

February 10, Young Peoples' Concert
Musical Stories told by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi

Beethoven Biography:

Composer and pianist Ludwig Van Beethoven, widely considered the greatest composer of all time, was born on or about December 16, 1770 in the city of Bonn in the Electorate of Cologne, a principality of the Holy Roman Empire. Although his exact date of birth is uncertain, Beethoven was baptized on December 17, 1770.

Hoping that his young son would be recognized as a musical prodigy à la Mozart, Beethoven's father arranged his first public recital for March 26, 1778. Billed as a "little son of six years," (Mozart's age when he debuted for Empress Maria Theresa) although he was in fact seven, Beethoven played impressively but his recital received no press whatsoever. Meanwhile, the musical prodigy attended a Latin grade school named Tirocinium, where a classmate said, "Not a sign was to be discovered of that spark of genius which glowed so brilliantly in him afterwards."

Beethoven, who struggled with sums and spelling his entire life, was at best an average student, and some biographers have hypothesized that he may have had mild dyslexia. As he put it himself, "Music comes to me more readily than words." In 1781, at the age of 10, Beethoven withdrew from school to study music full time with Christian Gottlob Neefe, the newly appointed Court Organist. Neefe introduced Beethoven to Bach, and at the age of twelve Beethoven published his first composition, a set of piano variations.

Haydn was living in Vienna at the time, and it was with Haydn that the young Beethoven now intended to study. As his friend and patron Count Waldstein wrote in a farewell letter, "Mozart's genius mourns and weeps over the death of his disciple. It found refuge, but no release with the inexhaustible Haydn; through him, now, it seeks to unite with another. By means of assiduous labor you will receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn."

In Vienna, Beethoven dedicated himself wholeheartedly to musical study with the most eminent musicians of the age. He studied piano with Haydn, vocal composition with Antonio Salieri and counterpoint with Johann Albrechtsberger. Not yet known as a composer, Beethoven quickly established a reputation as a virtuoso pianist who was especially adept at improvisation.



BAPTIZED: December 17, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

DIED: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

WORK COMPOSED - Beethoven Symphony No. 4 – Finale Movement – Perpetual Motion; Symphony No. 4 in B flat major, Op. 60: 1806

WORLD PREMIERE: March 1807 in a private concert at the home of Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, Beethoven conducting; first public performance on April 13, 1808, at the Burg theater, Vienna.

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There's a peculiarity about Beethoven's even-numbered symphonies, especially his Fourth, that begs the question, 'Why aren't they played more often?' It seems that the odd-numbered symphonies can be heard on the radio and in concert halls so frequently that they are almost instantaneously recognizable. But when one hears one of the master's even-numbered symphonies... one thinks, 'well it sounds like Beethoven, but I'm not sure.' The Fourth has suffered this obscurity more than the others and even Robert Schumann called it "a slender Grecian maiden between two Nordic giants." At the end of the 19th century George Grove (of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians) commented that the Fourth "is a complete contrast to both its predecessor and successor, and is as gay and spontaneous as they are serious and lofty."

Beethoven was accustomed to spending his summers outside of Vienna in modest residences that he would rent. But in 1806 he was having financial difficulties and he decided that he couldn't afford the luxury. However, during that summer his patron, Prince Lichnowsky, invited Beethoven to stay at his country estate as his guest. We can only imagine what sort of house guest Beethoven made – although his hearing was still mostly intact, the master was anything but an enjoyable person to be around. "A servant, asked later about his impressions of the famous visitor, said Herr Beethoven struck him as not in his right mind. He would dash around the castle and grounds for hours on end, bareheaded in the cold and rain; other times, he would shut himself up in his room for whole days, not seeing anyone." Nevertheless, Lichnowsky was a very forgiving man when it came to Beethoven's shortcomings and he had been the Beethoven's patron long enough to understand and accept his idiosyncrasies.

