

## **12 Things You Probably Didn't Know About Beethoven**

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*Ludwig van Beethoven, one of the greatest composers who ever lived, was born in December 1770 in Bonn, Germany to a musical family. His grandfather and father were both singers in the state choir. Stubborn and self-involved, dramatic yet loving of his friends, Beethoven would become a virtuoso pianist and canonical composer of nine symphonies, concertos for piano, piano sonatas, and string quartets. His oeuvre spanned the period between the Classical style, characterized by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Joseph Haydn, and Romantic style, led by Frédéric Chopin and Franz Liszt, and created a new vocabulary of humanism and enlightenment in music. Having performed brilliantly for much of his youth and into his early thirties, Beethoven slowly lost his hearing, yet went on to write many of the most important works in musical history.*

**To celebrate the 250th birthday of Ludwig van Beethoven this year, here's a list of things you might not know about this beloved artist, with information from Jan Swafford's biography *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*.**

### **1. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN'S FATHER HUSTLED HIS SON INTO PERFORMING.**

Early on, Johann van Beethoven noticed the boy's penchant for playing. He set his sights on creating a prodigy just as Mozart had been a couple of decades before. Johann forced his son to practice day and night to reach the same level of genius. Neighbors of Beethoven remembered the small boy standing on a bench to reach the keyboard, crying, as his father loomed over him.

### **2. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN WAS BAD AT MATH.**

Having left school at age 11 to help with household income, Beethoven never learned how to multiply or divide. To his last day, if he had to multiply, say, 60 x 52, he'd lay out 60 52 times and add them up.

### **3. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN WAS A NOTORIOUS DAYDREAMER.**

Once, while speaking to family friend Cacilie, she noticed him zoning out. When she demanded a reply to what she'd said, his answer was, "I was just occupied with such a lovely, deep thought, I couldn't bear to be disturbed."

### **4. ON HIS FIRST VISIT TO VIENNA, 17-YEAR-OLD LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN PERFORMED FOR MOZART.**

Mozart, then the greatest composer in Vienna, was generally unimpressed with other musicians, being so far ahead of his peers in talent and accomplishments. No one really knows what happened in the recital, but apocryphally, Mozart allegedly walked out of the room saying, "Keep your eyes on him—someday he'll give the world something to talk about."

#### 5. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN'S PERFORMANCES WERE KNOWN FOR IMPROVISATION.

One of Beethoven's contemporaries, composer Johann Baptist Cramer, told his students that if you haven't heard Beethoven improvise, you haven't heard improvisation.

#### 6. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN LEARNED FROM HAYDN.

After moving to Vienna in his early 20s, Beethoven took lessons from Joseph Haydn, father of the symphony. As per Beethoven's habit with teachers, the two often got frustrated with each other, and ultimately didn't like each other very much.

#### 7. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN PIONEERED COMPOSITION FOR PIANO.

Beethoven's predecessors had composed for harpsichord, but Beethoven decided he would focus his efforts on the piano, an instrument for which no one had yet written comprehensive work.

#### 8. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN'S DEAFNESS PROBABLY RESULTED FROM CHILDHOOD ILLNESS.

Though Beethoven attributed the beginning of his deafness to an instance in which he was startled and fell, it was likely a side effect of a disease he had suffered from as a child, such as typhus or smallpox. He began to hear constant buzzing at age 27.

#### 9. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN CONTROLLED HIS PUBLIC IMAGE.

The composer set the tone of critiques of his work in the leading music journal of the day, the *Allgemein musikalische Zeitung* (AMZ), telling the editor to back off with negative comments if he wanted to receive copies of the musician's work.

#### 10. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN E-FLAT MAJOR WAS DEDICATED TO NAPOLEON.

At first, Beethoven admired Napoleon as a symbol of revolution and new era in Europe, and wrote his third symphony, also called Eroica, as he considered moving to Paris. Later Beethoven would be disappointed that the French general crowned himself emperor, but the symphony would be a defining artistic work of the German enlightenment.

#### 11. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN NEVER QUIT HIS DAY JOB.

Despite his acclaim, the composer always had to work hard to ensure a comfortable living by giving piano lessons, writing work commissioned by wealthy Viennese citizens, and publishing his own music.

#### 12. THOUSANDS JOINED THE PROCESSION AT LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN'S BURIAL.

Vienna's leading composers, playwrights, poets, and citizens, took part at the city's Währing cemetery. His monument said, simply, "BEETHOVEN."

## Some notes about the pieces that are part of our concert:

### 1. *Beethoven String quartet Op. 18, No. 4 in C minor - movement 1*

A string quartet is a chamber group made of two violins, a viola and a cello. The entire piece has four movements, which is the standard format for string quartets.

This piece by Beethoven was written in between 1798 and 1800 and was published in 1801. It is thought that he used pieces from other works to create this piece. He would have been between the ages of 28 and 30 when he wrote it.

