

Little Fox Readers

Level 7

Beethoven: Master of Symphonies



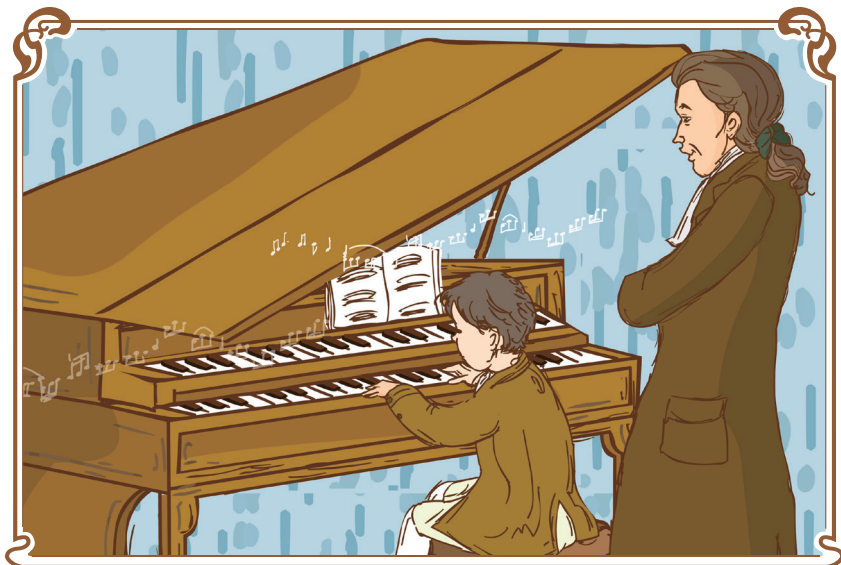
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Many music lovers and scholars consider Ludwig van Beethoven one of the greatest composers who ever lived. It's especially amazing that Beethoven composed many of his musical masterpieces after losing his hearing!

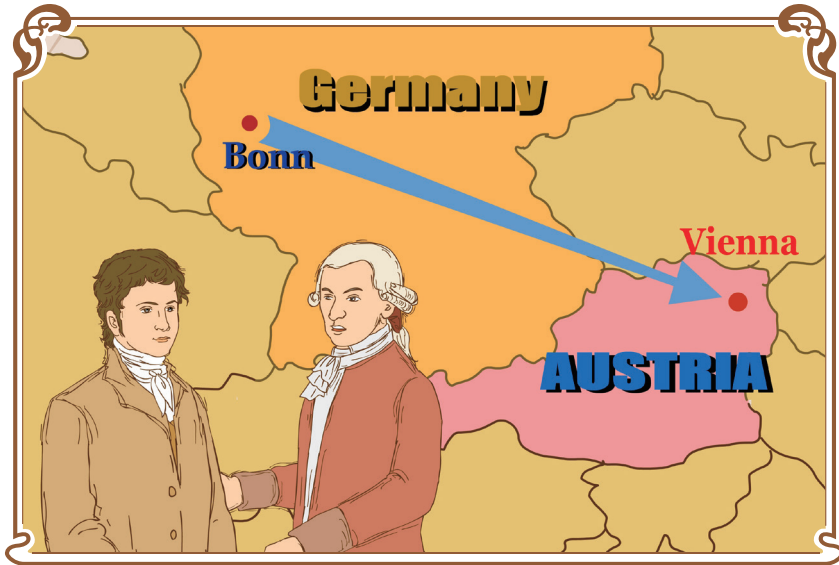
Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany, in 1770. Both his father and grandfather were court musicians—musicians hired to play for royalty. Beethoven's father was determined to teach his young son to play music, and to turn him into a prodigy. According to many stories, Beethoven was often crying as he practiced, and his father made him



work very hard, often until late at night.

When Beethoven was almost 12, he published his first composition. He had also been appointed as an assistant organist at the court—an impressive job for such a young musician. It was around this time that Beethoven left school and devoted himself entirely to music. As a result, he was never a very good speller. His letters show that he often made simple grammatical errors, even later in his life.

As Beethoven began earning money from his music, his family grew more dependent upon his income. The Beethovens had once been wealthy,



but the father was an alcoholic. His serious drinking problem had led the family into financial decline.

