

# Beethoven: The Symphonies and Concertos

The Beethoven symphonies and concertos form the central core of Western Classical music; each of the nine symphonies and seven concertos comprise a separate world, from the heroism and tragedy of the Third, Fifth and Ninth symphonies, the pantheism of the “Pastoral” to the sublimity of the violin concerto and the brilliance and elan of the “Emperor” concerto. This seminar uses both archival and contemporary performances on CD and DVD to explore these essential works, offering entertaining and illuminating perspectives, historical and social, on this perennially fascinating repertory.

## 10:00-12:30

Beethoven the Classicist

Symphonies 1-2

Piano Concertos 1-2

Beethoven the Revolutionary

Symphonies 3-5

Piano Concertos 3-5

**12:30-1:30 – Lunch (on your own)**

## 1:30-3:00

Beethoven the Pantheist

Beethoven the Romantic

Symphonies 6-8

Violin Concerto

Emperor Concerto (No. 5)

## 3:00-4:00

Beethoven the Sublime

Symphony No. 9



## Beethoven's Orchestral Music

Beethoven wrote nine [symphonies](#), nine [concertos](#), and a variety of other orchestral music, ranging from [overtures](#) and [incidental music](#) for theatrical productions to other miscellaneous "occasional" works, written for a particular occasion. Of the concertos, seven are widely known (one violin concerto, five piano concertos, and one triple concerto for violin, piano, and cello); the other two are an unpublished early piano concerto ([WoO 4](#)) and an arrangement of the Violin Concerto for piano and orchestra ([Opus 61a](#)).

### Symphonies[[edit](#)]

- Opus 21: [Symphony No. 1](#) in C major (composed 1799–1800, première 1800)
- Opus 36: [Symphony No. 2](#) in D major (composed 1801–02, première 1803)
- Opus 55: [Symphony No. 3](#) in E-flat major ("Eroica") (composed 1803/04, première 1805)
- Opus 60: [Symphony No. 4](#) in B-flat major (composed 1806, première 1807)
- Opus 67: [Symphony No. 5](#) in C minor ("Fate") (composed 1804–08, première 1808)
- Opus 68: [Symphony No. 6](#) in F major ("Pastoral") (composed 1804–08, première 1808)
- Opus 92: [Symphony No. 7](#) in A major (composed 1811–12, première 1813)
- Opus 93: [Symphony No. 8](#) in F major (composed 1812, première 1814)
- Opus 125: [Symphony No. 9](#) in D minor ("Choral") (composed 1817–24, première 1824)

Beethoven is believed to have intended to write a [Tenth Symphony](#) in the last year of his life; a performing version of possible sketches was assembled by [Barry Cooper](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

### Concertos

- WoO 4: [Piano Concerto No. 0](#) in E ♭ major (1784)
- Opus 15: [Piano Concerto No. 1](#) in C major (composed 1796–97)
- Opus 19: [Piano Concerto No. 2](#) in B ♭ major (first two movements composed 1787–1789, finale composed in 1795)
- Opus 37: [Piano Concerto No. 3](#) in C minor (composed 1800–01)
- Opus 56: [Triple Concerto](#) for violin, cello, and piano in C major (1803)
- Opus 58: [Piano Concerto No. 4](#) in G major (composed 1805–06)
- Opus 61: [Violin Concerto](#) in D major (1806)
- Opus 61a: [Beethoven's arrangement of Opus 61 for piano](#)
- Opus 73: [Piano Concerto No. 5](#) in E ♭ major ("Emperor") (composed 1809–10)
- Hess 13: Romance in E minor for 3 soloists and orchestra
- Hess 15: [Piano Concerto No. 6](#) in D major (unfinished – performing version completed by [Nicholas Cook](#)) (1815)<sup>[2]</sup>

- Anh. 7: Piano Concerto (Allegro) in D major (first movement only) (probably spurious; some believe this work to be the missing movement of a piano concerto by the Bohemian composer [Johann Joseph Rösler](#) <sup>[de]</sup> (1771–1813)

## Beethoven's musical style

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[Ludwig van Beethoven](#) is generally viewed as one of the most influential figures in the history of [classical music](#). Since his lifetime, when he was "universally accepted as the greatest living composer," Beethoven's music has remained among the most performed, discussed and reviewed.<sup>[1]</sup> Scholarly journals are devoted to analysis of his life and work. He has been the subject of numerous biographies and monographs, and his music was the driving force behind the development of [Schenkerian analysis](#). He is widely considered as among the most important composers, and along with [Bach](#) and [Mozart](#), his music is the most frequently recorded.<sup>[2]</sup>

Beethoven's stylistic innovations bridge the [Classical](#) and [Romantic](#) periods. The works of his early period brought the Classical form to its highest expressive level, expanding in formal, structural, and harmonic terms the musical idiom developed by predecessors such as [Mozart](#) and [Haydn](#). The works of his middle and late periods were even more forward-looking, appropriately being categorized in and contributing to the musical language and thinking of the [Romantic](#) era, directly inspiring other Romantic composers such as [Frédéric Chopin](#), [Franz Schubert](#), [Felix Mendelssohn](#), [Robert Schumann](#), [Franz Liszt](#), [Richard Wagner](#), and [Johannes Brahms](#).

