

Favorite Composers

For this tour, I selected three composers whom I believe are the greatest composers to have ever lived. They changed the course of music with their innovations and have influenced composers for centuries. Even today, their music and legacy live on beyond their imagination. Who are these composers?

We'll begin this tour with Georg Friderick Handel, continue with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and conclude with Ludwig van Beethoven.

Georg Friderick Handel

Georg Friderick Handel was a 17th century composer who wrote exquisite and delightful masterpieces that share a very special place in my musical collection.

In addition to his prolific compositional achievements, Handel established his reputation as the most important composer of his generation. He was also a savvy businessman and a talented impresario.

He had a clear perception of the musical trends of his time and was quick and receptive to the needs of both his noble and common audiences.

Let's now take an in-depth look at Handel's life and his musical accomplishments. After this tour, you will be able to:

- Describe Handel's life and accomplishments
- Identify Handel's major compositions
- State Handel's role in history

Handel in a Nutshell

Handel was a brilliant composer who wrote a vast amount of exceptionally well crafted music.

Handel distinguished himself for writing oratorios, operas, music for the harpsichord, concerti grossi, music for orchestra and an extensive variety of sacred and secular music.

His music was regarded as the most elegant and well written of his time. Handel was a giant among giants, with other composers of the time such as Antonio Vivaldi, George Phillip Telemann, Johann Sebastian Bach, Domenico and Alessandro Scarlatti.

Square One

George Friderick Handel was born on February 23rd, 1685 in Halle, a city in Germany.

As a child, Handel played the organ at the Cathedral in Halle. Handel's mother encouraged her son to pursue his musical dreams.

On the other hand, his father did not think the same way. He thought that music was a profession that would not provide his son with a gratifying occupation or a commendable livelihood.

The Cathedral provided Handel with the best organ and the best musical opportunities. It also provided young Handel with a safe haven to practice his music away from his father's disaffected ears.

The Dawning of a Great Composer

His father, a barber-surgeon by trade, wanted him to become a lawyer. However, young Handel had different plans and talents.

Regardless of his musical instincts and desires, young Handel honored his father and obeyed his wishes. In 1702, Handel registered and attended Halle University to study law. However, a year later at age 18, Handel decided that music, not law, would be his life long career.

The Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels usually attended the services at the Cathedral every Sunday.

Eventually, he met young Handel during a Sunday evening concert organized by the Master organist with Handel's help.

That evening, Handel appealed to the Duke's musical ears and heart. The Duke was very impressed and overwhelmed by Handel's musical skills.

The Duke eventually made financial arrangements to ensure that Handel would continue to study with the Cathedral's master organist. This event marked the beginning of Handel's musical career.

Handel's musical education included a vast array of musical subjects such as music theory, counterpoint, and composition. He also played the organ and the violin.

Beginning of a Musical Tenure

In 1703, at the age of 18, Handel used his recently learned violin skills to reach a very important landmark of his musical career.

He auditioned for a vacant violin position in the Hamburg Opera House orchestra. As Handel sat with other musicians in the orchestra pit, he listened to and enjoyed the beautiful singing on stage. He was impressed with the opera divas' and prima donnas' use of Bel canto style.

This experience must have caused an indelible impression on the young musician, who was already quite familiar with the driving force of the human voice.

On the Road to Greatness

Bel canto translates to English as “beautiful singing”, and it is an Italian style of opera writing that allows leading opera headliners, also known as divas or prima donnas, to display their vocal brilliance.

Before long, Handel fell in love with vocal music, and this love drove him to discover more about operas and oratorios.

Oratorios began to flourish in Europe and especially in England by the early part of the 1700s.

An oratorio was a sacred opera without costumes or scenery for people who wanted opera during the times when the opera theatres were closed for religious reasons.

Handel learned from a wealth of musical resources that otherwise would not have been available to him during his time at the opera house.

This knowledge about the human voice allowed him to write instrumental music in such a way that it resembled the musical attributes of the human voice.

During Handel's time, Hamburg was the home of the German opera, and Italy was the major opera center in Europe.

He knew that Italy, not Germany, was the place to go if one wanted to learn how to write operas in the Italian style.

The first operas had been performed and written in Italy, during the late 16th century, by many preeminent Italian opera composers.

Handel resigned his position as a violinist in the Hamburg opera house orchestra, and set forth to the beautiful Italian city of Florence.

The musical scene in Florence provided Handel with his first personal exposure to the beauties of Italian opera.

