Classical Music: Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven was a composer. Composers write music. Beethoven is known as one of the best composers of all time.

Beethoven was born in December 1770. He had a strong personality. It was hard to know how he would act. He would get mad easily. Sometimes he would get very mad at someone. But then he would ask that person to forgive him. He would be very kind. Beethoven was also very impulsive. That means he did not think carefully before doing things. He would just do something based on how he felt at that time. Sometimes, he would not finish composing a piece of music until the day it was going to be played in front of people. When this happened, the people playing the music had very little time to practice.

Beethoven cared a lot about his music. He put a lot of love into the music he wrote. Some of Beethoven’s music was impulsive, just like him. These pieces were based on feelings. They were not based on patterns or structure. This type of music is called Romanticism.

When Beethoven was alive, many rich people listened to music for fun. Some of them even gave musicians money or other kinds of support. Many rich people went to concerts. That was one of the only ways they could hear music. There were no recordings to listen to. Beethoven used to give concerts. Sometimes his personality would come out strongly during a concert. Once when he was playing a song, he heard someone start talking. Beethoven stopped playing. He said he would not play music for “such pigs”! And he would not start again. This shows that Beethoven took his music very seriously. Because of this, other famous composers of his time respected him.

When Beethoven was in his late twenties, he started to lose his hearing. He could not hear as well as before. But he still composed some of his best music when he was losing his hearing. He wrote one of his most well-known pieces during this time. The musical piece was his Fifth Symphony. People believe that Beethoven said the beginning sounded like fate knocking at the door.
Beethoven was very upset about losing his hearing. He did not want other musicians to know. He was worried they would think he could not compose music anymore.

Over time, Beethoven stopped being able to hear anything. He could feel sound, but he could not hear it. Beethoven became more and more alone in the world of music in his head. All he wanted to do was compose and play music. He stopped caring about taking care of himself. Sometimes he wouldn’t get dressed. If friends came to see him while he was writing music, he would ignore them.

Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony was the last one he wrote. Lots of people know this piece. He wrote it to go with a poem called “Ode to Joy.” He took six years to compose it. He wrote it as he was losing his hearing. He had lost almost all of his hearing by the time he finished it. There are lots of stories about the first time this symphony was played in front of people. The stories are slightly different from each other. Some say that Beethoven did not lead the musicians, but he kept the beat by hitting the stage. Other stories say that Beethoven was on the stage, but that someone else was leading the musicians. The story says that at one point, the music stopped. The people watching started clapping loudly. They wanted to show how much they liked the music. But Beethoven was not looking at them. And he could not hear them clapping. Someone had to show him that everyone was clapping. After this happened, everyone there knew that Beethoven was a genius. He was such a genius that he could create an amazing piece of music without even hearing it!

On March 26, 1827, Beethoven died. He was 56. Thousands of people went to his funeral. They went to show how much they admired Beethoven. He said once, “Composers do not cry. Composers are made of fire.” People who hear his songs still can feel this fire today.