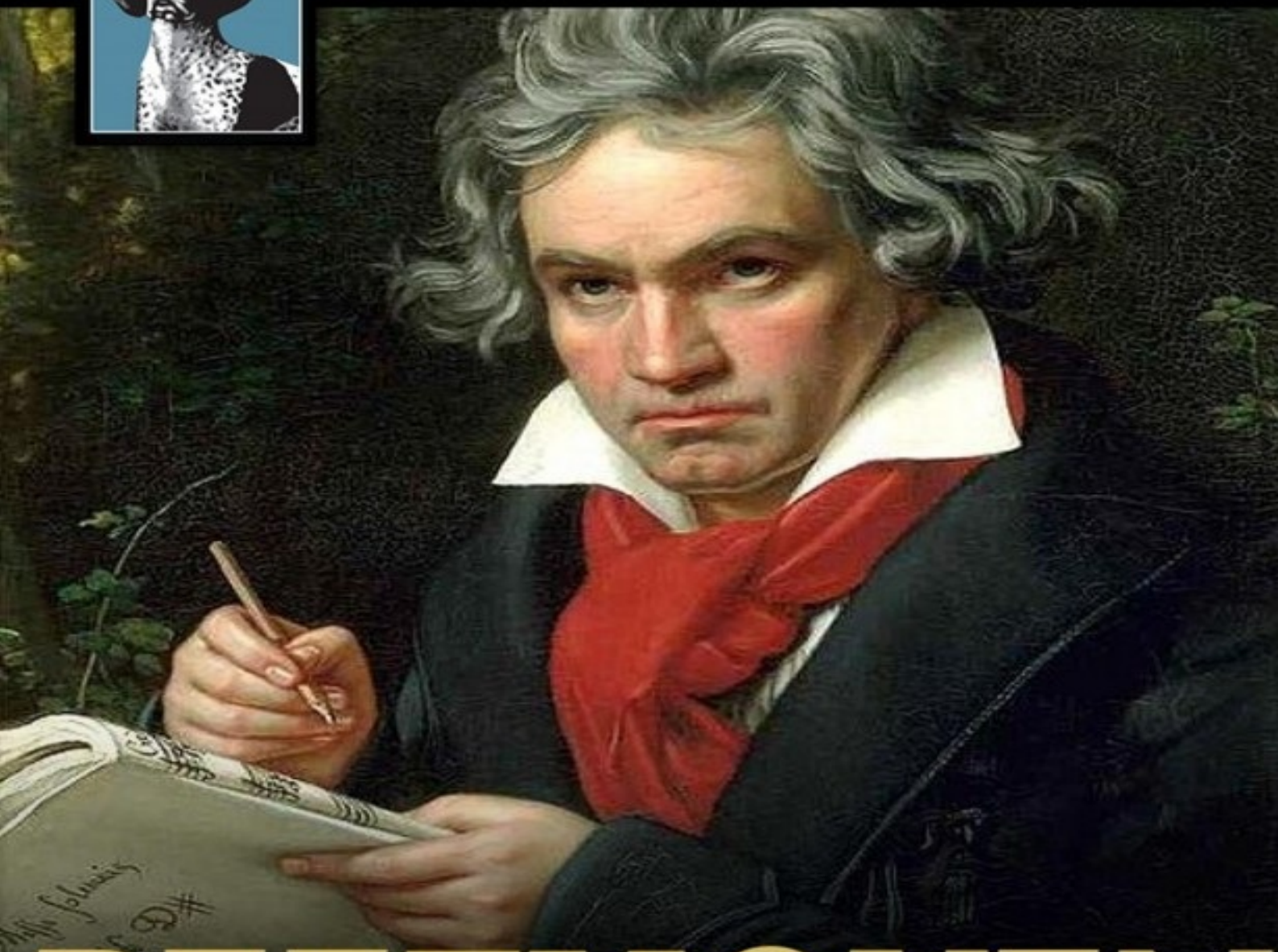




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BEETHOVEN  
AS REVEALED IN  
HIS OWN WORDS

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

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*BEETHOVEN, AS REVEALED IN HIS OWN  
WORDS*

*THE MAN AND THE ARTIST*

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*LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN*

*Edited by*

*FRIEDRICH KERST*



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*Beethoven, as Revealed in His Own Words*  
*The Man and the Artist*

From a 1904 edition

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# *Brief Biographical Sketch*

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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) is widely considered to be one of the pre-eminent classical music figures of the Western world. This German musical genius created numerous works that are firmly entrenched in the repertoire. Except for a weakness in composing vocal and operatic music (to which he himself admitted, notwithstanding a few vocal works like the opera "Fidelio" and the song "Adelaide,"), Beethoven had complete mastery of the artform. He left his stamp in 9 symphonies, piano concertos, 10 violin sonatas, 32 piano sonatas, numerous string quartets and dozens of other keyboard works. Many of his works are ingeniously imaginative and innovative, such as his 3rd symphony (the "Eroica"), his 9th Violin Sonata (the "Kreutzer"), his "Waldstein" piano sonata, his 4th and 5th piano concertos, or his "Grosse Fugue" for string quartet. (Of course, each of Beethoven's works adds its own unique detail to Beethoven's grand musical paradigm.)

It is difficult to sum up briefly what his musical works represent or symbolize, since taken together they encompass a vast system of thought. Generally, however, those who apprehend his music sense that it reflects their own personal yearnings and sufferings. It egoistically, and always intelligently "discusses" with its listener his or her feelings in the wake of personal failure and personal triumph from the lowest depths of despair to the highest heights of happy or triumphant fulfillment. In his music, he represents the feelings felt by those attempting to achieve their goals within their societies whether they are competing for love, status, money, power, mates and/or any other things individuals feel naturally inclined to attempt to acquire.

