see him released from his terrible suffering. For a week he lay as though almost dead, but would summon his remaining strength now

and again to put a question or to ask for something. His condition was quite terrible. He lay in a permanent state of dull brooding; his head hanging forward onto his breast and his eyes staring fixedly at one spot for hours; he seldom recognised his closest acquaintances unless he was told who they were. It was a dreadful thing to see.

On 23rd March, in a particularly lucid moment, he asked for his pen and painfully wrote his final words – a codicil to his will, in which he specified that in the event of Karl’s death, the entire capital of his estate should pass to his mother, Johanna van Beethoven. At long last, he had made his peace with the ‘Queen of the Night’. The moment had now come when Beethoven, the man who had taken Fate by the throat, knew with absolute certainty that his lifelong struggle was almost over. He turned to the friends standing at his bedside, and surprised them by speaking in Latin: ‘Plaudite amici, finita est comoedia’ (‘Applaud, my friends, for the comedy is over’). Soon afterwards he lost consciousness and lapsed into a coma. Yet still he clung to life. Two days passed. The morning of the 26th dawned stormy and dull, and the unsettled, wintry weather persisted through the day. The rest of the story can be told by Anselm Hüttenbrenner:

During Beethoven’s last moments there was no-one present in the death-chamber but Frau van Beethoven and myself. Beethoven lay in the final agony, unconscious and with the death-rattle in his throat, from 3 o’clock, when I arrived, until after 5 o’clock. Then there was suddenly a loud clap of thunder accompanied by a bolt of lightning which illuminated the death-chamber with a harsh light (the snow lay thick in front of Beethoven’s house). After this unexpected natural phenomenon, which had shaken me greatly, Beethoven suddenly opened his eyes, raised his right hand, looked upwards for several seconds and shook his fist, with a very grave, threatening countenance, as though to say ‘I defy you all, powers of evil! Away! God is with me.’ And his hand sank down onto the bed again, his eyes half closed. My right hand lay under his head, my left hand rested on his breast. There was no more breathing, no more heart-beat. The great composer’s spirit fled from this world of deception into the

kingdom of truth. I shut his half-open eyes, kissed them, and then his forehead, mouth and hands. At my request, Frau van Beethoven cut a lock of his hair and gave it to me as a sacred relic of Beethoven's last hour.

Thirty-odd years earlier, the streets of Vienna had been almost deserted as the body of the 35-year-old Mozart was conveyed in the rain to an unmarked pauper's grave. Now, on 29th March 1827, they were choked by an estimated 20,000 mourners who gathered to pay their last respects to the man almost universally held to have been the greatest composer who ever lived. He was a man, as we've seen, whose life had been beset by almost continuous sufferings, physical, psychological and emotional, but a man, also, whose tenacious hold on – more than that, whose ultimately indomitable love of life had found unique expression in his music. His art embraced the whole of life, and the experience of all of humanity. And it's no mere coincidence that the last movement of his last symphony is a setting of the poet Schiller's *Ode to Joy*.

61 Music: Symphony No. 9

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