In addition to staying in Florence, Handel visited other cities in Italy in order to familiarize himself with the different styles, audiences and regional subtleties of Italian opera. Handel was exposed to many great Italian opera composers and performers during his visit to Venice, Milan and Rome.

Handel thought that his Italian excursion would provide a valuable first-hand lesson on opera writing and production as was customary on the most important Italian opera stages.

On the Road to Greatness...

Although at the time of his visit, Handel was not well received by his Italian colleagues, the visit to Italy was a decisive and positive move for his musical career.

The Italians did not think highly of his musical abilities. How could they have ever imagined that Handel would later accomplish greater fame than any Italian composer!

Handel had a special affinity and appreciation for the artistic potential of the human voice. This appreciation allowed him to have a better use of the available talent for his vocal music.

Vocal music surrounded and defined Handel's splendid body of music. His work reflects more than the task of writing for voices.

His innate ability to understand the breathing and phrasing cycle of the voice equipped Handel with a gift to write music for instruments in a different way than any other composer before him.

He understood the language of music like no one else did and he knew how to blend all elements of music into his timeless compositions.

This is why I think his music has a wider appeal to the general music audience.

Handel wrote a collection of concerti grossi, which are sets of instrumental music that feature cleverly blended harmonies and rhythms.

Handel's concerti grossi clearly earned him well deserved credit and respect. Writing operas and oratorios assured him a prominent place in the history of music.

His effective way of writing for solo voices and choruses reflected his mastery of designing lucid vocal textures.

These textures highlighted the plot of the corresponding opera or oratorio. In Italian, the plot is also known as the *libretto*.

Handel was not the only composer following this technique, but he was the most important.

Handel used the natural range of the human voice to make his music striking, beautiful and captivating.

He knew how to exploit the best of the normal ranges of singers with the straightforward and popular libretti of his operas and oratorios.

Additionally, he used his knowledge of harmony to integrate the sounds and texture of his choruses.

Handel knew that he would achieve the greatest impact on his audiences by maximizing the use and potential of singers in his productions. His operas and oratorios are indeed his best argument.

Crafting a Career

After returning from his trip to Italy, Handel took a job as musical director to George Ludwig, who was the Elector of Hanover at the time. Handel began using his newly acquired skills to write operas in the Italian style.

In the meantime, European audiences were captivated with the beauty of Italian operas and its Bel Canto style.

The Italian opera became highly fashionable in the continental Europe and opera houses were continuously sold out.

The people of London followed this musical trend, which attracted enough interest to support this growing musical novelty. Several months after obtaining his new position, Handel asked the Elector for permission to travel to London.

Handel had something new and refreshing to offer London audiences: the beauty of Italian operas. At the time, Italian operas were a very profitable business.

In addition to being a great musician, Handel also proved to be a very savvy businessman.

Crafting a Career...

In 1705, Handel managed and supervised the premiere of his first opera titled *Almira*, which was completely written in the Italian style.

London's audiences were exposed to Handel's music for the first time and they loved it. The premiere of the opera was a smashing success. His visit to London was profitable and highly successful.

At a royal festive occasion, Handel met a British ambassador who invited him to stay in London for a short season to write and present his operas written in the Italian style.

At the ambassador's request, Handel's opera *Rinaldo* premiered in London. The opera was performed at the Queen's Theatre which had been built solely to present operas in the Italian style.

Soon after, Handel triumphantly returned to Hanover to fulfill his musical duties for the Elector.

It did not take long for Handel to return to England, and by 1712, he was back in London. He was invited, by popular demand, to write and present his operas.

King George became King of England in 1714, and Handel accepted the royal appointment as chief composer of the English court soon afterwards.

Six years later, Handel became the first director of the newly created Royal Academy of Music.

At the request of King George, Handel became a British citizen by a special act of Parliament in 1726.

Touch of a Master

Handel wrote a vast amount of music during his tenure as resident composer for the King of England. This time period marks the beginning of a more mature and polished composer.

One of the most remarkable pieces he wrote during this time was the *Water Music* suite. This was written at the request of King George I while he crossed the Thames river on his way to a summer meeting with other noble friends.

The King liked it so much he requested several performances of the suite that day.

1728 marks the beginning of the decline of Italian opera.

By this time, Handel was already well known in London, and he had achieved the reputation as being one of the greatest composers living in Europe.

As a savvy businessman, Handel perceived changes that would favor staging oratorios in London, in addition to the already established opera season.

Opera producers were looking for creative ways to keep famous singers in town after the end of the opera season.

As a result, they elected to stage oratorios instead. This was a good way to generate additional income.

In 1732, Handel released *Esther*, which was an oratorio based on the woman of the same name in the Bible.

