

Prelude

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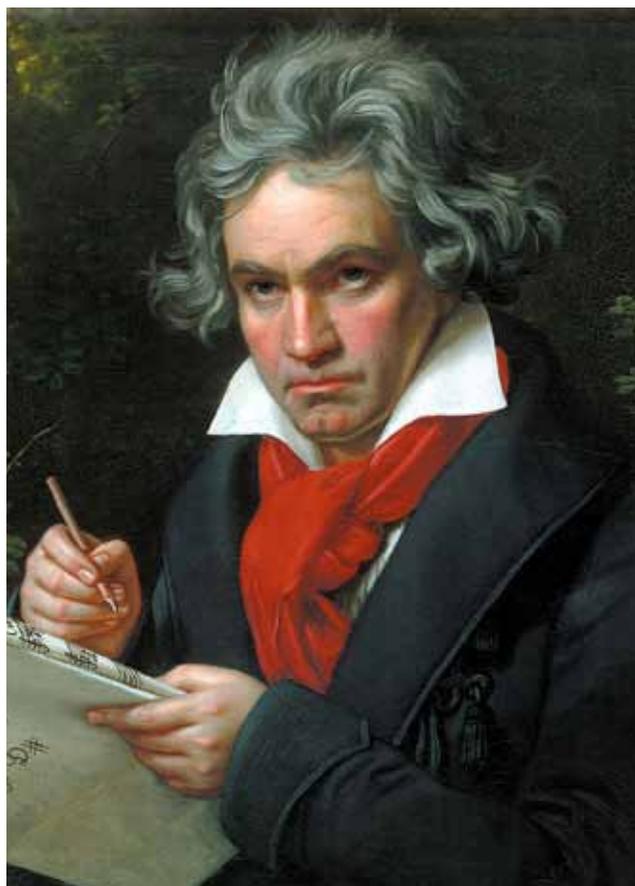
OCTOBER 2015

Masterworks #2: Beethoven – The Bold Entrepreneur



Beethoven the composer is widely-known, but it is Beethoven the entrepreneur who forever changed the way composers support themselves.

In the 18th century, the patronage of the Hapsburgs and other nobles in Vienna drew composers to the city, each seeking a patron to provide a secure income. When a 21-year old Beethoven arrived in Vienna in 1791, his remarkable talent quickly secured support from Prince Lichnowsky, who generously granted him annual income of 600 Gulden.ⁱ But this daring young composer had other ideas: he wanted to become an *independent* artist. And the environment in Vienna suited his ambitions perfectly.



Vienna in the late 1700s was a world in transition, with a budding public music scene offering performance possibilities for a wider target audience beyond the nobility.ⁱⁱ Market-oriented Vienna appealed to Beethoven, who developed skills as an entrepreneur, selling his talent and his products in the free market, making him one of the first freelance composers.ⁱⁱⁱ

Widely-admired, Ludwig was not so foolish as to turn down grants from royalty; but he also earned money teaching children of wealthy parents, performing privately-sponsored concerts (in which he often featured himself as the piano soloist), composing on commission and even “on spec” to publishers.^{iv} Beethoven cleverly devised a way to sell the same piece to different publishers, managing simultaneous releases in different national markets. He even offered works to publishers after they had been premiered.^v With the dawn of the new century, however, his developing marketing skills were about to be put to an extreme test.

In the early 1800's, Vienna and the Austro-Hungarian Empire were hard-hit by the Napoleonic Wars.^{vi} Currency was devalued; wealthy nobles fled the city for the country; and with the threat of invasions, the populace retreated to their homes. Virtually all social life came to a halt.^{vii} In a wartime environment, most in Vienna struggled to earn a living, and Beethoven was no different.

But Beethoven, for all of his fame, had an added burden: despite his youth, (he was only in his late twenties), he suffered from failing health. [Some speculated syphilis was the cause of his multiple health issues^{viii} but in the late 1990's, radioimmunoassay testing on his hair revealed abnormally high levels of lead, indicating the possibility of chronic lead poisoning, or “plumbism” which would explain a multitude of his health problems, including his loss of hearing.^{ix}]

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In 1801, Beethoven's letters to his friends Karl Amenda and Franz Gerhard Wegeler, confided a painful truth. He was rapidly losing his hearing^v:

"My hearing has grown steadily worse over the last three years, which was said to be caused by the condition of my belly..."

"Know that my noblest faculty, my hearing, has greatly deteriorated..."

"I beg of you to keep the matter of my deafness a profound secret to be confided to nobody, no matter whom..."

"For two years I have avoided almost all social gatherings because it is impossible for me to say to people 'I am deaf.' If I belonged to any other profession it would be easier, but in my profession it is a frightful state..."

"Often I can scarcely hear someone speaking softly, the tones yes, but not the words. However, as soon as anyone shouts it becomes intolerable..."