In a thematic sense, Beethoven does not promote anarchist ideas. The listener cannot, in listening to Beethoven's music, apprehend ideas which, if applied, would compromise the welfare of his society. The music is thus "civically responsible," as is the music of Bach or Mozart. For Beethoven, the society exists as a bulwark with which the individual must function in harmony, or at least not function such as to harm or destroy it. And, should the society marginalize or hurt the individual, as it often does, the individual must, according to Beethoven, humbly accept this, never considering the alternative act of attempting to harm or destroy the society in the wake of his or her personal frustrations. But, thanks to Beethoven, such an individual is provided with the means to sooth his or her misery in the wake of feeling "hurt" at the hands of society. The means is this music and the euphoric pleasure that it can provide to minds possessing the psycho- intellectual "wiring" needed to apprehend it.

Some post-World-War-II composers, such as the late, LSD-using John Cage, reject the music of Beethoven because of its predominant reliance on "beauty" as way of communicating idealized concepts. Also, since the music intimately reflects the cravings and thought- processes of the natural human mind, which in numerous ways is emotionally and intellectually irrational, the music may itself be consequently irrational.

The following book consists of brief biographical commentaries about Beethoven, each followed by sections of quotations attributed to the muse. In these quotes, Beethoven demonstrates his intention

preoccupation (or obsession) with thinking artistically and intelligently, and with helping to alleviate man's suffering by providing man with musical artworks that could enlighten him, so as to become educated enough to pull himself out of his misery. He felt immediate, strong disdain at any artistic statement that was not truly intelligent and artistic, such as, in his view, the music of Rossini. Although not prudish, he had high standards when it came to marriage, and was morally against "reproductory pleasure" for its own sake, or any form of adultery. He never married. Interestingly, experimental psychologists have discovered that people who have an intense love of humanity or are preoccupied with working to serve humanity tend to have difficulty forming intimate bonds with people on a personal level.

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# Preface

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This little book came into existence as if it were by chance. The author had devoted himself for a long time to the study of Beethoven and carefully scrutinized all manner of books, publications, manuscripts, etc., in order to derive the greatest possible information about the hero. He can say confidently that he conned every existing publication of value. His notes made during his reading grew voluminous, and also his amazement at the wealth of Beethoven's observations comparative unknown to his admirers because hidden away, like concealed violets, in books which have been long out of print and for whose reproduction there is no urgent call. These observations are of the utmost importance for the understanding of Beethoven, in whom man and artist are inseparably united. Within the pages of this little book are included all of them which seemed to possess value, either as expressions of universal truths or as evidence of the character of Beethoven or his compositions. Beethoven is brought more directly before our knowledge by these his own words than by the diffuse books which have been written about him. For this reason the compiler has added only the necessary explanatory notes, and (on the advice of professional friends) the remarks introductory to the various subdivisions of the book. He dispensed with a biographical introduction; there are plenty of succinct biographies, which set forth the circumstances of the master's life easily to be had. Those who wish to penetrate farther into the subject would do well to read the great work by Thayer, the foundation of a Beethoven biography (in the new revision now making by Deiters), or the critical biography by Marx as revised by Behncke. In sifting the material it was found that it fell naturally into thirteen subdivisions. In arranging the succession of utterances care was had to group related subjects. By this means unnecessary interruptions in the train of thought were avoided and interesting comparisons made possible. To this end it was important that time, place and circumstances of every word should be conscientiously set down.

Concerning the selection of material let it be said that in all cases of doubt the authenticity of every utterance was proved; Beethoven is easily recognizable in the form and contents of his sayings. Attention must be directed to two matters in particular: after considerable reflection the compiler decided to include in the collection a few quotations which Beethoven copied from books which he read. From the fact that he took the trouble to write them down, we may assume that they had a fascination for him, and were greeted with lively emotion as being admirable expressions of thoughts which had moved him. They are very few, and the fact that they are quotations is plainly indicated. By copying them into his note-books Beethoven as much as stored them away in the thesaurus of his thoughts, and so they may well have a place here. A word touching the use of the three famous letters to Bettina von Arnim, the peculiarities of which differentiate them from the entire mass of Beethoven's correspondence and compel an inquiry into their genuineness: As a correspondent Bettina von Arnim has a poor reputation since the discovery of her pretty forgery, "Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde" (Goethe's Correspondence with a Child). In this alleged "Correspondence" she made use of fragmentary material which was genuine, pieced it out with her own inventions, and even went so far as to turn into letters poems written by Goethe to her and other women. The genuineness of a poem by Beethoven to Bettina is indubitable; it will be found in the chapter entitled "Concerning Texts." Doubt was thrown on the letters immediately on their appearance in 1839.

Bettina could have dissipated all suspicion had she produced the originals and remained silent. One letter, however, that dated February 10, 1811, afterward came to light. Bettina had given it to Philip von Nathusius. It had always been thought the most likely one, of the set to be authentic; the compiler has therefore, used it without hesitation. From the other letters, in which a mixture of the genuine and the fictitious must be assumed so long as the originals are not produced, passages have been taken which might have been thus constructed by Beethoven. On the contrary, the voluminous communications of Bettina to Goethe, in which she relates her conversations with Beethoven, were scarcely used. It is significant, so far as these are concerned, that, according to Bettina's own statement, when she read the letter to him before sending it off, Beethoven cried out, "Did I really say that? If so I must have had a raptus."

In conclusion the compiler directs attention to the fact that in a few cases utterances which have been transmitted to us only in an indirect form have been altered to present them in a direct form, inasmuch as their contents seemed too valuable to omit simply because their production involved a trifling change in form.