During the period, most vocal works were written in Latin or in the language of their own country. However, *Esther* was performed in English.

The year 1737 marked a great change in Handel's musical life. After writing 46 operas, he decided he would no longer write operas.

Instead, he decided to concentrate on writing oratorios. As mentioned earlier, an oratorio is a sacred opera without the scenery or costumes.

In 1739, Handel wrote his oratorio *Saul*, which is about the first King of ancient Israel and his successor, the famous King David.

During that time, Handel met Charles Jennens, the poet who wrote the libretto for *Saul*. A libretto is the script that contains the plot of an opera or oratorio.

Jennens had already gathered a large number of passages taken from the Bible for his own literary project. Jennens gave these passages to Handel and suggested that they could be used to write another oratorio. Handel used the material to write his next work, titled *Messiah*.

Touch of a Master...

Messiah is one of Handel's most famous oratorio compositions and is based on the story of Jesus Christ.

Messiah has a three-part structure, with the first part telling the story of the arrival of Jesus Christ.

The second act tells how Christ suffered while he lived on Earth.

The third act describes how he came back to life after dying on the cross.

The first performance of Handel's *Messiah* took place in a theatre in Dublin on April 13th, 1742, instead of in a church or cathedral.

Handel conceived *Messiah* as a different kind of opera written with a religious theme. He called it a sacred oratorio, but it was actually performed in theatres. The term sacred was used because oratorios use sacred text instead of secular text.

Messiah was intended for a theatre because that is where oratorios were performed in England.

The audience for theatre productions at the time was widespread. Both noblemen and common men were interested in attending. Handel wanted to reach as many people as possible.

Today, one can listen to *Messiah* in a church or cathedral. In the United States, it is traditionally played during Christmas time.

Messiah is very memorable because the words are simple and the musical voices are a pleasure to listener's ears.

Audiences particularly enjoy the Hallelujah chorus as it sings, "and he shall reign forever and ever". This is coupled with the repetition of "ever and ever" and "forever and ever" giving to the audience a sensation of purpose and intention.

Regardless of this seemingly complex process, it took Handel only three weeks to write and produce *Messiah*.

After *Messiah*, Handel worked on *Royal Fireworks*, which was first performed in 1749 to celebrate the end of the Austrian War.

The evening audience had great expectations for the premiere of *Royal Fireworks*, because the event planner had arranged a firework display. Also, the premier of *Royal Fireworks* was to be played by a very large orchestra. Unfortunately, it rained that evening and the premier did not occur as scheduled.

One month later, Handel finally premiered *Royal Fireworks* as part of a hospital charity function.

Handel also wrote another famous piece of music later that year named *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*.

Closing Curtains

Handel lived for another 18 years after he wrote Messiah. During his last few years, he began to lose his eyesight. In an attempt to correct his vision, he had an eye operation that went bad. He was totally blind by the time he died on the April 14th April, 1759.

Handel wanted to be buried quietly and privately, but he did not get his wish. Handel, like many other famous people, was buried in Westminster Abbey in London.

Throughout his musical career, Handel wrote music with style, energy, strength, and dedication. He also wrote on subject matters that he hoped had relevance to the current events in England at the time.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a true musical genius. His innate ability to understand the complex intricacies of music allowed him to become the greatest representative of the Classical period.

He was an irreverent and sassy character, who thought his talent was above any musician of his time.

Mozart is the second composer of this featured trilogy.

After this tour you will be able to:

- Describe Mozart's life and accomplishments
- Identify Mozart's major compositions
- State Mozart's role in history

Mozart in a Nutshell

Vienna was a great musical and artistic center in the 18th century during Mozart's times.

Many musical experts considered Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to be a great natural musical talent. By the time Mozart came to Vienna, in 1781, he was 25 years old but he had been famous all of his life.

Mozart's early operas are associated with Italian court entertainment. As a matter of fact, Mozart Italian operas are considered to be masterpieces of the opera repertoire.

Physically, Mozart was a small man and suffered from many illnesses throughout his short life of 35 years. As a father, Wolfgang Mozart had six children. Only two survived into adulthood, a ratio common for the time.

Mozart enjoyed lewd behavior and used to say rude things to people. I think mostly, he felt that he was a superior being. Certainly, he never considered anyone to be a better composer than he was.

Mozart also described himself as a bit of a *enfant terrible*. More often than not, he played many tricks on his friends. Some of his letters indicate a very sharp and sometimes twisted sense of humor.

Square One

Mozart was born in the Austrian city of Salzburg on the 27th of January in 1756.

