



# Ludwig van Beethoven

**BORN** 1770, Bonn, Germany. **DIED** 1827, Vienna, Austria.

## HIGHLIGHTS

1. Ludwig van Beethoven was born December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany. His father, Johann, had ambitions for his son, wanting him to be the next child prodigy. He was not disappointed when at 5, Ludwig was already playing the piano and violin and was demonstrating a remarkable musical memory.
2. Beethoven was only 5 feet 4 inches tall, the same height as his heroes, Napoleon and Mozart. He had a large head, a dark complexioned face scarred from smallpox, and sad-looking, nearsighted eyes.
3. Beethoven was a great admirer of revolutionaries and as a child loved to listen to stories about the American and French revolutions. Throughout his life he demonstrated a disdain for the aristocracy and a sympathy for common folk. As Beethoven turned 30, he realized that he was slowly going deaf.

## BACKGROUND & TIMES

1. Beethoven's later works stretched the abilities of the musicians and their instruments and confused people of the time. Often musicians proclaimed his works to be impossible to perform. But even this later phase of his works was still widely recognized,

deeply admired, and became the period that would influence composers of the 1900s, including Bela Bartok.

2. Because of his advancing deafness he had to gradually cease playing the piano and performing. He then shifted to composing and produced stunning symphonies, concertos, and sonatas.
3. Goethe, the famous writer who admired Beethoven once said of him: "He is an utterly untamed personality, who is not altogether wrong in holding the world to be detestable, but surely does not make it any more enjoyable either for himself or for others, by his attitude."

## INNOVATIONS IN STYLE

1. Beethoven's special gift was creating works of art with varied emotions with a unity that relied on the organization of the music itself.
2. Beethoven's craftsmanship was developed mostly at the piano. He wrote his first two symphonies, his first three piano concertos, and several sonatas during the early portion of his career.
3. To Beethoven, feeling was important in the music but this didn't make him a true romantic. He is instead a true classical composer because of the

balance he achieved between emotion and form.

4. His trademark sound is *crescendos*, unexpected accents, and the rapid up and down of chords.
5. Before Beethoven, music required a function or an event but Beethoven's music is the central event.

## UNIQUE INFLUENCE

1. Beethoven is solely responsible for giving instrumental music its rightful place and is also responsible for making it an art form independent of voice and singing.
2. People have found his *Ode to Joy* so inspiring that it's often played on special occasions or historic events. For instance, it was played during the Chinese student protest in 1989 and was also played when Germany's Berlin Wall was torn down in 1990.
3. During Beethoven's middle period, he began to explore. This period would influence the Romantic composers who followed. He paved the way with compositions that were highly expressive, mysterious, and lyrical.
4. Beethoven is the first composer to have liberated himself from the bonds of church or court for his livelihood.

## MAJOR WORKS

### SYMPHONIES

*No. 3 in E-flat (Eroica); No. 5 in C Minor; No. 9 in D Minor (Ode to Joy); No. 6 in F; No. 7 in A.*

### OTHER ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

*Piano Concerto No. 4 in G; Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat; Violin Concerto in D; Leonore Overture.*

### STRING QUARTETS

*No. 13 in B-flat; No. 14 in C-sharp Minor; Great Fugue; Trio No. 6 in B-flat.*

### SOLO INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

*Piano Sonata No. 23 in F Minor (Appassionata); Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor (Pathétique); Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor*

*(Moonlight); No. 14 in C-sharp Minor; No. 21 in C; No. 23 in F Minor; Sonata No. 9 in A for Violin and Piano.*

### OPERA

*Fidelio.*