For more specific information about this piece, please click here: <https://vanrecital.com/tag/string-quartet-in-c-minor-op-18-no-4/>

### 2. Allegretto from Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92

The symphony was written in 1811-1812 and was premiered in December 1813. The second movement of the Seventh often is performed separately from the complete symphony, and might have been one of Beethoven's most popular compositions. It's premiere performance was for soldiers injured in Hanau, which occurred on October 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, 1813. Bavarian soldiers fought against the retreating Napoleon army. This was thought to be one his best attended concerts.

To hear the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement in it's entirety with animated graphics, check out this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffYKCNy6kUk>

### 3. Selections from Six Country Dances

In late 1792, Beethoven travelled to Vienna to study with Haydn, who soon demonstrated to his pupil the art of writing public dance music. Beethoven's best mentors in these genres were Mozart and Haydn. While these masters wrote public dance music relatively late in their careers, Beethoven was only beginning his career. He had everything ahead of him, and one can hear that in many of these dances, even if some of them are only 36 seconds long! These songs have been arranged for many different sets of instruments: piano solo, string quartet, solo violin and solo viola to name a few.

4. Sonatina WoO 43A (originally Sonatina for mandolin and harpsichord)

This Sonatina was written between February and April 1796 while Beethoven was living as a touring pianist. In 1796, he left Vienna for a concert tour – his first stop was in Prague where he stayed 3 months. Beethoven travelled with his patron, Prince Lichnowsky, who was on his way to his estates in Bohemia and Silesia. Lichnowsky introduced Beethoven to the salons of the nobility in Prague and opened doors for him into higher social circles.

Beethoven wrote several works in Prague, including the Four Pieces for Mandolin and Piano (Harpsichord) WoO 43 and 44. The pieces were written for and dedicated to Comtesse Josephine von Clary-Aldringen, a well-known singer and mandolin player.

5. *An die ferne Geliebte* (To The Distant Beloved) from the song cycle of the same name

This one song from a cycle of six songs written by Beethoven in 1816, when he was 46. The six poems were written by Alois Jeitteles, a young Czech medical student in Vienna, possibly at Beethoven's request.

It is thought that this is one of his most influential works because it inspired the song cycles of Schumann and Schubert later in the Romantic period of classical music. Schumann even quotes the theme from one of these songs in his Fantasy in C major, Op. 17, as an homage to Beethoven.

All of the songs from the cycle can be heard at this link – if you enjoy the performance in our concert! Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Gerald Moore: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOk7EWYbyqk>

6. Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2: Sonata quasi una fantasia (Moonlight Sonata)

*From Britannica.com:* This piece is a solo piano work by Ludwig van Beethoven, admired particularly for its mysterious, gently arpeggiated, and seemingly improvised first movement. The piece was completed in 1801, published the following year, and premiered by the composer himself. The nickname Moonlight Sonata traces to the 1830s, when German Romantic poet Ludwig Rellstab published a review in which he likened the first movement of the piece to a boat floating in the moonlight on Switzerland's Lake Lucerne. Beethoven dedicated the work to Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, a 16-year-old aristocrat who was his student for a short time.

7. Two Folk Songs from 25 Irish Songs, WoO 152

Scottish publisher and folk song collector, George Thomson (1757-1851), commissioned Beethoven to arrange a series of folk songs. After Beethoven arranged the melodies, Thomson added lyrics. They were published in 1814. English Beethoven scholar, Barry Cooper (1949) has said of Beethoven's Irish folk song arrangements that they have "a kind of sophisticated artlessness that no ordinary composer could achieve."

#### 8. Romance by Claude Debussy for cello and piano

In the 1992 book "Debussy Remembered" by Robert Nichols the author states: Debussy's relationship to Beethoven was complex; he was said to refer to him as "le vieux sourd" (the old deaf one) and asked one young pupil not to play Beethoven's music for "it is like somebody dancing on my grave;" but he believed that Beethoven had profound things to say, yet did not know how to say them, "because he was imprisoned in a web of incessant restatement and of German aggressiveness."

#### 9. Allegro spiritoso by Jean-Baptiste Senaillé (c1688-1730)

Jean-Baptiste Senaillé was a French born Baroque composer and violin virtuoso. He was regarded as one of the leading violinists in Paris at the beginning of the eighteenth century and is known for bringing Italian baroque pieces to the French court. Allegro spiritoso, written in 2/4, is from the last movement of a Violin Sonata and is one of his most famous works.

#### 10. "Fidelio" from the opera Fidelio

Beethoven wrote only one opera in his entire career, Fidelio. The opera has three known versions, the first performance was in 1805 and the final version was performed in 1814. The first two versions were titled Lenore and only the final version uses the title Fidelio.