Little Mozart and his sister Nannerl were the two only surviving children to Leopold and Maria Anna Mozart. He was christened Joannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Amadeus Mozart, although he would later prefer to be called Wolfgang Amadeus.

As his name suggest, Amadeus means God's favorite. His father was a gifted musician who played many instruments including the violin and the keyboard. Leopold Mozart was a renowned musical teacher who educated his children at home.

Today, Mozart's home is a museum where famous items related to Mozart's musical life are displayed.

Among the many attractions, visitors to the museum can glimpse at the violin played by the musical genius as a child, his clavichord, a pianoforte, portraits, and letters of the Mozart family.

The Dawning of a Great Composer

By the age of 3, Mozart was already playing the harpsichord. At the age of 4, he was composing music. It was simple music, but he was going through the process of creating it.

His father, Leopold Mozart, helped his son write the music, but young Mozart provided the inspiration.

At the age of 6, his father took him and his sister Nannerl to play for the royal courts of Europe.

They were an instant success despite numerous critics who saw Leopold's intentions of showing off his children's musical talents as more of an impresario than a father figure.

However, the letters Leopold wrote to friends and family suggest a completely different view.

His elder sister Nannerl was also a child prodigy. She was an exceptional musician whose talent was quickly eclipsed by the accomplishments of her younger brother.

However, during the early development years of these young prodigies, both Wolfgang Amadeus and Nannerl played for the European nobility, including Vienna Empress Maria Teresa.

In the picture you can see both Mozarts at work.

Beginning of a Musical Tenure

Young Mozart was a very curious musician and was very impressed by the power of the opera.

Mozart is considered to be one of the most important opera composers in the history of music.

Young Mozart started writing operas at a very early age. His opera *Bastien und Bastienne* premiered in Vienna when he was 11 years old.

Even if he had help from his father, I am sure that he undertook most of the task of setting the text to music himself.

I played one of his operas, *La Finta Giardinera* few years ago. He wrote this work when he was only 14 years old. Let me tell you, it is a very good opera!

On the Road to Greatness

Although having perfect pitch is not necessary for a musician, this was a particular characteristic that helped young Mozart throughout his musical career.

At parties, his friends played tricks on him. When blindfolded, Mozart was able to recognize the notes played because he had what is called perfect pitch.

Perfect pitch can be a curse or a blessing, as in Mozart's case. He could compose music in his mind and know how it would sound.

When Mozart was a boy, a town choir was about to perform a special work: the famous *Miserere Mei Deus* by composer Gregorio Allegri.

Mozart was set on attending this concert, so Papa Mozart took him to Rome.

There, they attended Mass at St. Peter's Cathedral on the day that the work was scheduled to be performed.

This was the only place where it could be heard, because no other choral group was permitted to perform it. It had never been published, and no one outside the church had ever seen the score, which was carefully guarded.

On the Road to Greatness...

At the end of the service, young Mozart sat there as if in a trance. When Papa Mozart finally got him to depart, he hummed the music over and over again. He wanted to remember it all and carry it away with him.

Mozart began to recall the sounds of the *Miserere* whenever he wanted and began to write them down. Days later, when he was done, the score from the great *Miserere* was delivered to the Pope's choir room.

It seems that Mozart had more than talent and genius. He had understood the science of music. In other words, he had the ability to look at a series of notes and be able to see how those notes could combine.

Conceivably, anyone can compose a piece of music. But writing a perfect musical work requires more than just writing the notes. It requires knowledge about how notes relate to each other to make a everlasting and timeless impression.

Mozart's abilities were beyond belief. While the famous concert pianists of our time travel the world performing the same repertoire, Mozart was able to compose and perform new works on a regular basis.

Once, in a five-week period, Mozart gave a series of 22 piano concerts and conducted many of them as well. In musical terms, he attained the highest degree of accomplishment.

It seems that everything he did regarding the music field was of the utmost level of execution. Here you can see a copy of an original program played by Mozart.

During the years that Mozart was in Vienna, Italian musicians and composers had a lot of power in the Emperor's court in Vienna.

The Emperor's court composer at the time was Antonio Salieri. There seem to be many stories about Salieri's dislike of Mozart, and there are even some accounts that say that Salieri poisoned Mozart.

But according to historical facts, Salieri in fact respected Mozart's music very much.

Touch of a Master

As the Mozart continued traveling through continental Europe, he developed an acute interest in learning how to write operas in the Italian style just like George Fredrick Handel did before him.

Mozart went to Italy in 1769 to learn the craft from Italian masters. At the time, Italy was the center of European opera and Mozart was enthusiastic about his trip to Italy.

