

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770-1827

Welcome to the last FAME lesson for this year. Today's composer was both prolific and diverse. Before I turn on the first piece, I would like you all to put a hand over your mouth, close your eyes, and listen. If you recognize the piece because you have heard it before, raise your hand. If you know the composer and the name of the piece, nod your head. Ready? Play "*Fur Elise*," **track 4** on the CD. (*Ask them where they have heard it – piano students learn to play this piece early on, so it frequently shows up at the Gomes Talent Show, other places they may have heard it are jewelry boxes or an old McDonald's commercial – the piano students in the class may also be able to identify the composer and the piece by name*)

Today's composer is Ludwig Van Beethoven (pronounce it as Bay as in the SF Bay, toe as in your big toe and ven, so Bay-toe-ven). Where do you think he came from? (Bonn, Germany – use the map to point it out) and the piece I just played is called Fur Elise and was written in 1810. Fur in German translates to "for" in English so this piece was written "For Elise". Raise your hand if you take piano lessons and learned to play this piece. Did you learn it when you were a beginner or an "expert"? Is this a challenging piece or a fairly easy piece? Beethoven had a student named Theresa von Malfatti, whom he had nicknamed Elise. She was a very pretty woman and he was smitten by her. However, she was an average piano player so he wrote this easy piece for her to play. Which element of composition do you notice most here? (*Melody*)

How many of you take music lessons? How much do you practice each day? Half an hour? An hour? Beethoven's first teacher was his father, an obscure musician, who wanted to introduce his son as a child prodigy (*you may have to explain the term*). So, by the time he was four years old, little Ludwig was already practicing the piano for three to four hours a day! He gave his first concert when he was seven or eight years old (though his dad printed up flyers claiming that he was only six). As he grew older and demonstrated a real musical talent, he got better teachers and eventually, at 17, he moved to Vienna, which was home to musical greats like Haydn and Salieri. Unlike his father, who was a court musician and wrote music for his one patron, Beethoven chose an independent life as a musician. He wrote music upon request, but made sure it could be played over and over. Often, his music was improvised (*made up on the spur of the moment based on the theme of a request or his mood*). As a result, he was a very popular performer. When he was 39 years old, his patrons guaranteed him an income so he could just make and perform music without worrying about money.

If you were a musician, what sense would be most important to you? Your hearing, right? Unfortunately for Beethoven, around the time he was twenty-six, he started hearing these strange whistling and buzzing noises in his years. That was the beginning of his deafness. As you can imagine, it was not only irritating, but also very embarrassing for a young man in his twenties to keep asking people to "PLEASE SPEAK UP." So, as his hearing worsened, he became more of a recluse and focused more on his musical compositions. How could he compose music if he could not hear it? Well, as he told the

Swedish king's son, when he was visiting Sweden, he could "listen to it here (*point to the chest*)." In other words, he could "feel" the music. Some of his most famous pieces were written after he had gone deaf. In fact, all the pieces you will listen to today were composed well after his deafness had set in.

Let us listen to an orchestral piece known as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony that offers an excellent example of all four elements of composition. Does anybody remember what they are? (*Melody, Rhythm, Harmony, Dynamics – depending on the age group, you may want to go over what each of these means*) Play **track 1** (*The piece starts with the crescendo/decrescendo of Dynamics followed by the changes in Rhythm of quick quick quick slow. Melody is also noticeable – ask the kids what instruments they hear. Harmony is probably the trickiest portion so have kids listen for places where the notes seem to overlap and trip over almost as though the instruments were singing a round!*)

This next piece is considered Beethoven's best and has some historical significance to it. Beethoven lived between 1770 and 1827. Can anybody name a major figure who dominated Europe in the late 1700's and early 1800's? (*Napoleon*) Napoleon started as a soldier in the French army and was very opposed to the corruption of the royalty that prevailed in Europe. He slowly climbed the ranks and became very powerful but initially stuck with his ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Beethoven felt Napoleon represented hope so when he composed this next piece, he was going to call it Bonaparte. However, Napoleon decided to crown himself Emperor, which seemed against everything that Beethoven believed in. He was so furious and cheated that he re-named the piece "*Eroica*" meaning hope or dream. Play **track 7**. What emotions do you have when you listen to this piece? (*Triumphant, expectant, hopeful*)

The last piece, which you will hear while you work on your art project, is his Ninth Symphony. By the time he completed this in 1823, he was completely deaf yet he insisted on conducting its first performance. After the music died down, somebody had to turn him around so he could actually see and accept the thunderous applause that he was receiving. It is amazing that he could compose such magnificent music without even hearing it. With today's advances in medicine, perhaps a simple hearing aid or surgery could have corrected some of his deafness. Play **track 5**.

Nietzsche fittingly said, "Beethoven's music is about music"

Side note:

How did he die? Liver failure. The day he died, there was a thunderstorm raging outside. At the critical moment, lightning lit the room, thunder reverberated, he opened his eyes, raised a clenched fist in defiance, and died. He died believing that he would be able to "hear in heaven." About 30,000 mourners attended his funeral.