—Elberfeld, October, 1904. Fr. K.



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# Concerning Art

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Beethoven's relation to art might almost be described as personal. Art was his goddess to whom he made petition, to whom he rendered thanks, whom he defended. He praised her as his savior in times of despair; by his own confession it was only the prospect of her comforts that prevented him from laying violent hands on himself. Read his words and you shall find that it was his art that was his companion in his wanderings through field and forest, the sharer of the solitude to which his deafness condemned him. The concepts Nature and Art were intimately bound up in his mind. His lofty and idealistic conception of art led him to proclaim the purity of his goddess with the hot zeal of a priest fanatic. Every form of pseudo or bastard art stirred him with hatred to the bottom of his soul; hence his furious onslaughts on mere virtuosity and all efforts from influential sources to utilize art for other than purely artistic purposes. And his art rewarded his devotion richly; she made his sorrowful life worth living with gifts of purest joy:

"To Beethoven music was not only a manifestation of the beautiful, an art, it was akin to religion. He felt himself to be a prophet, a seer. All the misanthropy engendered by his unhappy relations with mankind, could not shake his devotion to this ideal which had sprung in to Beethoven from true artistic apprehension and been nurtured by enforced introspection and philosophic reflection."

("Music and Manners," page 237. H. E. K.)

1. "'Tis said, that art is long, and life but fleeting:— Nay; life is long, and brief the span of art; If e'er her breath vouchsafes with gods a meeting, A moment's favor 'tis of which we've had a part."

(Conversation-book, March, 1820. Probably a quotation.)

2. "The world is a king, and, like a king, desires flattery in return for favor; but true art is selfish and perverse—it will not submit to the mould of flattery."

(Conversation-book, March, 1820. When Baron van Braun expressed the opinion that the opera "Fidelio" would eventually win the enthusiasm of the upper tiers, Beethoven said, "I do not write for the galleries!" He never permitted himself to be persuaded to make concessions to the taste of the masses.)

3. "Continue to translate yourself to the heaven of art; there is no more undisturbed, unmixed, pure happiness than may thus be attained."

(August 19, 1817, to Xavier Schnyder, who vainly sought instruction from Beethoven in 1811, though he was pleasantly received.)

4. "Go on; do not practice art alone but penetrate to her heart; she deserves it, for art and science only can raise man to godhood."

(Teplitz, July 17, 1812, to his ten years' old admirer, Emilie M. in H.)

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5. "True art is imperishable and the true artist finds profound delight in grand productions of genius."

(March 15, 1823, to Cherubini, to whom he also wrote, "I prize your works more than all other written for the stage." The letter asked Cherubini to interest himself in obtaining a subscription from King Louis XVIII for the Solemn Mass in D).

*(Cherubini declared that he had never received the letter. That it was not only the hope of obtaining favor which prompted Beethoven to express so high an admiration for Cherubini, is plain from a remark made by the English musician Cipriani Potter to A. W. Thayer in 1861. I found it in Thayer's note-books which were placed in my hands for examination after his death. One day Potter asked "Who is the greatest living composer, yourself excepted?" Beethoven seemed puzzled for a moment and then exclaimed, "Cherubini." H. E. K.)*

6. "Truth exists for the wise; beauty for the susceptible heart. They belong together—a complementary."

(Written in the autograph book of his friend, Lenz von Breuning, in 1797.)

7. "When I open my eyes, a sigh involuntarily escapes me, for all that I see runs counter to my religion; perforce I despise the world which does not intuitively feel that music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy."

(Remark made to Bettina von Arnim, in 1810, concerning Viennese society. Report in a letter by Bettina to Goethe on May 28, 1810.)

8. "Art! Who comprehends her? With whom can one consult concerning this great goddess?"

(August 11, 1810, to Bettina von Arnim.)

9. "In the country I know no lovelier delight than quartet music."

(To Archduke Rudolph, in a letter addressed to Baden on July 24, 1813.)

10. "Nothing but art, cut to form like old-fashioned hoop-skirts. I never feel entirely well except when I am among scenes of unspoiled nature."

(September 24, 1826, to Breuning, while promenading with Breuning's family in the Schonbrunn Garden, after calling attention to the alleys of trees "trimmed like walls, in the French manner.")

11. "Nature knows no quiescence; and true art walks with her hand in hand; her sister—from whom heaven forefend us!—is called artificiality."

(From notes in the lesson book of Archduke Rudolph, following some remarks on the expansion of the expressive capacity of music.)

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# Love of Nature

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Beethoven was a true son of the Rhine in his love for nature. As a boy he had taken extended trips sometimes occupying days, with his father "through the Rhenish localities ever lastingly dear to me. In his days of physical health Nature was his instructress in art; "I may not come without my banner he used to say when he set out upon his wanderings even in his latest years, and never without his notebook. In the scenes of nature he found his marvelous motives and themes; brook, birds and tree sang to him. In a few special cases he has himself recorded the fact.

But when he was excluded more and more from communion with his fellow men because of his increasing deafness, until, finally, he could communicate only by writing with others (hence the conversation-books, which will be cited often in this little volume), he fled for refuge to nature. Out of the woods he again became naively happy; to him the woods were a Holy of Holies, a Home of the Mysteries. Forest and mountain-vale heard his sighs; there he unburdened his heavy-laden heart. When his friends need comfort he recommends a retreat to nature. Nearly every summer he leaves his and dusty Vienna and seeks a quiet spot in the beautiful neighborhood. To call a retired and reposeful little spot his own is his burning desire.

12. On the Kahlenberg, 1812, end of September:

Almighty One In the woods I am blessed. Happy every one In the woods. Every tree speaks Through Thee.

