

The World of Beethoven: Music and the Rise of the Middle Class

Week 1: The cultural and historical setting in which Beethoven began his career. We will discuss the role of music in the aristocratic court setting and the emerging public forum for music for the middle class, and the changing role of the musician in society. The beginning of Beethoven's career coincided with the French Revolution. The revolutionary ideals of the period, the Napoleonic wars, and the more repressive political atmosphere after Napoleon's defeat in 1815 were more than a background to Beethoven's career; they gave rise to new conceptions of the individual in society and the role of the artist that directly stimulated Beethoven. In this session, we will listen to representative early works by Beethoven and contemporary works by Haydn and Mozart.

Week 2: The symphony. We will listen to selections from Beethoven's symphonic output to see how he took a genre that was developed by Haydn and Mozart and built on it. The phenomenon of public concert-going by a mass audience required music suited for large spaces, and the symphonies reflect the larger orchestral forces, larger orchestral forces, and longer durations that such musical settings demanded and fostered. In this session we will look at some images of representative sites where Beethoven's music was performed in his lifetime.

Week 3: The string quartet. After the previous session, which focused on music for the public, we will listen to selections from Beethoven's middle-period quartets as examples of the most intimate means of music-making. The quartets could be addressed to an audience of the general public, or to a small aristocratic circle, or even to the performers alone. These varying roles reflect changing attitudes toward the individual as well as society as a whole.

Week 4: The piano sonata. In the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, musicians were expected to do all functions from composing, performing, and other roles (such as teaching, providing religious music, etc.). Beethoven's piano sonatas were written to demonstrate his virtuoso abilities as well as his compositional goals. We will consider the social phenomenon of the virtuoso performer as a response to demand by the new concert-going public, and consider the direction of the piano sonata as Beethoven's growing deafness made him retire from the public stage.

Week 5: The concerto. The egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution and the emerging romantic esthetic of the early 19th century focused in part on the role of the individual apart from society as a whole, and this dichotomy is dramatized in the roles of the soloist and orchestra in the concerto as part of

the cult of the “artist as hero.” In this session we will look at representative examples of paintings by Jaques-Louis David and Francisco José de Goya that reflect political events of the times.

Week 6: The *Missa Solemnis*. This work was originally intended for the ceremony in which Rudolph of Austria, Beethoven’s pupil in piano and composition, and one of his most important patrons, was to be made archbishop of Olumütz, Moravia in 1820, but was not completed until 1822. In the changing relationship between composer, performer, and audience, religious music had an additional dimension, the sacred, which transcended the purely public and private spheres that are a large focus of this class. The largely secular world of the early 19th century engendered a more critical approach to liturgical music, and Beethoven produced a highly personal statement, emphasizing a more direct relationship between the communicant and God than was expected in contemporary Catholic practice.

Week 7: The late music. Beethoven’s late sonatas and especially the late string quartets were written when he was completely deaf, and break entirely new ground in musical rhetoric. The traditional means of continuity, development, and cohesion are replaced by unique solutions to problems of musical organization, reflecting his growing isolation from society at large.

Week 8: Summary. In this last session we will look at the trajectory of Beethoven’s career to see how it reflects contemporary changes in society as well as Beethoven’s personal development. We will also consider some of the ways that his music has affected subsequent western music.