

The Composer of the Month is: Ludwig van Beethoven



Born: December 1770 in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827 in Vienna, Austria

Nationality: German

Style/Period: Classical

Famous Works: Fifth Symphony, Ninth Symphony (Ode to Joy),
Moonlight Sonata and Fur Elise.

Beethoven was born in the German city of Bonn in 1770. Both his father and grandfather were local musicians so music was Beethoven's whole life. When he was only four, his father forced him to practice and practice, despite the fact he had to stand on the piano bench just to reach the keys. At the age of twelve, Beethoven was an organist at court and he was already publishing music.

At the age of 22, Beethoven moved to Vienna, the European center for music. He took lessons from several prominent teachers, including the famous Haydn and the infamous Salieri. Very quickly he gained success as both a concert pianist and a composer. In 1799, Beethoven discovered that he was going deaf.

By 1802, he had accepted his growing deafness, but was not defeated by it. He was quoted as saying, "I will seize fate by the throat; it shall never overcome me!" And it certainly didn't. Beethoven gave up his promising career as a concert pianist and threw himself into the role of composer. Beethoven turned out to be a prolific composer. He wrote 32 piano sonatas - including the famous Moonlight and the powerful Pathétique. He also wrote 18 string quartets and nine symphonies. Few music lovers can forget the four immortal opening notes of the Fifth Symphony. When asked about the inspiration for these powerful chords, Beethoven described them as, "how destiny knocks on the door."

Beethoven was known to be unkept and anti-social, but the music he produced was incredible. His deafness became complete in 1819, but instead of slowing the great composer down, it seemed to make him more creative. About his deafness, he once confidently declared, "You will see me again, when I am really great; not only greater as an artist but as a man you will find me better, more perfect." The day of his death in 1827 was such a tumultuous one that schools closed for the day, and the military was called out to control the bereaved Austrian public.