O God! What glory in the Woodland. On the Heights is Peace,— Peace to serve Him—

(This poetic exclamation, accompanied by a few notes, is on a page of music paper owned by Joseph Joachim.)

13. "How happy I am to be able to wander among bushes and herbs, under trees and over rocks; no man can love the country as I love it. Woods, trees and rocks send back the echo that man desires."

(To Baroness von Drossdick.)

14. "O God! send your glance into beautiful nature and comfort your moody thoughts touching things which must be."

(To the "Immortal Beloved," July 6, in the morning.)

*(Thayer has spoiled the story so long believed, and still spooking in the books of careless writers, that the "Immortal Beloved" was the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, to whom the C-sharp minor sonata was dedicated. The real person to whom the love-letters were addressed was the Countess Brunswick to whom Beethoven was engaged to be married when he composed the fourth Symphony. H. E. K.)*

15. "My miserable hearing does not trouble me here. In the country it seems as if every tree said me: 'Holy! holy!' Who can give complete expression to the ecstasy of the woods! O, the sweet stillness of the woods!"

(July, 1814; he had gone to Baden after the benefit performance of "Fidelio.")

16. "My fatherland, the beautiful locality in which I saw the light of the world, appears before me vividly and just as beautiful as when I left you; I shall count it the happiest experience of my life when I shall again be able to see you, and greet our Father Rhine."

(Vienna, June 29, to Wegeler, in Bonn.)

*(In 1825 Beethoven said to his pupil Ries, "Fare well in the Rhine country which is ever dear to me and in 1826 wrote to Schott, the publisher in Mayence, about the "Rhine country which I so long to see again.")*

17. "Bruhl, at "The Lamb"—how lovely to see my native country again!"

(Diary, 1812-1818.)

18. "A little house here, so small as to yield one's self a little room,—only a few days in this divine Bruehl,—longing or desire, emancipation or fulfillment."

(Written in 1816 in Bruehl near Modling among the sketches for the Scherzo of the pianoforte sonata op. 10.)

*(Like many another ejaculatory remark of Beethoven's, it is difficult to understand. See Appendix. I. E. K.)*

19. "When you reach the old ruins, think that Beethoven often paused there; if you wander through the mysterious fir forests, think that. Beethoven often poetized, or, as is said, composed there."

(In the fall of 1817, to Mme. Streicher, who was at a cure in Baden.)

20. "Nature is a glorious school for the heart! It is well; I shall be a scholar in this school and bring an eager heart to her instruction. Here I shall learn wisdom, the only wisdom that is free from disguise; here I shall learn to know God and find a foretaste of heaven in His knowledge. Among these occupations my earthly days shall flow peacefully along until I am accepted into that world where I shall no longer be a student, but a knower of wisdom."

(Copied into his diary, in 1818, from Sturm's "Betrachtungen uber die Werke Gottes in der Natur.")

21. "Soon autumn will be here. Then I wish to be like unto a fruitful tree which pours rich stores of fruit into our laps! But in the winter of existence, when I shall be gray and sated with life, I desire for myself the good fortune that my repose be as honorable and beneficent as the repose of nature in the winter time."

(Copied from the same work of Sturm's.)

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# Concerning Texts

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Not even a Beethoven was spared the tormenting question of texts for composition. It is fortunate for posterity that he did not exhaust his energies in setting inefficient libretti, that he did not believe that good music would suffice to command success in spite of bad texts. The majority of his works belong to the field of purely instrumental music. Beethoven often gave expression to the belief that words were a less capable medium of proclamation for feelings than music. Nevertheless it may be observed that he looked upon an opera, or lyric drama, as the crowning work of his life. He was in constant communication with the best poets of his time concerning opera texts. A letter of his on the subject was found in the blood-spotted pocketbook of Theodor Komer. The conclusion of his creative labor was to be a setting of Goethe's "Faust;" except "Fidelio," however, he gave us no opera. His songs are not many although he sought carefully for appropriate texts. Unhappily the gift of poetry was not vouchsafed him.

22. "Always the same old story: the Germans can not put together a good libretto."

(To C. M. von Weber, concerning the book of "Euryanthe," at Baden, in October, 1823. Mozart said: "Verses are the most indispensable thing for music, but rhymes, for the sake of rhymes, the most injurious. Those who go to work so pedantically will assuredly come to grief, along with the music.")

23. "It is difficult to find a good poem. Grillparzer has promised to write one for me,—indeed, he has already written one; but we can not understand each other. I want something entirely different than he."

(In the spring of 1825, to Ludwig Rellstab, who was intending to write an opera-book for Beethoven. It may not be amiss to recall the fact that Mozart examined over one hundred librettos, according to his own statement, before he decided to compose "The Marriage of Figaro.")

24. "It is the duty of every composer to be familiar with all poets, old and new, and himself choose the best and most fitting for his purposes."

(In a recommendation of Kandler's "Anthology.")

25. "The genre would give me little concern provided the subject were attractive to me. It must be such that I can go to work on it with love and ardor. I could not compose operas like 'Don Juan' and 'Figaro;' toward them I feel too great a repugnance. I could never have chosen such subjects; they are too frivolous."

(In the spring of 1825, to Ludwig Rellstab.)

26. "I need a text which stimulates me; it must be something moral, uplifting. Texts such as Mozart composed I should never have been able to set to music. I could never have got myself into a mood for licentious texts. I have received many librettos, but, as I have said, none that met my wishes."

(To young Gerhard von Breuning.)

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27. "I know the text is extremely bad, but after one has conceived an entity out of even a bad text, it is difficult to make changes in details without disturbing the unity. If it is a single word, on which occasionally great weight is laid, it must be permitted to stand. He is a bad author who can not, or will not try to make something as good as possible; if this is not the case petty changes will certainly not improve the whole."