In 1770, young Mozart's opera titled *Mitridates King of Pontis* was performed in Milan with great success.

One of Mozart's famous operas written in the Italian style is *Cos fan Tutte*. *Così fan Tutte* means "They are all like that", and it is a comic opera.

Comic operas are also known as *opera buffa* and they use a much lighter libretto, or text, than the more serious operas or *opera seria* style.

The plot of *Così fan Tutte* is about love and the tricks that lovers play on each other. There is little information from Mozart's letters at the time *Così fan tutte* was being written and staged, so Mozart's intentions are not very clear.

Mozart returned to Vienna, and he was hoping to obtain an appointment as court composer.

After the success of his opera *Idomeneo*, Mozart hoped for a position as a musician in Vienna. However, that success did not bring the position he had wished for. Mozart could not attain a job in Emperor Joseph II's court, so he dedicated his time to compose music for rich people who could afford to have music written for them.

Believe me; he had more commissions that he could handle. These commissions brought him a considerable amount of money that allowed him a very lavish lifestyle. The picture shows an original page from *Idomeneo*.

Touch of a Master...

As mentioned earlier, Mozart could write a whole symphony or a concerto in only 2 weeks.

Once Mozart thought of the themes for his music, it was just a matter of finding time to put them on paper.

So prolific a composer was Mozart that in the year 1786 he wrote several works including the *Marriage of Figaro* (an opera buffa), the *Horn concerto # 4* and three piano concertos.

Mozart, in fact, invented the piano concerto. This form was later used by many composers including Beethoven. Mozart wrote 27 piano *concerti*.

Notice that I used the word *concerti* and not concertos. This is the plural form in Italian.

Concerti have 3 movements, or sections. The first and third movements are fast and lively. The second is slow and beautiful.

This architectural design allows the performer to demonstrate his or her ability in playing fast passages, as well as the slower and more lyrical passages of the second movements.

The final movement always contains the exciting ending.

Mozart's piano *Concerto Number 21* is also known as the *Elvira Madigan* because of the prominent use of the second movement in the Swedish film of the same name by Bo Widerberg released in 1967.

Even though court composer Antonio Salieri did not hate Mozart as suggested in the movie *Amadeus*, that did not stop Salieri from making Mozart's life as uneasy as possible in an attempt to run him out of town. In 1786, Antonio Salieri tried to stop the premiere performance of Mozart's opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Nevertheless, *The Marriage of Figaro* was first performed in the Burg Theatre on May 1st, 1786 against Salieri's wishes.

Touch of a Master...

Finally in 1787, Mozart partially obtained the position he wanted. He replaced court composer Christopher Gluck as one of the court composers for the Emperor.

Gluck had passed away and it seemed that Mozart had the best qualifications of any of the available composers that applied for the position. However, his salary was considerably lower than Gluck's. This did not please the illustrious composer.

The same year, Mozart's father, Leopold died. Wolfgang had many different and contradictory views of his father.

Mozart's early years must have encouraged his deepest feelings towards his father. After his father's death, Mozart began to change and became very depressed. This is also reflected in the gloomy and insightful side of his late compositions.

One example is Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. It is full of gloom and fear. In its last scene, the hero is shown being taken down to hell by the devil. This is a very dark aspect of an opera that is supposed to be an opera buffa or a comic opera.

Mozart wrote his *Symphony Number 40* in the summer of 1788. In contrast to his *Symphony Number 39*, his 40th symphony is significantly more dramatic, with darker and more tragic overtones.

In my own personal opinion, this symphony is sublime and glorious. This symphony is also titled *Symphony in G Minor*.

Mozart used a minor key trying to explore new creative elements to bring his craft to a higher level.

Touch of a Master...

A minor key is regarded by musicians as sad and mournful.

But the use of this minor key seems to convey Mozart's creative efforts to open up new possibilities, rather than to bring about expression of mourning over his dilapidated fortunes.

It is good to note that major keys or tonalities are used by composers for happy and lively music. Mozart had used major tonalities extensively throughout his musical career.

One good example of Mozart's use of major keys is his Piano Concerto in A Major or Piano Concerto No. 23. This work is often referred by its catalog number or "K. 488".

At the highest point of his professional life and just weeks before his death, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed the *Clarinet Concerto in A major*. He wrote it explicitly for his friend and fellow freemason, Anton Stadler.

He had written music for Stadler before. As a matter of fact, Stadler was Mozart's favorite player whenever he wrote for the clarinet on many of his orchestral parts and several chamber works.

