



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

Background

Beethoven was born in 1. _____, Germany and was one of seven children in the family, four of whom died at infancy. He inherited his musical talent from his grandfather, Louis van Beethoven. Beethoven's father, Johann, was also a 2. _____ but had limited talent and a very aggressive personality. He realised Ludwig's potential, but was disappointed when his son, who developed his talents slowly, did not become a child prodigy like Mozart. It was his deeply loved mother, Maria Magdalena, who kept order within the household by attempting to control Johann's excesses.

Early Achievements

Despite his father's cruelty and brutal teaching methods, Beethoven showed signs of potential at an early age. At age 3. _____, he was advanced enough to appear in public and his progress became rapid when the composer Christian Gottlob Neefe took over his 4. _____. In 1780, his Variations for Piano in C minor were published and listed in the Leipzig catalogue.

Beethoven in Vienna

Beethoven visited the musical centre of Vienna in 5. _____ and it was here that he met Mozart, who gave him his first composition lessons. His talent impressed Mozart, but before proper lessons could take place, news of Beethoven's dying mother sent him back to 6. _____. At home, the situation was worsening as Beethoven was forced to take charge of everything - including his father's salary. This enabled Beethoven to become more self-reliant and it was because of his father that he developed 7. _____.

By the time he returned to Vienna in 1792, 8. _____ had also died. Haydn was passing through Vienna at this time and it was to him that Beethoven went for composition lessons. Unfortunately, the two had little in common, and Beethoven found Johann Albrechtsberger's tuition more valuable.

Preparing for greatness

Giving concerts in Vienna as well as Berlin and Prague, Beethoven was soon established as Vienna's leading concert pianist, and despite the growing rivalry between other performers, he still managed to attract nobility from all over Europe. In his first appearance in Vienna in 1795, Beethoven performed his Piano Concerto No.2 in B flat, and in this decade also composed piano sonatas, cello sonatas and violin sonatas. His First Symphony was completed in 1800, and his first set of string quartets in 1801. After leaving the court position in Bonn, Beethoven became Vienna's first successful freelance musician.

The onset of deafness

Beethoven created his greatest compositions, ironically, when he began experiencing deafness. From 1798, Beethoven was aware of a continual humming in his ear that gradually grew stronger until he went practically deaf. Beethoven was determined not to be ruined by his deafness, and by 1812 he had completed symphonies 2, 3 'Eroica', 4, 5, 6 'Pastoral', 7 and 8, Piano Concertos 4 and 5 'Emperor', the Violin Concerto, piano sonatas, the three Rasumovsky String Quartets, the opera Fidelio, and many other works. During the next 12 years, Beethoven composed the Hammerklavier Sonata, the last three piano sonatas, the Diabelli Variations, the Missa Solemnis, and the celebrated Ninth Symphony, ending with the famous Ode to Joy.

Final days

Beethoven's health deteriorated rapidly in 1826. He suffered from illnesses such as pneumonia, cirrhosis of the liver, and dropsy. His friends knew that Beethoven was dying and paid their respects. Twenty thousand people turned out for his funeral. He was buried at Währing Cemetery, alongside Schubert.

Ludwig van Beethoven was the most well-respected figure of the late classical period, and the next few centuries have firmly placed him on Classical music's Mount Olympus. He was undoubtedly the most influential symphonist of all time, boldly breaking all established conventions and traditions. His music always contains passages of nobility and warmth, and an underlying belief in the human spirit that found such powerful expression in his Ninth Symphony's 'Ode to Joy'.