(Teplitz, August 23, 1811, to Hartel, the publisher, who wanted some changes made in the hook of "The Mount of Olives.")

28. "Good heavens! Do they think in Saxony that the words make good music? If an inappropriate word can spoil the music, which is true, then we ought to be glad when we find that words and music are one and not try to improve matters even if the verbal expression is commonplace—dixi."

(January 28, to Gottfried Hartel, who had undertaken to make changes in the book of "The Mount of Olives" despite the prohibition of Beethoven.)

29. "Goethe's poems exert a great power over me not only because of their contents but also because of their rhythms; I am stimulated to compose by this language, which builds itself up to higher orders as if through spiritual agencies, and bears in itself the secret of harmonies."

(Reported as an expression of Beethoven's by Bettina von Arnim to Goethe.)

30. "Schiller's poems are difficult to set to music. The composer must be able to rise far above the poet. Who can do that in the case of Schiller? In this respect Goethe is much easier."

(1809, after Beethoven had made his experiences with the "Hymn to Joy" and "Egmont.")

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# On Composing

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Wiseacres not infrequently accused Beethoven of want of regularity in his compositions. In various ways and at divers times he gave vigorous utterance to his opinions of such pedantry. He was not the most tractable of pupils, especially in Vienna, where, although he was highly praised as a player, he took lessons in counterpoint from Albrechtsberger. He did not endure long with Papa Haydn. He detested the study of fugue in particular; the fugue was to him a symbol of narrow coercion which choked all emotion. Mere formal beauty, moreover, was nothing to him. Over and over again he emphasizes soul, feeling, direct and immediate life, as the first necessity of an art work. It is therefore not strange that under certain circumstances he ignored conventional forms in sonata and symphony. An irrepressible impulse toward freedom is the most prominent peculiarity of the man and artist Beethoven; nearly all of his observations, no matter what their subject, radiate the word "Liberty." In his remarks about composing there is a complete exposition of his method of work.

31. "As regards me, great heavens! my dominion is in the air; the tones whirl like the wind, and often there is a like whirl in my soul."

(February 13, 1814, to Count Brunswick, in Buda.)

32. "Then the loveliest themes slipped out of your eyes into my heart, themes which shall only then delight the world when Beethoven conducts no longer."

(August 15, 1812, to Bettina von Arnim.)

33. "I always have a picture in my mind when composing, and follow its lines."

(In 1815, to Neate, while promenading with him in Baden and talking about the "Pastoral" symphony)

*(Ries relates: "While composing Beethoven frequently thought of an object, although he often laughed at musical delineation and scolded about petty things of the sort. In this respect 'The Creation' and 'The Seasons' were many times a butt, though without depreciation of Haydn's loftier merits. Haydn's choruses and other works were loudly praised by Beethoven.")*

34. "The texts which you sent me are least of all fitted for song. The description of a picture belongs to the field of painting; in this the poet can count himself more fortunate than my muse for his territory is not so restricted as mine in this respect, though mine, on the other hand, extends into other regions and my dominion is not easily reached."

(Nussdorf, July 15, 1817, to Wilhelm Gerhard, who had sent him some Anacreontic songs for composition.)

35. "Carried too far, all delineation in instrumental music loses in efficiency."

(A remark in the sketches for the "Pastoral" symphony, preserved in the Royal Library in Berlin.)

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*(Mozart said: "Even in the most terrifying moments music must never offend the ear.")*

36. "Yes, yes, then they are amazed and put their heads together because they never found it in a book on thorough bass."

(To Ries when the critics accused him of making grammatical blunders in music.)

37. "No devil can compel me to write only cadences of such a kind."

(From notes written in his years of study. Beethoven called the composition of fugues "the art of making musical skeletons.")

38. "Good singing was my guide; I strove to write as flowingly as possible and trusted in my ability to justify myself before the judgment-seat of sound reason and pure taste."

(From notes in the instruction book of Archduke Rudolph.)

39. "Does he believe that I think of a wretched fiddle when the spirit speaks to me?"

(To his friend, the admirable violinist Schuppanzigh, when the latter complained of the difficulty of a passage in one of his works.)

*(Beethoven here addresses his friend in the third person, which is the customary style of address for the German nobility and others towards inferiors in rank. H. E. K.)*

40. "The Scotch songs show how unconstrainedly irregular melodies can be treated with the help of harmony."

(Diary, 1812-1818. Since 1809 Beethoven had arranged Folksongs for Thomson of Edinburgh.)

41. "To write true church music, look through the old monkish chorals, etc., also the most correct translations of the periods, and perfect prosody in the Catholic Psalms and hymns generally."

(Diary, 1818.)

42. "Many assert that every minor piece must end in the minor. Nego! On the contrary I find that the soft scales the major third at the close has a glorious and uncommonly quieting effect. Joy follows sorrow, sunshine—rain. It affects me as if I were looking up to the silvery glistening of the evening star."

(From Archduke Rudolph's book of instruction.)

43. "Rigorists, and devotees of antiquity, relegate the perfect fourth to the list of dissonances. Taste differs. To my ear it gives not the least offence combined with other tones."

(From Archduke Rudolph's book of instruction, compiled in 1809.)



44. "When the gentlemen can think of nothing new, and can go no further, they quickly call in diminished seventh chord to help them out of the predicament."

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(A remark made to Schindler.)

45. "My dear boy, the startling effects which many credit to the natural genius of the composer, are often achieved with the greatest ease by the use and resolution of the diminished seventh chords."

(Reported by Karl Friederich Hirsch, a pupil of Beethoven in the winter of 1816. He was a grandson of Albrechtsberger who had given lessons to Beethoven.)