## Overview

Beethoven's musical output has traditionally been divided into three periods, a classification that dates to the first years after the composer's death in 1827 and was formalised with the publication of [Wilhelm von Lenz](#)'s influential work *Beethoven et ses trois styles* (Beethoven and his Three Styles). Lenz proposed that Beethoven's creative output be marked by three periods of distinct stylistic personality and he identified specific compositions as milestones for each period. In Lenz's work, the first period opens with Beethoven's Trio set, Opus 1 and culminates with the performances in 1800 of his [first symphony](#) and [Septet](#). The second period spans the period from the publication of his [Moonlight Sonata](#) to the [Piano Sonata in E minor, Op. 90](#) in 1814. The last period covers Beethoven's mature works to his death in 1827.

Although later scholars have called into question such a simplistic categorisation, the periodisation is still widely used. Extensive subsequent analytical consideration of Lenz's thesis has resulted in a slight revision of his original dates and broad consensus regarding Beethoven's three periods is as follows:

- a formative period that extends to 1802
- a middle period from 1803 to 1814

- a mature period from 1814 to 1827

Generally, each period demonstrates characteristic stylistic evolutions in Beethoven's musical language and preoccupations as well as important developments in the composer's personal life.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **Early period**

The compositions that Beethoven wrote in his formative period can be generally characterized by the composer's efforts to master the predominant classical language of the period. His works from this period can be subdivided into two, based on the composer's residence. First, various juvenalia, written when the adolescent Beethoven was in residence in [Bonn](#) and heavily indebted to the works of contemporaries, especially [Mozart](#) and his teacher, [Christian Gottlob Neefe](#). These early efforts can be seen in a set of three [piano sonatas](#) and [piano quartets](#) (WoO 36) that Beethoven wrote before 1792. The Quartets, for instance, are each specifically modelled after three [Violin sonatas](#) Mozart published in 1781 - [K 296, 379 and 380](#) - and Beethoven would later draw upon this familiarity in the composition of several of his own Violin Sonatas.<sup>[4]</sup>

Second, a number of more substantial and original works written after Beethoven moved to [Vienna](#) and commenced studies with the famed Austrian composer and leading musical figure of the period, Joseph Haydn.

### **Bonn period**

With the exception of an abortive attempt to move to Vienna in 1787, Beethoven lived in Bonn until 1792, where he worked in the court chapel of the [Elector of Cologne](#). Some forty compositions from this period are extant, including ten early works written by the young adolescent Beethoven when he was being promoted as a child prodigy performer and published as a result of the efforts of his teacher. It has been suggested that Beethoven largely abandoned composition between 1785 and 1790, possibly as a result of negative critical reaction to his first published works.<sup>[5]</sup> A 1784 review in [Johann Nikolaus Forkel](#)'s influential *Musikalischer Almanack* compared Beethoven's efforts to those of rank beginners.<sup>[5]</sup> Whatever the case, most of Beethoven's earliest works were written after he turned twenty, between 1790 and 1792. Some of this music was later published by Beethoven, or incorporated into later works. As such, they provide an important foundation for judging the later evolution of his style.

In general, Beethoven's earliest compositions show his struggles to master the prevailing classical style, both in structural and idiomatic terms. Several works, including two he later published, show the incipient signs of his later individual style: twelve [Lieder](#), several of which he published in 1805 as Opus 52, his Wind Octet, later published as Opus 103, and several sets of Variations, including one (WoO 40) for violin and piano on Mozart's aria [Se vuol ballare](#) (later reworked in Vienna). Although these works largely conform to the formal conventions of the classical style, including a strict observance of form and, in the

variations, the decorative filigree associated with the genre, they also show early signs of Beethoven's later tendency to more substantive treatment of thematic material.

In 1790, Beethoven was commissioned to write a funeral cantata (WoO 87) on the death of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor, Joseph II, the first of his extant compositions written in [C minor](#). A number of concert arias also date to this period including "Prüfung des Küssens" (WoO 89) and "Mit Mädeln sich vertragen" (WoO 90).