"Of course, I am resolved to rise over every obstacle, but how will it be possible?..."^{xi}

The depth of Beethoven's anguish is reflected in his heartbreaking words, written when he was just 31 years old.

With his loss of hearing, and now increasingly uncomfortable in social settings, Beethoven's options were shrinking. By 1807, Beethoven was scrambling financially. A huge blow-out with Prince Lichnowsky the year before over a performance the prince had demanded left Beethoven without an annuity.^{xii} Beethoven managed to secure some money from Count Oppersdorff for his Fourth Symphony^{xiii} but this was hardly sufficient.

Heinrich Von Collins, a friend, asked Beethoven to write music for his less-than brilliant play (*Coriolan*); Beethoven's acceptance of the commission was likely driven by necessity – not inspiration.^{xiv} With little faith in the play's success, Beethoven performed the *Coriolan* Overture at two private concerts for wealthy patrons before the play opened, just to raise some extra funds.^{xv}

Making matters worse, one of Beethoven's existing publishers (Breitkopf & Hartel) refused to purchase the *Coriolan*.^{xvi} With iron resolve, Beethoven found a new publisher: Muzio Clementi. Ludwig already admired

Clementi's piano sonatas, and when they met for the third time in early 1807, Beethoven persuaded Clementi to quickly agree to a publishing contract under which Clementi received the British publication rights to Beethoven's five largest-scale works: his Fourth Piano Concerto, the Razumovsky Quartets, the Fourth Symphony, the Violin Concerto and the *Coriolan* Overture.^{xvii} Sadly, as luck would have it, three of the manuscripts (sent by courier) were lost in transit and were not published, all to Beethoven's financial loss.^{xviii} Thinking quickly, Beethoven decided to re-sell the works to three different publishers simultaneously: one in Paris, one in London and one in Vienna, with the condition that the works be published immediately.^{xix} Obstacles created by the war severely impacted the music trade, but Beethoven continued to bargain ferociously with the publishers, advocating for the best available price.^{xx}



In 1808, Beethoven found an ingenious way to turn circumstances to his own advantage: he strategically let it be known that he'd received an offer from the King of Westphalia to become his Kappelmeister. Given Beethoven's fame, it is hardly surprising that several nobles in Vienna quickly joined forces to persuade Beethoven to remain with a lifelong annual annuity of 4,000 Gulden, provided by Archduke Rudolph and Prince Kinsky.^{xvi} At last, his financial situation was equal to that of a Royal Advisor. But his entrepreneurial instincts remained to the end. In the last decade of his life, Beethoven learned a new skill: he began investing in the newly-created stock market in Vienna. His early purchase of shares in the Austrian Central Bank made him a pioneer – and a wealthy one at that: at the time of his death, he was the owner of the largest and best-kept of all of his homes.^{xxii}

On November 5 -7, 2015, join the HSO as we present "Bold Beethoven," the music of a brilliant composer who, in spite of (and perhaps because of) challenges he faced, was the first to forge his own financial destiny.

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ⁱ Albinsson, Staffan. "Early Music Copyrights: Did They Matter for Beethoven and Schumann?" *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 43.2 (2012): 265-302. JSTOR. Web. 17 June 2015.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Ibid

^v Ibid

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} "Austria's History: Periods & Regents." Austria Arrive and Revive. Austrian Tourism Board, 1995-2015. Web. 12 June 2015.

^{viii} "The Pox", William C. Roberts, M.D., Baylor University Medical Center Journal, Volume 17(1), 2004 January, PMC1200645. Web.

^{ix} Beethoven's Hair, Martin, Russell. Broadway Books, division of Random House, Inc., New York, 2000.

^x "Beethoven's Deafness." Beethoven's Website. Copyright Depot, n.d. Web. 27 July 2015. Bordo, Michael D., and Eugene N. White.

^{xi} Ibid

^{xii} "Beethoven's Concert Overtures Creation Histories The *Coriolan*-Overture, OP. 62." Beethoven: The Magnificent Master. Raptus Association for Music Appreciation, 1998. Web. 05 June 2015.

^{xiii} Ibid

^{xiv} Cummings, Robert. "Ludwig Van Beethoven *Coriolan* Overture, Op. 62." All Music. AllMusic, a Division of All Media Network, LLC., n.d. Web. 05 June 2015.

^{xv} "Beethoven's Concert Overtures Creation Histories The *Coriolan*-Overture, OP. 62." Beethoven: The Magnificent Master. Raptus Association for Music Appreciation, 1998. Web. 05 June 2015.

^{xvi} Ibid

^{xvii} Ibid

^{xviii} Ibid

^{xix} Ibid

^{xx} Ibid

^{xxi} Albinsson, Staffan. "Early Music Copyrights: Did They Matter for Beethoven and Schumann?" *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 43.2 (2012): 265-302. JSTOR. Web. 17 June

^{xxii} Ibid

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