46. "In order to become a capable composer one must have already learned harmony and counterpoint at the age of from seven to eleven years, so that when the fancy and emotions awake one shall know what to do according to the rules."

(Reported by Schindler as having been put into the mouth of Beethoven by a newspaper of Vienna. Schindler says: "When Beethoven came to Vienna he knew no counterpoint, and little harmony.")

47. "So far as mistakes are concerned it was never necessary for me to learn thorough-bass; my feelings were so sensitive from childhood that I practiced counterpoint without knowing that it must be so or could be otherwise."

(Note on a sheet containing directions for the use of fourths in suspensions—probably intended for the instruction of Archduke Rudolph.)

48. "Continue, Your Royal Highness, to write down briefly your occasional ideas while at the pianoforte. For this a little table alongside the pianoforte is necessary. By this means not only is the fancy strengthened, but one learns to hold fast in a moment the most remote conceptions. It is also necessary to compose without the pianoforte; say often a simple chord melody, with simple harmonies, then figurate according to the rules of counterpoint, and beyond them; this will give Y. R. H. no headache, but, on the contrary, feeling yourself thus in the midst of art, a great pleasure."

(July 1, 1823, to his pupil Archduke Rudolph.)

49. "The bad habit, which has clung to me from childhood, of always writing down a musical thought which occurs to me, good or bad, has often been harmful to me."

(July 23, 1815, to Archduke Rudolph, while excusing himself for not having visited H.R.H., on the ground that he had been occupied in noting a musical idea which had occurred to him.)

50. "As is my habit, the pianoforte part of the concerto (op. 19) was not written out in the score; I have just written it, wherefore, in order to expedite matters, you receive it in my not too legible handwriting."

(April 22, 1801, to the publisher Hofmeister, in Leipzig.)

51. "Correspondence, as you know, was never my forte; some of my best friends have not had a letter from me in years. I live only in my notes (compositions), and one is scarcely finished when another is begun. As I am working now I often compose three, even four, pieces simultaneously."

(Vienna, June 29, 1800, to Wegeler, in Bonn.)

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52. "I never write a work continuously, without interruption. I am always working on several at the same time, taking up one, then another."

(June 1, 1816, to Medical Inspector Dr. Karl von Bursy, when the latter asked about an opera (the book by Berge, sent to Beethoven by Amenda), which was never written.)

53. "I must accustom myself to think out at once the whole, as soon as it shows itself, with all the voices, in my head."

(Note in a sketch-book of 1810, containing studies for the music to "Egmont" and the great Trio in B-flat, op. 97. H. E. K.)

54. "I carry my thoughts about me for a long time, often a very long time, before I write them down; meanwhile my memory is so faithful that I am sure never to forget, not even in years, a theme that has once occurred to me. I change many things, discard, and try again until I am satisfied. Then, however, there begins in my head the development in every direction, and, in as much as I know exactly what I want, the fundamental idea never deserts me,—it arises before me, grows,—I see and hear the picture in all its extent and dimensions stand before my mind like a cast, and there remains for me nothing but the labor of writing it down, which is quickly accomplished when I have the time, for I sometimes take up other work, but never to the confusion of one with the other.

You will ask me where I get my ideas. That I cannot tell you with certainty; they come unsummoned, directly, indirectly,—I could seize them with my hands,—out in the open air; in the woods; while walking; in the silence of the nights; early in the morning; incited by moods, which are translated by the poet into words, by me into tones that sound, and roar and storm about me until I have set them down in notes."

(Said to Louis Schlosser, a young musician, whom Beethoven honored with his friendship in 1822-23.)

55. "On the whole, the carrying out of several voices in strict relationship mutually hinders the progress."

(Fall of 1812, in the Diary of 1812-18.)

56. "Few as are the claims which I make upon such things I shall still accept the dedication of your beautiful work with pleasure. You ask, however, that I also play the part of a critic, without thinking that I must myself submit to criticism! With Voltaire I believe that 'a few fly-bites can not stop a spirited horse.' In this respect I beg of you to follow my example. In order not to approach you surreptitiously, but openly as always, I say that in future works of the character you might give more heed to the individualization of the voices."

(Vienna, May 10, 1826. To whom the letter was sent is not known, though from the manner of address it is plain that he was of the nobility.)

57. "Your variations show talent, but I must fault you for having changed the theme. Why? What man loves must not be taken away from him;—moreover to do this is to make changes before variations."

(Baden, July 6, 1804, to Wiedebein, a teacher of music in Brunswick.)

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58. "I am not in the habit of rewriting my compositions. I never did it because I am profoundly convinced that every change of detail changes the character of the whole."

(February 19, 1813, to George Thomson, who had requested some changes in compositions submitted to him for publication.)

59. "One must not hold one's self so divine as to be unwilling occasionally to make improvements in one's creations."

(March 4, 1809, to Breitkopf and Hartel, when indicating a few changes which he wished to have made in the symphonies op. 67 and op. 68.)

60. "The unnatural rage for transcribing pianoforte pieces for string instruments (instruments that are in every respect so different from each other) ought to end. I stoutly maintain that only Mozart could have transcribed his own works, and Haydn; and without putting myself on a level with these great men I assert the same thing about my pianoforte sonatas. Not only must entire passages be elided and changed, but additions must be made; and right here lies the rock of offence to overcome which one must be the master of himself or be possessed of the same skill and inventiveness. I transcribed but a single sonata for string quartet, and I am sure that no one will easily do it after me."

(July 13, 1809, in an announcement of several compositions, among them the quintet op. 29.)

61. "Were it not that my income brings in nothing, I should compose nothing but grand symphonies, church music, or, at the outside, quartets in addition."