Beethoven also produced numerous fragments of larger-scale works, including a symphonic movement (also written in C minor), a violin concerto, an oboe concerto, an early draft of his [B-flat Piano concerto](#) (both now vanished), and a concertante for piano, flute and bassoon. Scholars generally regard these early efforts as bland and uninspired and have concluded that his first efforts at writing in the classical sonata style (with the exception of his Wind Octet) were poorly conceived. [Gustav Nottebohm](#), for example, wrote of Beethoven's Dressler Variations (WoO 63), "they show not a trace of contrapuntal independent part-writing. They are figural variations of the simplest kind".<sup>[6]</sup> [Téodor de Wyzewa](#) considered his early "Kurfürsten Sonatas" written in 1783 (WoO 47) as merely "correct imitations of Haydn".<sup>[7]</sup> Considered as a whole, Beethoven's compositional efforts in Bonn demonstrate the importance of his move to Vienna in terms of the development of his musical style and the sophistication of his grasp of classical form and idiom.

## **Vienna period**

Beethoven moved to Vienna in 1792, having in all likelihood arranged beforehand to study with Joseph Haydn, who had been freed from his Kapellmeister duties upon the death of his benefactor Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy. Beethoven's arrival coincided with Haydn's own return to the city after his first visit to London at the behest of the impresario [Johann Peter Salomon](#), a trip which secured Haydn's reputation, already considerable, as the foremost composer of his day. In addition to his association with Haydn, Beethoven also studied under [Antonio Salieri](#), who was among the most popular [operatic](#) composers then active, and [Johann Georg Albrechtsberger](#), the leading expert on musical theory.

There is evidence that Beethoven composed very little for the first year or so after his arrival at Vienna, devoting his time instead to securing his position in the leading [salons](#) of the city as a performer and improviser. What little compositional activities did occupy Beethoven seem to have been put to revising earlier works (such as his Wind Octet, Op. 103) to conform to Viennese musical tastes. Between 1793 and 1795, Beethoven seems to have pursued his compositional studies diligently, working through ideas and texts such as [Johann Joseph Fux](#)'s important treatise on [counterpoint](#), [Gradus ad Parnassum](#), and working on those compositions that he would later publish under his first opus numbers.

The first of these, the three piano trios grouped together under op. 1 (July 1795) and three piano sonatas under op. 2 (March 1796), demonstrate many of the characteristics of Beethoven's early Viennese period.

## Middle period

### Style

He also continued another trend—towards larger [orchestras](#)—that moved the center of the sound downwards in the orchestra, to the violas and the lower register of the violins and cellos, giving his music a heavier and darker feel than [Haydn](#) or [Mozart](#). [Gustav Mahler](#) modified the orchestration of some of Beethoven's music—most notably the 3rd and 9th symphonies—with the idea of more accurately expressing Beethoven's intent in an orchestra that had grown so much larger than the one Beethoven used: for example, doubling woodwind parts to compensate for the fact that a modern orchestra has so many more strings than Beethoven's orchestra did. Needless to say, these efforts remain controversial.

Above all, his works distinguish themselves from those of any prior composer through his creation of large, extended architectonic structures characterized by the extensive development of musical material, themes, and motifs, usually by means of "modulation", that is, a change in the feeling of the home key, through a variety of keys or harmonic regions. Although Haydn's later works often showed a greater fluidity between distant keys, Beethoven's innovation was the ability to rapidly establish a solidity in juxtaposing different keys and unexpected notes to join them. This expanded harmonic realm creates a sense of a vast musical and experiential space through which the music moves, and the development of musical material creates a sense of unfolding drama in this space.

Beethoven helped to further unify the different movements in multi-movement works with the invention of the 'germ motive'. The germ motive, or 'germinal motif,' as it is sometimes called, is a motive that is used to create motives and themes throughout a whole work, without making it obvious that such a thing is being done. Thus, all the themes in a piece can be tied back to a single motive in the work. An early and famous example of this is his sonata 'Pathetique', where all of the subjects used in the first movement originate from a germinal idea derived from its opening bar. Similarly, the opening bars of his Eighth Symphony are used to derive motives to be used throughout the whole symphony. This device lends unity to a work or even a group of works (as some motives Beethoven used not only in one work, but in many works) without repeating material exactly or turning to canonic devices.

In his Fifth Symphony Beethoven used the four-note motif (drawn from a late Haydn symphony) throughout the whole movement in different juxtapositions, marking the first important occurrence of cyclic form and giving a sense of a totally internal conflict to the piece.<sup>[8]</sup>

In his book [The Joy of Music](#), [Leonard Bernstein](#), who, in his television documentary *Bernstein on Beethoven* admitted that he considered Beethoven the greatest composer who ever lived, nevertheless criticized his orchestration as sometimes being "downright bad", with "unimportant" orchestral parts being given too much prominence.



Bernstein attributed this to Beethoven's ever-increasing deafness, which presumably rendered him incapable of judging how much louder than another a given instrument might be playing at certain moments.<sup>[9]</sup> He repeated some of this criticism in the 1982 miniseries *Bernstein/Beethoven*, a PBS miniseries containing performances of all nine symphonies, several overtures, one of the string quartets, and the *Missa Solemnis*.<sup>[10]</sup> But at the same time Bernstein added that what makes Beethoven great is his perfect sense of form - his ability to realize what the next note always had to be.

