

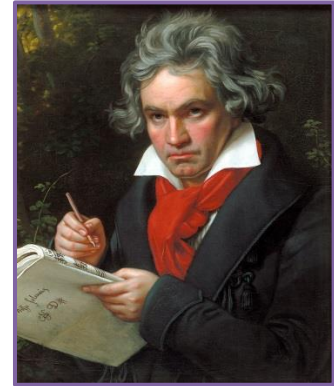
# The Unlucky Genius – a biography of Ludwig van Beethoven

Name: ..... Date:.....

## The Unlucky Genius - a biography of Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in 1770 in Bonn, Germany, Ludwig Van Beethoven is known throughout the world as one of the greatest ever composers of classical music.

His compositions still live on in small works for solo piano and string quartets, but he is also renowned for his expansive symphonies involving hundreds of instruments and the memorable tunes that he created. His music is still used in advertisements, played at live concerts and learned by millions of students across the globe.



1770  
Beethoven born

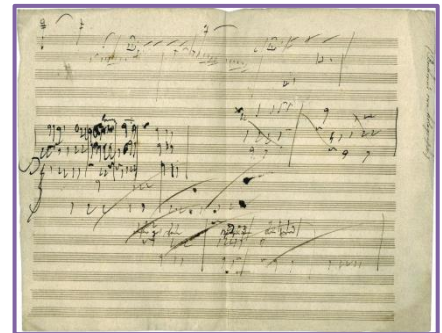
1700

1800

1900

2000

In this period of history (known as the 18<sup>th</sup> century), the technology did not exist to record music. To be remembered and played accurately, music had to be written down. It was performed live—either in the home on a piano or in concert halls, large and small. Beethoven made his living from selling and performing his music, and as a music teacher. The music of this time is now called **classical**, but in Beethoven's time it was the pop music of the day and he was as famous as any pop star is today.



Beethoven is celebrated for being inventive with his music, and for surprising people with his ideas and originality. He changed the way the orchestra was organised, and he challenged the talented musicians of the day with his complex musical ideas. Members of the orchestra had to rehearse for days on end to cope with Beethoven's complex and exciting new music. No-one had ever heard music like it! His Symphony No.3, for example, was responsible for bringing him fame across the whole of Europe. He wrote it to celebrate the new Emperor of France - Napoleon Bonaparte, who came to power in 1804.

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This symphony was only a tiny part of the huge collection of masterpieces that Beethoven created over his relatively short life. His Symphony No.5 starts with four simple, ominous notes which is still known and played across the world.

This whole piece of music (divided into four parts, called **movements**) is based on these four notes - transforming each time into a new character in the music. Beethoven was one of the first composers to introduce the idea that music could have an emotional effect on an audience. He experimented with sound, adding voices to orchestras and creating new sensations in his audiences.

Beethoven is credited for starting the trend towards **romantic classical music** - a sound world concerned with feelings, impressions, and all of the senses.



Right up to his death in 1827, Beethoven continued his musical journey, even though he was plagued by hearing loss. In the last ten years of his life, he was almost completely deaf. Yet some of his finest works were produced at this time, such as his musical genius.

Comprehension questions - set one

Read the biography carefully and answer the following questions.

1. Here are some of the trickier words from the text. Read around the words to work out their meanings. Draw a line to the best match.

Word	Meaning
composition	a section of music
expansive	suffered from
masterpiece	created using artistic skills
movement	a great piece of work
plagued	large in scale

2. Use the information in the text to work out what age Beethoven lived to.

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3. Which piece of music brought fame across Europe to Beethoven?

.....

4. What is meant by 'romantic' classical music?

.....

5. What is your impression of Beethoven as a person? Complete the sentences:

**Beethoven was clever and creative because...** .....

.....

**He was resilient because ...** .....

.....

6. Why do you think people still appreciate Beethoven's music today? Give two reasons.

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Comprehension questions - set two

1. Highlight five tricky words you found in the text. Use a dictionary to find their meanings.

Word	Meaning

2. Use the information in the text to work out what age Beethoven lived to.

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.....

3. Which piece of music brought Beethoven fame across Europe?

.....

4. What is meant by 'romantic' classical music? Tick one:

- It is loud and scary
- It makes people feel things when they listen
- It starts with four notes

5. Why do people still listen to Beethoven's music?

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6. Write down two things that were clever and different about Beethoven's Symphony No.5:

.....  
.....

## Answer guidance - set one

Word		Meaning
composition		a section of music
expansive		suffered from
masterpiece		created using artistic skills
movement		a great piece of work
plagued		large in scale

1. Use the information in the text to work out what age Beethoven lived to.

1827 - 1770 = 57

2. Which piece of music brought fame across Europe to Beethoven?

Symphony No.3

4. What is meant by 'romantic' classical music?

Music that appeals to / is concerned with: 'feelings, impressions, and all of the senses.'

5. What is your impression of Beethoven as a person? Complete the sentences:

Beethoven was clever/creative/original because he tried new ideas with the orchestra/wrote complex music like no other and introduced feelings in music/ romantic music.

He was resilient because (answers that mention him being brave to try new things, persevered in the face of opposition, kept going despite being deaf).

6. Why do you think people still appreciate Beethoven's music today? Give two reasons.

Any of the following two: his ideas are original, new, different / people enjoy the sounds he created with the orchestra / this was a turning point in musical history / he was someone to admire - he kept going despite being deaf / unique / he was a genius / his music challenges musicians - they enjoy playing his tricky music / his tunes - e.g. Symphony No.5.

## Answer guidance - set two

1. Accept any highlighted tricky words with a definition.

2. Use the information in the text to work out what age Beethoven lived to.

1827 - 1770 = 57

3. Which piece of music brought fame across Europe to Beethoven?

Symphony No.3

4. What is meant by 'romantic' classical music?

Music that appeals to / is concerned with: 'feelings, impressions, and all of the senses.'

5. Why do people still listen to Beethoven's music?

Great tunes / he was a genius / it is different / people enjoy the feelings it gives them / it is clever/creative/different

6. Write down two things that were clever and different about Beethoven's Symphony No. 5:

- It starts in a scary way
- It keeps the four notes all the way through
- The four notes change and become characters
- It was the first piece of music to have ideas that went all the way through
- It is memorable because of the four notes
- It makes you listen when the four notes start - they grab your attention

Name: .....

Date:.....

**Appreciating the music of Beethoven**

Listen to:



- a. Fur Elise for solo piano
- b. The opening of Symphony No.5
- c. The last movement of Piano Concerto No.3
- d. The finale of Symphony No.9, The Choral Symphony

Which of these words would you use to describe the works of Beethoven in the list above? Write the letters of each piece which match the words below.

jolly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	longing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
patriotic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	rhythmical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
happy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	powerful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
danger	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	serious	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you had to pick a favourite piece, which would it be? Can you explain why?

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Beethoven was not fully appreciated at the time when he wrote his music. He always worried about being poor and he was never a truly happy man. Many people thought his music was too different. Tragically, his loss of hearing left him unable to hear his music. What would you say to Beethoven if you could talk to him today? How would you reassure him about his music?

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