(December 20, 1822, to Peters, publisher, in Leipzig. His income had been reduced from 4,000 to 800 florins by the depreciation of Austrian currency.)

*(Here, in the original, is one of the puns which Beethoven was fond of making: "Ware mein Gehalt nicht ganzlich ohne Gehalt." H. E. K.)*

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# *On Performing Music*

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While reading Beethoven's views on the subject of how music ought to be performed, it is but natural to inquire about his own manner of playing. On this point Ries, his best pupil, reports:

"In general Beethoven played his own compositions very capriciously, yet he adhered, on the whole, strictly to the beat and only at times, but seldom, accelerated the tempo a trifle. Occasionally he would retard the tempo in a crescendo, which produced a very beautiful and striking effect. While playing he would give a passage, now in the right hand, now in the left, a beautiful expression which was simply inimitable; but it was rarely indeed that he added a note or an ornament."

Of his playing when still a young man one of his hearers said that it was in the slow movements particularly that it charmed everybody. Almost unanimously his contemporaries give him the palm for his improvisations. Ries says:

"His extemporizations were the most extraordinary things that one could hear. No artist that I ever heard came at all near the height which Beethoven attained. The wealth of ideas which forced themselves on him, the caprices to which he surrendered himself, the variety of treatment, the difficulties, were inexhaustible."

His playing was not technically perfect. He let many a note "fall under the table," but without marring the effect of his playing. Concerning this we have a remark of his own in No. 75. Somewhat critical Czerny's report:

"Extraordinary as his extempore playing was it was less successful in the performance of printed compositions; for, since he never took the time or had the patience to practice anything, his success depended mostly on chance and mood; and since, also, his manner of playing as well as composition was ahead of his time, the weak and imperfect pianofortes of his time could not withstand his gigantic style. It was because of this that Hummel's purling and brilliant manner of play, well adapted to the period, was more intelligible and attractive to the great public. But Beethoven's playing in adagios and legato, in the sustained style, made an almost magical impression on every hearer, and, so far as I know, it has never been surpassed." Czerny's remark about the pianofortes of Beethoven's day explains Beethoven's judgment on his own pianoforte sonatas. He composed for the sonorous pianoforte of the future,—the pianoforte building today.

The following anecdote, told by Czerny, will be read with pleasure. Pleyel, a famous musician, came to Vienna from Paris in 1805, and had his latest quartets performed in the palace of Prince Lobkowitz. Beethoven was present and was asked to play something. "As usual, he submitted to the interminable entreaties and finally was dragged almost by force to the pianoforte by the ladies. Angrily he tears the second violin part of one of the Pleyel quartets from the music-stand where it still lay open, throws it upon the rack of the pianoforte, and begins to improvise. We had never heard him extemporize more brilliantly, with more originality or more grandly than on that evening."

But throughout the entire improvisation there ran in the middle voices, like a thread, or cantus firmus, the insignificant notes, wholly insignificant in themselves, which he found on the page of the quartet which by chance lay open on the music-stand; on them he built up the most daring melodies and harmonies, in the most brilliant concert style. Old Pleyel could only give expression to his amazement by kissing his hands. After such improvisations Beethoven was wont to break out into a loud and satisfied laugh."

Czerny says further of his playing: "In rapidity of scale passages, trills, leaps, etc., no one equalled him,—not even Hummel. His attitude at the pianoforte was perfectly quiet and dignified, with no approach to grimace, except to bend down a little towards the keys as his deafness increased; his fingers were very powerful, not long, and broadened at the tips by much playing; for he told me often that in his youth he had practiced stupendously, mostly till past midnight. In teaching he laid great stress on a correct position of the fingers (according to the Emanuel Bach method, in which I was instructed me); he himself could barely span a tenth. He made frequent use of the pedal, much more frequently than is indicated in his compositions. His reading of the scores of Handel and Gluck and the fugues of Bach was unique, inasmuch as he put a polyphony and spirit into the former which gave the works a new form."

In his later years the deaf master could no longer hear his own playing which therefore came to have a pitifully painful effect. Concerning his manner of conducting, Seyfried says: "It would no wise do to make our master a model in conducting, and the orchestra had to take great care lest it be led astray by its mentor; for he had an eye only for his composition and strove unceasingly by means of manifold gesticulations to bring out the expression which he desired. Often when he reached a forte he gave a violent down beat even if the note were an unaccented one. He was in the habit of marking diminuendo by crouching down lower and lower, and at a pianissimo he almost crept under the stand. With a crescendo he, too, grew, rising as if out of a stage trap, and with the entrance of a fortissimo he stood on his toes and seemed to take on gigantic proportions, while he waved his arms about as if trying to soar upwards to the clouds. Everything about him was in activity; not a part of his organization remained idle, and the whole man seemed like a perpetuum mobile. Concerning the expression, the little nuances, the equable division of light and shade, as also an effective tempo rubato, he was extremely exact and gladly discussed them with the individual members of the orchestra without showing vexation or anger."

62. "It has always been known that the greatest pianoforte players were also the greatest composers, but how did they play? Not like the pianists of today who prance up and down the key-board with passages in which they have exercised themselves,—putsch, putsch, putsch;—what does that mean? Nothing. When the true pianoforte virtuosi played it was always something homogeneous, an entity; it could be transcribed and then it appeared as a well thought-out work. That is pianoforte playing; the other is nothing!"

(In conversation with Tomaschek, October, 1814.)

63. "Candidly I am not a friend of Allegri di bravura and such, since they do nothing but promote mechanism."

(Hetzendorf, July 16, 1823, to Ries in London.)

64. "The great pianists have nothing but technique and affectation."