## Late works

Beethoven began a renewed study of older music, including works by [J. S. Bach](#) and [Handel](#), that were then being published in the first attempts at complete editions. He composed the overture *The Consecration of the House*, which was the first work to attempt to incorporate these influences. A new style emerged, now called his "late period". He returned to the keyboard to compose his first piano sonatas in almost a decade: the works of the late period are commonly held to include the last five piano sonatas and the *Diabelli Variations*, the last two sonatas for cello and piano, the late string quartets (see below), and two works for very large forces: the *Missa Solemnis* and the *Ninth Symphony*.

By early 1818 Beethoven's health had improved, and his nephew moved in with him in January. On the downside, his hearing had deteriorated to the point that conversation became difficult, necessitating the use of conversation books. His household management had also improved somewhat; Nanette Streicher, who had assisted in his care during his illness, continued to provide some support, and he finally found a skilled cook.<sup>[79]</sup> His musical output in 1818 was still somewhat reduced, but included song collections and the "*Hammerklavier*" Sonata, as well as sketches for two symphonies that eventually coalesced into the epic Ninth. In 1819 he was again preoccupied by the legal processes around Karl, and began work on the *Diabelli Variations* and the *Missa Solemnis*.

For the next few years he continued to work on the Missa, composing piano sonatas and *bagatelles* to satisfy the demands of publishers and the need for income, and completing the Diabelli Variations. He was ill again for an extended time in 1821, and completed the Missa in 1823, three years after its original due date. He also opened discussions with his publishers over the possibility of producing a complete edition of his work, an idea that was arguably not fully realised until 1971. Beethoven's brother Johann began to take a hand in his business affairs, much in the way Carl had earlier, locating older unpublished works to offer for publication and offering the Missa to multiple publishers with the goal of getting a higher price for it.

Two commissions in 1822 improved Beethoven's financial prospects. The [Philharmonic Society](#) of London offered a commission for a symphony, and Prince [Nikolas Golitsin](#) of [St. Petersburg](#) offered to pay Beethoven's price for three string quartets. The first of these commissions spurred Beethoven to finish the Ninth Symphony, which was first performed, along with the Missa Solemnis, on 7 May 1824, to great acclaim at the [Kärntnertortheater](#). The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* gushed, "inexhaustible genius had shown us a new

world," and Carl Czerny wrote that his symphony "breathes such a fresh, lively, indeed youthful spirit ... so much power, innovation, and beauty as ever [came] from the head of this original man, although he certainly sometimes led the old wigs to shake their heads." Unlike his more lucrative earlier concerts, this did not make Beethoven much money, as the expenses of mounting it were significantly higher.<sup>[80]</sup> A second concert on 24 May, in which the producer guaranteed Beethoven a minimum fee, was poorly attended; nephew Karl noted that "many people [had] already gone into the country." It was Beethoven's last public concert.<sup>[81]</sup>

Beethoven then turned to writing the string quartets for Golitsin. This series of quartets, known as the "[Late Quartets](#)," went far beyond what musicians or audiences were ready for at that time. One musician commented that "we know there is something there, but we do not know what it is." Composer [Louis Spohr](#) called them "indecipherable, uncorrected horrors." Opinion has changed considerably from the time of their first bewildered reception: their forms and ideas inspired musicians and composers including [Richard Wagner](#) and [Béla Bartók](#), and continue to do so. Of the late quartets, Beethoven's favorite was the [Fourteenth Quartet, op. 131](#) in C# minor, which he rated as his most perfect single work.<sup>[82]</sup> The last musical wish of [Schubert](#) was to hear the Op. 131 quartet, which he did on 14 November 1828, five days before his death.<sup>[83]</sup>

Beethoven wrote the last quartets amidst failing health. In April 1825 he was bedridden, and remained ill for about a month. The illness—or more precisely, his recovery from it—is remembered for having given rise to the deeply felt slow movement of the [Fifteenth Quartet](#), which Beethoven called "Holy song of thanks ('Heiliger Dankgesang') to the divinity, from one made well." He went on to complete the quartets now numbered [Thirteenth](#), [Fourteenth](#), and [Sixteenth](#). The last work completed by Beethoven was the substitute final movement of the Thirteenth Quartet, which replaced the difficult *Große Fuge*. Shortly thereafter, in December 1826, illness struck again, with episodes of vomiting and diarrhea that nearly ended his life.

In 1825, his nine symphonies were performed in a cycle for the first time, by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under [Johann Philipp Christian Schulz](#). This was repeated in 1826.<sup>1</sup>