During this summer of 1806 Beethoven took a break from working on his Fifth Symphony to compose the Fourth Symphony, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto. The relaxed characteristics of these three works gives us an insight into Beethoven's life at this time. It's almost as if Beethoven is leaving the struggles of life behind for awhile and taking time to smell the roses and enjoy life. At the end of the summer Prince Lichnowsky traveled to Silesia and took Beethoven with him. During that journey they made a visit to Count Franz von Oppersdorff who, besides being a relative of Lichnowsky, maintained a small private orchestra. Oppersdorff required everyone on his staff to play an instrument and he was excited to have his musicians play Beethoven's Second Symphony for his guests. More than likely Beethoven later mentioned to Oppersdorff that he had just finished a new symphony and the Count jumped at the chance to purchase the rights to it. The Fourth is dedicated to "the Silesian nobleman Count Franz von Oppersdorf." There is no record of Oppersdorff's orchestra ever performing the Fourth before its Vienna premiere, although one may feel safe in assuming that the Count wasted little time in having his orchestra perform it.

In Beethoven's letter to his publisher, Breitkopf & Härtel, on November 18, 1806, he writes, "I cannot yet give you the symphony I promised you, because a distinguished gentleman has taken it from me. But I still retain the freedom to publish it after six months." Barry Cooper writes in the Urtext edition of Beethoven's Nine Symphonies, "Usual procedure with commissions was

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that the sponsor would receive and retain a manuscripts score of the work in return for the fee, and would have exclusive use of the music for six months, but Beethoven could publish it thereafter. " For some reason the payment was delayed and Beethoven's receipt, dated on February 3, 1807, reads: "Receipt for 500 florins which I have received from Count Oppersdorf for a symphony which I have written for him."

The opening of the Fourth Symphony begins with a unison B-flat in the winds and a series of descending note patterns in the strings. If it sounds a little familiar, Beethoven would later use a similar pattern in a faster tempo to begin the Fifth Symphony. Eighty-some years later Gustav Mahler would use a similar opening in his First Symphony. Although the symphony is in B-flat major, Beethoven begins it in B-flat minor to set a dark and foreboding mood which builds in suspense and anticipation until the final resolution to B-flat major.

Although the Fourth is not held in the same company as the Third or Fifth, it should not be considered a lightweight. Had any of Beethoven's contemporaries composed it, the critics would have praised it as a supreme achievement in orchestral writing. It is thoroughly a Beethoven work with unstoppable momentum and muscularity that is unmistakably the composer's style. Within all its movements there are hints of things to come, as if Beethoven is using the Fourth as his sketchpad.

The final movement is a tour de force for the orchestra that has what seems like an endless run of notes in energetic and dynamic contrasts. Carl Maria von Weber, who didn't care much for this symphony when it was new, imagined the double bassist complaining: "I have just come from the rehearsal of a Symphony by one of our newest composers; and though, as you know, I have a tolerably strong constitution, I could only just hold out, and five minutes more would have shattered my frame and burst the sinews of my life. I have been made to caper about like a wild goat, and to turn myself into a mere fiddle to execute the no-ideas of Mr. Composer." The relaxed summer of 1806 was to end in turmoil for Beethoven. He had a terrible fight with Prince Lichnowsky when he refused the Prince's request to play for visiting French soldiers and the story goes that Count Oppersdorff intervened right about the time that Beethoven was going to smash a chair over the Prince's head.

Beethoven left the Prince's estate and resided with the Count before returning to Vienna (some accounts have him returning to Vienna and not staying with Oppersdorff). Prince Lichnowsky persistently made attempts to reconcile with Beethoven, but the composer never allowed their relationship to resume. In his declining years, Lichnowsky would climb the four flights of stairs to sit outside Beethoven's apartment in order to listen to him play. Beethoven never allowed him in and Lichnowsky told the servant that he was just content to sit and listen. One of Beethoven's most quoted statements comes from a note he left at the Prince's estate after their fight: "There are many princes and noblemen. There is only one Beethoven."

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Suggested listening activities for Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 – Final Movement:

Beethoven Symphony No. 4 – Final Movement – Perpetual Motion – Seiji Ozawa conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra

<https://youtu.be/WLE-VCdzwaQ>