(Fall of 1817, to Marie Pachler-Koschak, a pianist whom Beethoven regarded very highly. "You will play the sonatas in F major and C minor, for me, will you not?")

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65. "As a rule, in the case of these gentlemen, all reason and feeling are generally lost in the nimbleness of their fingers."

(Reported by Schindler as a remark of Beethoven's concerning pianoforte virtuosi.)

66. "Habit may depreciate the most brilliant talents."

(In 1812 to his pupil, Archduke Rudolph, whom he warns against too zealous a devotion to music.)

67. "You will have to play a long time yet before you realize that you can not play at all."

(July, 1808. Reported by Rust as having been said to a young man who played for Beethoven.)

68. "One must be something if one wishes to put on appearances."

(August 15, 1812, to Bettina von Arnim.)

69. "These pianoforte players have their coteries whom they often join; there they are praised continually,—and there's an end of art!"

(Conversation with Tomaschek, October, 1814.)

70. "We Germans have too few dramatically trained singers for the part of Leonore. They are too cold and unfeeling; the Italians sing and act with body and soul."

(1824, in Baden, to Freudenberg, an organist from Breslau.)

71. "If he is a master of his instrument I rank an organist amongst the first of virtuosi. I too, played the organ a great deal when I was young, but my nerves would not stand the power of the gigantic instrument."

(To Freudenberg, in Baden.)

72. "I never wrote noisy music. For my instrumental works I need an orchestra of about sixty good musicians. I am convinced that only such a number can bring out the quickly changing gradations in performance."

(Reported by Schindler.)

73. "A Requiem ought to be quiet music,—it needs no trump of doom; memories of the dead require no hubbub."

(Reported by Holz to Fanny von Ponsing, in Baden, summer of 1858. According to the same authority Beethoven valued Cherubini's "Requiem" more highly than any other.)

74. "No metronome at all! He who has sound feeling needs none, and he who has not will get no help

from the metronome;—he'll run away with the orchestra anyway."

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(Reported by Schindler. It had been found that Beethoven himself had sent different metronome indications to the publisher and the Philharmonic Society of London.)

75. "In reading rapidly a multitude of misprints may pass unnoticed because you are familiar with the language."

(To Wegeler, who had expressed wonder at Beethoven's rapid *primavista* playing, when it was impossible to see each individual note.)

76. "The poet writes his monologue or dialogue in a certain, continuous rhythm, but the elocutionist in order to insure an understanding of the sense of the lines, must make pauses and interruptions in places where the poet was not permitted to indicate it by punctuation. The same manner of declamation can be applied to music, and admits of modification only according to the number of performers."

(Reported by Schindler, Beethoven's faithful factotum.)

77. "With respect to his playing with you, when he has acquired the proper mode of fingering and plays in time and plays the notes with tolerable correctness, only then direct his attention to the matter of interpretation; and when he has gotten this far do not stop him for little mistakes, but point them out at the end of the piece. Although I have myself given very little instruction I have always followed this method which quickly makes musicians, and that, after all, is one of the first objects of art."

(To Czerny, who was teaching music to Beethoven's nephew Karl.)

78. "Always place the hands at the key-board so that the fingers can not be raised higher than is necessary; only in this way is it possible to produce a singing tone."

(Reported by Schindler as Beethoven's view on pianoforte instruction. He hated a staccato style of playing and dubbed it "finger dancing" and "throwing the hands in the air.")

*(#79 was skipped in the 1905 edition—error?)*

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# On His Own Works

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80. "I haven't a single friend; I must live alone. But well I know that God is nearer to me than to the others of my art; I associate with Him without fear, I have always recognized and understood Him, and I have no fear for my music,—it can meet no evil fate. Those who understand it must become free from all the miseries that the others drag with them."

(To Bettina von Arnim. (*Bettina's letter to Goethe, May 28, 1810.*))

81. "The variations will prove a little difficult to play, particularly the trills in the coda; but let that not frighten you. It is so disposed that you need play only the trills, omitting the other notes because they are also in the violin part. I would never have written a thing of this kind had I not often noticed here and there in Vienna a man who after I had improvised of an evening would write down some of my peculiarities and make boast of them next day. Foreseeing that these things would soon appear in print I made up my mind to anticipate them. Another purpose which I had was to embarrass the local pianoforte masters. Many of them are my mortal enemies, and I wanted to have my revenge in that way, for I knew in advance that the variations would be put before them, and that they would make exhibitions of themselves."

(Vienna, November 2, 1793, to Eleonore von Breuning, in dedicating to her the variations in F major "Se vuol ballare." (*The pianist whom Beethoven accuses of stealing his thunder was Abbe Gelinek.*))

82. "The time in which I wrote my sonatas (the first ones of the second period) was more poetical than the present (1823); such hints were therefore unnecessary. Every one at that time felt in the Largo of the third sonata in D (op. 10) the pictured soulstate of a melancholy being, with all the nuances of light and shade which occur in a delineation of melancholy and its phases, without requiring a key to the shape of a superscription; and everybody then saw in the two sonatas (op. 14) the picture of a contest between two principles, or a dialogue between two persons, because it was so obvious."

(In answer to Schindler's question why he had not indicated the poetical conceits underlying his sonatas by superscriptions or titles.)

83. "This sonata has a clean face (literally: 'has washed itself'), my dear brother!"

(January, 1801, to Hofmeister, publisher in Leipzig to whom he offers the sonata, op. 22, for 20 ducats.)

84. "They are incessantly talking about the C-sharp minor sonata (op. 27, No. 2); on my word I have written better ones. The F-sharp major sonata (op. 78) is a different thing!"

(A remark to Czerny.)

(*The C-sharp minor sonata is that popularly known as the "Moonlight Sonata," a title which is wholly*



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