Mozart's clarinet concerto is one of his last complete pieces.

Each one of his concerti is unique and shows his commitment to the form rules of the Classical period.

Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* is a fairy tale of love.

Mozart wrote *The Magic Flute* in 1791, just after the French Revolution and right before he died.

Fellow composer Joseph Haydn had introduced Mozart to Freemasonry. *The Magic Flute* is full of Masonry ideals and symbolisms.

Mozart's commentary on love, forgiveness, tolerance and the brotherhood of mankind has made *The Magic Flute* one of the most beloved operas in the repertory.

Closing Curtains

Mozart was actively engaged in writing music right up until his death.

In his last year of life, he composed many works including his *Piano Concerto # 27*, the *Clarinet Concerto* and 2 operas, one of which was *The Magic Flute*.

Count von Walsegg's wife passed away, and he planned for a composer to write a Requiem mass for his late wife. This Requiem was to be performed annually on the anniversary of her death.

A Requiem Mass is meant to be sung and played for people who have died. He thought Mozart was the perfect composer to write the Requiem Mass.

Mozart accepted the commission, and it became his last attempt at composing.

There are speculations that Count von Walsegg wanted to pretend that he had written the Requiem himself.

Closing Curtains...

Toward the end of Mozart's life, it seems that he suffered from a nervous illness that affected him strangely.

The weather in Vienna in November and December of 1791 was particularly bad, and Mozart fell ill with fever. No one could have thought such illness would prove to be fatal.

Allegedly, Mozart was bed-ridden and decided to stop working on the Requiem in order to recuperate.

By early December Mozart felt death was near, and lamented that his life's work would be drastically cut short.

In the afternoon of December 4th, 1791, several singers from the opera sang parts of the Requiem for him.

Mozart died just after midnight on December 5th, 1791.

Franz Xavier Sussmayer, Mozart's student, completed the Requiem at the request of Mozart's wife Constanze.

In all, Mozart composed 626 pieces of music. In my opinion, they are all perfect compositions. He wrote concertos, symphonies, German style operas, Italian style operas, piano music, music for orchestra and religious music.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven was a classical composer who revolutionized the way symphonies were written.

The thing people remember most about Beethoven's is the fact that he is a deaf composer that was deaf for most of his life. The truth is, Beethoven's music is among the most sublime, innovative, and emotional music ever written by any composer in history. Although, his life was very dramatic, the impact he had on the history of music outweighs all the terrible circumstances that surrounded his tormented existence.

Beethoven is part of the featured trilogy of my favorite composers.

After this tour, you will be able to:

- Describe Beethoven's life and accomplishments
- Identify Beethoven's major compositions
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Beethoven in a Nutshell

During Beethoven's time, Vienna was considered the most important musical center in continental Europe. Many of the most famous musicians lived or played in the Austrian capital during Beethoven's time.

Beethoven, throughout his career, was never concerned with the opinions of other musicians or critics regarding his music. His main concern was to write his music for future generations of musicians and audiences.

In a famous response to a musician that complained about the difficulty of his music, Beethoven is quoted as saying, "Do you think I give a care about your miserable little violin when the muse visits me?"

Square One

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in the quiet town of Bonn, Germany in the year 1770: six years before the United States Declaration of Independence.

Johann Beethoven and Magdalena Keverich van Beethoven were Beethoven's parents.

He was his parents' first surviving child. His birth date is not certain. However, it is believed to be the 16th of December, since he was baptized on the 17th of December. At the time, it was customary to baptize children within 24 hours of their birth.

The Dawning of a Great Composer

Johann wanted his son to follow the same path of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Beethoven gave his first public concert at the age of 7. Archive letters indicate that young Beethoven did not have a successful presentation.

This unfortunate debut did not deter Beethoven's father from his ambition to promote his son's musical career.

A court musician by the name of Christian Neefe attended young Beethoven's concert. He later became Beethoven's first formal teacher.

Young Beethoven's piano lessons continued, and by the age of 10, he quit school to devote himself solely to music.

Despite his father's rough treatment, the young pianist continued to develop as a fine musician.

In 1787, at the age of 17, a group of noblemen noticed Beethoven's talent, and sponsored his trip to Vienna, which was considered to be the main artistic center in Europe.

Beginning of a Musical Tenure

Beethoven's father, Johann, was not a good father figure. He drank often and was quite abusive of his family. Consequently, young Beethoven felt that it was his responsibility to take care of his small family circle. This included his mother and brothers.

Beethoven took a job with the Bonn court to play the viola. This job brought enough money to support young Beethoven's family.