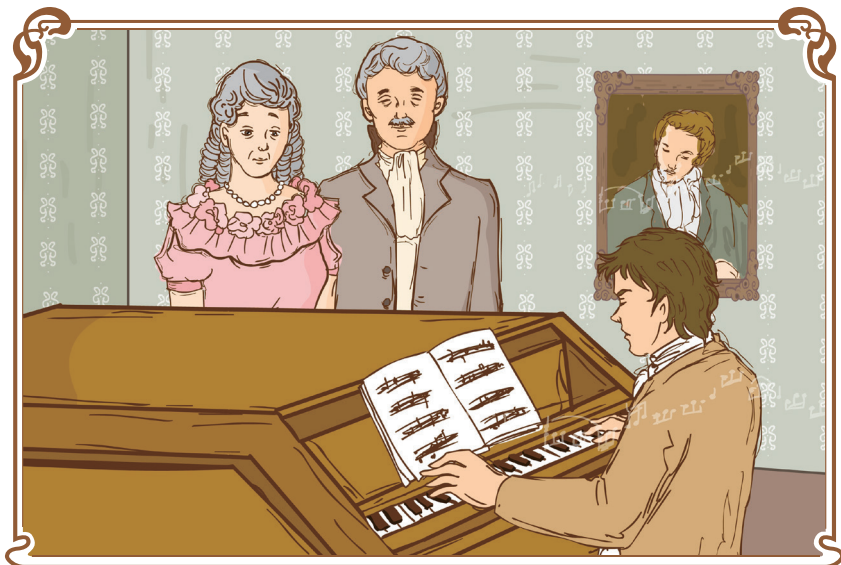
When Beethoven turned 18 years old, the court decided to send him to Vienna, which was the center of the music world at that time. Beethoven wanted to stay in Vienna and study with the great composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. But back in Bonn, disaster struck. His mother fell ill and died, and Beethoven had to return home to Bonn.

The next years were probably a very stressful time in the Beethoven household. Beethoven's father was still drinking, and Beethoven had two



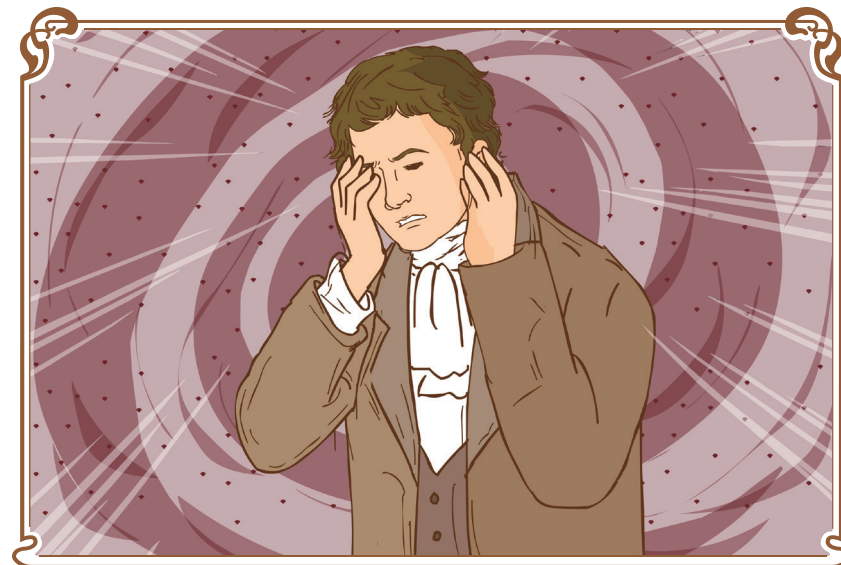
younger brothers who needed his financial support. Beethoven's life was very busy as he tried to take care of his family and practice and develop his music. Yet it was also a good time for his career as he took on more responsibilities at court. He also expanded his social circle with other musicians and some prosperous friends.

In 1790 an important European political figure—the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Joseph II—died, and Beethoven was invited to compose the funeral ode. This was a huge honor for a young composer. While Beethoven's composition



was never played at the emperor's funeral, it did eventually attract the attention of another well-known composer—Joseph Haydn. By 1792 Beethoven was traveling back to Vienna to study with Haydn as well as other composers.