A brief synopsis from Opera Online: Leonore has disguised herself as a man and presented herself as Fidelio, in order to be hired as a deputy gaoler in the prison where her husband Florestan is unjustly held at the orders of the cruel Don Pizarro. In this hazardous undertaking, Fidelio has aroused the love of Marzelline, the gaoler's daughter, who now rejects her fiancé. The courageous and persistent wife will manage to save her husband from the death reserved for him by Pizarro, his political enemy whose treachery will be exposed.

If you would like to read more about Fidelio and it's category as a "rescue opera" check out this article: <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/07/132712125/strife-and-salvation-beethovens-fidelio>

#### 11. Three movements from Suite no. 4 in E flat Major, BWV 1010, for Solo Cello by J.S. Bach

Johann Sebastian Bach was a German born composer of a large musical family. He is generally regarded as one of the greatest composers of all time and is celebrated as the creator of the *Brandenburg Concertos*, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, *the Mass in B Minor*, and numerous other masterpieces of church and instrumental music. There is no doubt that his music influenced the composers of Beethoven's generation and continues to influence composers of the current generation.

Bach composed the fourth cello suite sometime between 1717-1723 while he was in the employ of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen. Some say that the Prelude is harmonically one of his wildest. The key of E-flat is not especially "easy" on the cello – the key does not allow the use of resonant open strings in the high register.

To read a full analysis of this piece, please read this article:

<https://costanzabach.stanford.edu/commentary/suite-no-4-e-flat-major>

#### 12. Franz Joseph Haydn, London Trio, No. 1 in C. Hob. IV

Haydn was a teacher and influencer of Beethoven. His London Trios were written in 1794 when Haydn travelled to London with his patron, Lord Abington. In all, there are four works, originally written for two flutes and cello. At this time, the flute was a relatively new instrument and had become the number one instrument of choice for amateur musicians.

To learn more about the relationship between Haydn and Beethoven, check out this article:

<https://www.classicfm.com/composers/beethoven/guides/beethoven-and-haydn-their-relationship/>

#### 13. Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano', WoO 28

"Là ci darem la mano" ("There we will give each other our hands") is a duet for the characters Don Giovanni (baritone) and Zerlina (soprano) from Act I of Mozart's 1787 opera Don Giovanni. Beethoven wrote this lovely set of variations in 1795. During this period, Beethoven was studying Mozart and was considered to be the successor to Mozart. The piece has been arranged for a variety of instrumentations, but the original setting was for two oboes and English horn (Cor anglais).

#### 14. Zärtliche Liebe (Tender Love), WoO 123

"Zärtliche Liebe" ("Tender Love") was first published in 1803 by Johann Traeg in Vienna, however it is believed that the pieces was actually written in 1795. In 1795, Beethoven had lived in Vienna for almost two years and had studied with Haydn and other composer of the period. He had become something of a "hot commodity" among Viennese aristocrats, and his music was becoming popular. "Zärtliche Liebe" contains subtle nuances that point toward the mature Beethoven. The arching, stepwise lines and quiet interplay between the voice and piano demonstrate Beethoven's assimilation of the Classical style as embodied in the work of Haydn and Mozart.

#### 15. Adelaide, Opus. 46

Adelaide is a song for solo voice and piano composed in about 1795. The text is a poem in German by Friedrich von Matthisson (1761–1831) to whom the composition is dedicated. The piece was premiered in 1797 by singer Magdalena Willmann, an acquaintance of Beethoven in Bonn who found herself in Vienna with Beethoven. It is said that Beethoven was quite infatuated with her and even proposed to her, although she turned him down. The song was a favorite of singers and was rearranged by several composers.

#### 16. Drei Equali - Three Equals for four trombones, WoO 30

Beethoven first included trombones in his symphonic music his fifth, written in 1808. The Drei Equali were commissioned in 1812 as tower music for All Soul's Day. Their first performance was on November 2, 1812 at Old Cathedral, Linz. Pieces 1 and 3 were performed at Beethoven's funeral both by trombone quartet and by men's vocal quartet. The pieces continue to be a part of the standard trombone repertory.

#### 17. "Ode to Joy" from Symphony No. 9 for violin and cello duet

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, is the final complete symphony of Beethoven, written between 1822 and 1824. It was first performed on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1824. The symphony is regarded by many to be Beethoven's greatest work and one of the crowning achievements of western music history.

The symphony was the first example of a major composer using voices in a symphony. Only the fourth movement of the symphony includes four vocal soloists and a chorus. The words were taken from the "Ode to Joy", a poem written by Friedrich Schiller in 1785 and revised in 1803, with text additions made by Beethoven.

Listen to a performance of the 4<sup>th</sup> movement of Symphony No. 9. We were looking forward to performing this for Roswell! <https://youtu.be/q0EiVVjJraA>

# Happy 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Beethoven!