Meanwhile, he continued his preparation to become a fine concert artist and composer.

On the Road to Greatness

As a composer, Beethoven was not very concerned with the available talent. He always thought that he was writing music that was ahead of his time.

Beethoven is considered to be the last of the important composers that belonged to the Classical period of music, and the first important composer of the Romantic period.

He was an innovator and a revolutionary music composer. Although he was a contemporary of Mozart, he created and imposed his own style.

During Beethoven's time, critics considered Franz Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Mozart to be the most honorable musicians in Vienna.

Beethoven met Haydn briefly for the first time in Bonn on December 26th, 1790.

They met again two years later, and Beethoven showed Haydn samples of his work.

Haydn was quite impressed and gave Beethoven permission to be his pupil.

However, these music lessons did not last long since Beethoven became displeased at Haydn's lack of tutorial attention.

Crafting a Career

Beethoven is in many ways the first modern artist; the creator that works for its own music.

Perhaps, Mozart could be in this category, but it is Beethoven who takes this to a higher level since he did not hold any royal appointments.

He occasionally repaid his patrons by dedicating compositions to them. Throughout history, there are countless instances of Beethoven dedicating many of his works to the noblemen that supported his artistic lifestyle.

Beethoven was not a refined character. His features and manners revealed a rough background; certainly not a noble one.

Nonetheless, money from wealthy patrons kept coming. This allowed young Beethoven to concentrate fully on playing and writing music.

When Beethoven arrived in Vienna in November 1792, he had a letter of recommendation from Count Waldstein to Prince Karl Lichnowsky, one of Vienna's foremost patrons of the arts.

This letter secured him a small apartment - in the attic of the Lichnowsky's sumptuous apartment. Prince Lichnowsky was a patron of inestimable worth.

Beethoven was soon performing at the Friday concert evenings held by Prince Lichnowsky in his salon. It was here that Beethoven met men and women that had influence in the Viennese art scene.

Prince and Princess Lichnowsky were so impressed with their young lodger, that within a month they moved him down from the attic to a spacious apartment on the ground floor.

To show his appreciation, Beethoven dedicated the *Pathétique* sonata to the Lichnowsky's.

Touch of a Master

In 1800, Beethoven, now 30 years old, wrote his first symphony. Although, Mozart was writing symphonies since he was 8 years old, it took Beethoven many more years to develop as a composer.

Mozart was a musical genius who wrote 41 symphonies in his 35 years of existence. Nevertheless, Beethoven was an obsessed creator who developed his genius throughout his life.

Vienna's music critics enjoyed the premiere of Beethoven's *First Symphony*.

Beethoven dedicated this symphony to Baron Gottfried Van Swieten. It is considered to be part of his first compositional period.

This is the period in which Beethoven's music draws the most influence from Haydn and Mozart. Music critics at the time acknowledged the work by praising its candor and originality.

Two years later, Beethoven privately premiered his grandiose *Third Symphony*. It was dedicated to one of his heroes: Napoleon Bonaparte.

Beethoven had originally titled the work the *Bonaparte Symphony* as a tribute to Napoleon Bonaparte.

After Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor, Beethoven felt disillusioned and violently tore Napoleon's name off the musical score and re-titled the symphony simply as *Eroica*, which means heroic.

Eroica was then rededicated to the spirit of the French Revolution.

Beethoven was carrying on his own musical revolution, and in 1808, Ludwig van Beethoven presented the world with his *Fifth Symphony*.

Music critics had little to say about the *Fifth Symphony* at its premiere. However, a year and a half later, a prestigious Viennese publication gave a highly favorable review of another performance.

The *Fifth Symphony* has undergone much musical analysis since then, and its first four notes have drawn much attention. Beethoven himself supposedly described them as "Fate knocking at the door". It certainly is a suggestive representation of such a powerful theme.

Touch of a Master...

Beethoven's *6th Symphony*, also known as *The Pastoral Symphony*, was composed almost simultaneously with the *5th Symphony*, although different in theme and spirit. The *5th Symphony* deals with the struggles and pleasures of triumph, while *The Pastoral Symphony* represents Beethoven's love for nature.

Beethoven had lost most of his hearing by the time he wrote his *Seventh Symphony*.

Stories mention that he had to press his ears into the wood of his piano to listen to the sounds of his lustrous *Seventh Symphony*.

The picture you see is from the movie *Immortal Beloved*. In that scene, Beethoven becomes irate when he feels betrayed by friends who tricked him into coming to their house to try a piano. He felt they wanted to confirm he was deaf.