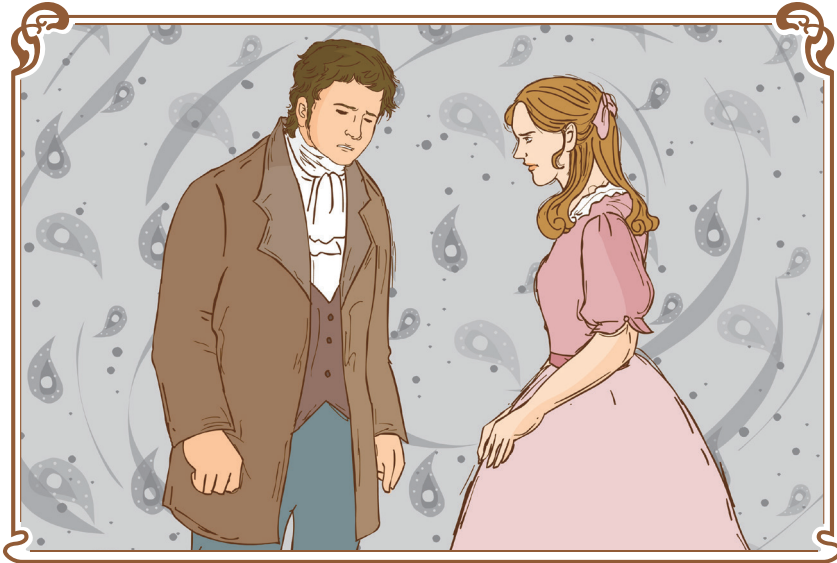
During this time Beethoven continued to compose music. His compositions were very different from anything anyone had heard before. Beethoven included new sounds and paired up instruments in new and creative ways. He also became known in Vienna for his playing of the piano; he received many invitations to play at the homes of noble families and



aristocrats.

By the time Beethoven was around 28 years old, disaster had struck again—he realized he was losing his hearing. Over the years he became completely deaf, sometimes isolating himself from others, and growing bitter about his condition.

Even though he could no longer hear his compositions being played, Beethoven kept writing music. He often wandered country roads in villages near Vienna, and in sketchbooks, he wrote down his ideas. His music grew more sensitive and powerful because of his personal struggles. Beethoven never



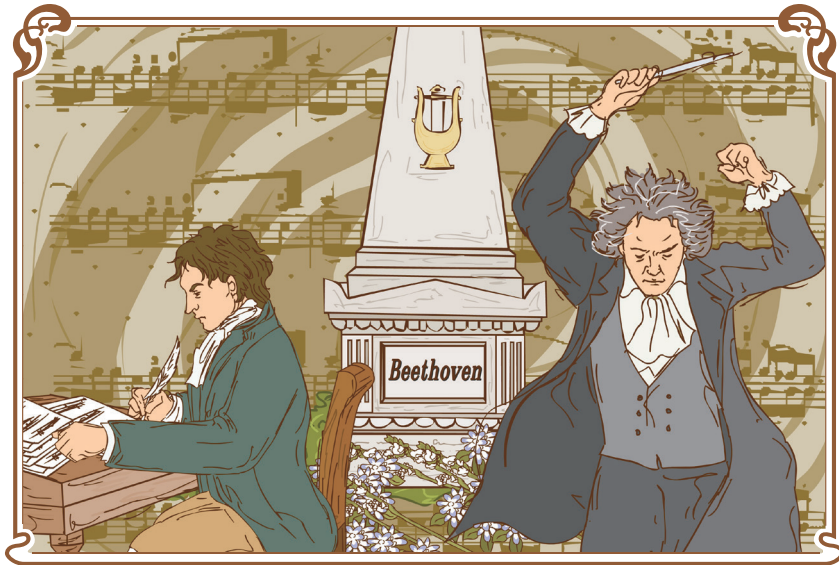
had luck finding love, and this added to his loneliness and dark spirit. His piece *Moonlight Sonata* is regarded as one of his most beautiful works. It is believed that it was inspired by the tragic love he felt for a girl he couldn't marry.

Beethoven's nine symphonies are also considered masterpieces. A symphony is a long musical work played by an orchestra. Beethoven wrote complicated compositions that evoke many different moods and feelings. Each symphony has a different theme and expresses a different emotion. His Symphony No. 3 was written in honor of Napoleon, whom Beethoven



admired for a time. Symphony No. 6 was inspired by the beauty found in nature. In one section Beethoven has woodwind instruments imitate the sounds of nightingales, cuckoos, and quails.

His most popular symphony is probably his final one—Symphony No. 9. It is a very powerful piece of music, one in which Beethoven uses both an orchestra and a chorus of singers. When it was first played, the audience loved it so much, they clapped for a very long time after the concert ended. Because he was deaf, Beethoven was completely unaware of the thunderous applause. Finally someone turned him



in the direction of the audience so he could see their enthusiastic clapping and cheering.

Ludwig van Beethoven died in Vienna on March 26, 1827, at age 57. He left an incredible musical legacy that includes some of the most important musical works of all time. It is hard to believe that he created many of these great works without being able to hear a single note.