

Music 320

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

Early Beethoven

Biography:

- Unhappy childhood in Bonn; father wanted him to be a child prodigy like Mozart
- began composing by age 12; forced to practice piano endlessly
- Went to Vienna in 1792 to study with Haydn. They didn't get along well, studies lasted a little over a year. Had a falling out over Piano Trios Op.1
- Considered best piano virtuoso in Vienna in 1790's, but gradually Hummel took that place
- 1802 was crisis: hearing loss plus soured love affair made him contemplate suicide
- Politics: champion of Democracy, Napoleon was his hero, supported revolution until Napoleon crowned himself emperor
- By 1816 totally deaf; avoided public appearances (feared people's reactions to deaf composer), but continued to compose; started to lose supporters in last 10 years although some works still well-received. Problem was works were hard to understand
- Many health problems in last few years, died in 1827 (age 56)
- "Long Shadow" cast across 19th century: most composers over-awed by him through whole century. .
- his music is the culmination of Viennese Classical tradition
 - provided model and inspiration for most of European music in 19th century; many composers avoided or postponed writing in genres favored by Beethoven

Style Periods: many historians say three, or three plus "apprenticeship"

- **apprenticeship:** works prior to Op. 1 (WoO = Werke ohne Opus)
 - although seen as a pianist when first came to Vienna, had written lots of music already in Bonn
 - style traits already present in early works that remain throughout his career, and are hallmarks of Romantic Style
 - sharp unexpected dynamic contrasts
 - lots of contrary motion long codas

- early works influenced by his other teachers: Neefe (Bonn), Salieri, Albrechtsberger (counterpoint) also studied music of other composers esp Clementi
- **First Comp Period 1794-1800**
 - continues expressive effects like sudden dynamic changes, temp changes
 - experiments with
 - form, e.g. scherzos, excursions to foreign keys
 - emotional ranges; sublime (e.g. 2nd mvt of Pathetique) to stormy (e.g. finale of Piano Trio Op. 1 No. 3 in C Minor)
 - "aggressive" contrary motion
 - Pathetique Sonata, Op. 13, in C Minor (an important key for Beethoven)
 - 1st mvt is Sonata Allegro but with music from Slow Introduction used to demarcate form
 - thematic material in slow section is related to fast material, also other movements
 - origin of sobriquet "Pathetique" is obscure, probably given by publisher to enhance sales
 - success of this and several other early works led to bidding wars by publishers