Continuing with his impressive compositional output, Beethoven finished a deeply personal opera titled *Fidelio*.

Fidelio was Beethoven's only opera production. However, this opera was very important in his musical life.

Fidelio is about a political prisoner rescued from his dark and grim barracks by a beautiful woman. The victorious powers promoted *Fidelio* as a liberation story meant to symbolize newly freed Europe.

Fidelio premiered on November 20th 1805, in the Theater an der Wien before an audience of French officers.

The first performance was not a success. After the disappointment of the premiere, which deeply frustrated Beethoven, he accepted his associates' recommendations to make drastic revisions to the original score.

Touch of a Master...

The revised version of the opera premiered a short time later. This time the work was better received. Nonetheless, there was a dispute between the composer and the manager of the theatre and the composer decided to stop further performances.

Almost 10 years passed before *Fidelio* was performed again at the Kärntner Theater on May 23rd, 1814. The musical director was Beethoven himself, assisted by the Kapellmeister.

Critics enthusiastically received the opera, and the composer-director received a very special standing ovation.

In 1824, at age 54, Beethoven finished his most famous work of all: the *9th Symphony*.

The *9th Symphony* really was revolutionary. It was the first symphony ever to use a chorus. On a personal note, I believe that this is perhaps Beethoven's most powerful composition. It seems odd, that at the time, the composer's personal life was a complete chaos. However, his musical world was working perfectly.

Beethoven set the finale to the words of the poet Friedrich Schiller famous Ode to Joy. Ode to Joy was a soaring hymn dedicated to a righteous God and to brotherhood between all men.

Beethoven's Personal Affairs

Beethoven took Countess Giulietta Guicciardi on as an apprentice around the year 1801.

He quickly fell in love with her, and composed his Sonata Op. 27 no. 2 dedicating it to the noble lady.

The work was published in the early 1800s under the title Sonata quasi una Fantasia.

Today it is known as the Moonlight Sonata. It is believed that Beethoven wished to marry the countess. Her father probably forbade her to marry a man without class, wealth or permanent appointment.

In 1812, he wrote a heartbreaking and passionate letter to the woman he called his Immortal Beloved. This letter was indeed written by Beethoven and it is the theme of the movie with the same name. Many scholars think it was meant for Antonie Brentano.

It seems that the composer was always in love with the wrong woman. Beethoven's former love interest, countess Josephine Von Brunswick, had a daughter about nine months after the Immortal Beloved letter was written.

There are speculations that this child may have been Beethoven's only child. This child also was a piano prodigy.

In 1815 and after his brother Kasper died, Beethoven decided to launch a vicious court battle to gain custody of his brother's eight year old son, Karl.

At a terrible price to his reputation, he eventually won custody of the boy.

Many secrets about Beethoven's personal life were uncovered by this incident.

During this period, he was not very active musically, and this recession aggravated his already dreadful personal conditions.

Eventually, Karl left Beethoven's custody to live with his mother after a failed attempt to commit suicide.

Closing Curtains

Beethoven returned to Vienna in December of 1826.

He contracted pneumonia during the trip. Although he briefly recovered, he was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver, which turned into dropsy.

His condition deteriorated dramatically over the next few weeks shortly afterward. Sensing his final days, his friends rallied around him to provide moral and medical support.

Beethoven's final moments, as reported by a friend, were very dramatic.

On March 26th, 1827, at about 5:45pm, a storm raged and Beethoven's room was suddenly filled with light and shaken with thunder.

It is said that Beethoven's eyes opened as he lifted his right fist for several seconds, and then, had a serious, threatening expression on his face. When he fell back, he half-closed his eyes and... not another word, not another heartbeat from the great composer.

In his will, Beethoven left everything to his estranged nephew Karl.

Beethoven was so revered at the time of his death that sculptors made a death mask of his face right after he took his last breath. Take a look at Beethoven's death mask in the picture.

Dr. Ferdinand von Hiller cut off all Beethoven's hair. Some of his hair locks were sold to his fans at different auctions.

Great composers and musicians were among the more than 20,000 people who mourned the composer at his funeral three days later.

Beethoven was buried in Währing Cemetery. His remains were later moved in 1888 to Zentral-friedhof in Vienna; a great resting place for musicians.

Final Word on Favorite Composers

I hope that you have enjoyed learning about the lives of my most favorite composers throughout this tour. Handel, Beethoven, and Mozart all are prominent fixtures in the history of music because of their ability to compose beautiful music.

For each composer, you know should be able to:

- Describe the Composer's life and accomplishments
- Identify major compositions
- State the Composer's role in history