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Research Paper

## Beethoven

Since the invention of the genre opera in the Baroque era, this new genre added to Western music became so popular that many composers, including Beethoven, had one or even five opera compositions. Even though they were already known in their era for their pieces in other genres, their works on opera made them known widely as the greatest composers of their time and even now. Beethoven (1770-1827) composed only one opera, *Fidelio*, during the most significant period of his life, the Heroic Phase (1802-1812). One article, "Beethoven, Ludwig Van," written by a group of writers, including Joseph Kerman, states that "Although Beethoven had already gained a reputation throughout Europe as a composer of instrumental music, opera was still the royal road to fame" (Kerman, Tyson and Burnham). But eventually, people's interest in the opera wore out, and after 1806, *Fidelio* was considered a failure by most critics.

Beethoven's music, for instance, *Melancholy*, reflected his personal traits and was known for his outstanding compositions of symphonies, concertos, string quartets, and other genres in his mid-period. In this paper, we will glimpse Beethoven's life with an emphasis on his heroic phase and try to answer why he is so important in the music industry.

He begins to compose at a young age, so if we want to trace why he is so important in the music industry, we should study the works of his early years because they have some distinct characteristics of Classic music with some changes and improvisations. As he was born in the eighteenth century (1770), he had the opportunity to be taken under the care of Franz Joseph Haydn and find his way out of his native town to explore his gifts in music. Still, Beethoven states that Haydn did not teach him anything apart from giving him some instructions from a composer to a future one. What Haydn had to offer was outside Beethoven's interest. They say that "Beethoven was proud, assertive, and difficult to get along with" (Yudkin 156), and we know from our study that he has a flair for the dramatic, so it is no wonder that he found Haydn to be "old-fashioned and a little pompous" (Yudkin 132).

Regarding the genres he focused on in his early years, we can cite songs and chamber works, string quartets, a piano concerto, and symphony. He wrote six string quartets from this period because this genre "provides an ideal balance between high and low instruments" (Yudkin 114) and was popular in the eighteenth century. Although he focused more on Classic music, it is said by Richard Capell, in his article "Beethoven," that: "The conception of musical classics was absent from the young Beethoven's world. Music was either contemporary or archaic" (Capell 382).

Eventually, things become more severe for him, and people begin to notice some signs of individuality, which separate his works from Classic music. We begin to see a new side to the music of Beethoven after his first performances and compositions composed of keyboard and chamber works. He added a severe tone to his music and had a language of his own that some people identify as "tonal music: the adjective being understood in the specific sense whose nouns are tonality, key-relationship" (Capell 383); we begin to see new characteristics of his music in

his middle phase; his works focused on lyricism and muscular themes; we can prove that by listening to some of his symphonies (Nos. 4, 6, and 8), or his Fifth Piano Concerto, where the composition “build to aggressive climaxes and then move into moments of purest beauty and radiance” (Yudkin 132). People also realize other changes in this new evolution style of Beethoven, known as the Heroic phase. Beethoven began to write longer symphonies than Haydn’s and Mozart’s combined. Regarding his main topic (drama and heroism) for his composition during this period, people described his music from this period of his life as “strong and patriotic.”

With new ideas in his head, Beethoven added six more symphonies, Nos. 3-8 on the two symphonies he had already composed, “four concertos, five more string quartets, an entire opera, some orchestral overtures, and several important piano sonatas as well as other pieces of chamber music” (Yudkin 132). Two of those six symphonies he composed during this time marked the course of music history; we can cite the Third Symphony, known as *Eroica*, and the Fifth Symphony, written in 1807-1808. Firstly we will try to dig more into Symphony No. 3, for they considered it “the centerpiece of the great stylistic transition that emerged out of Beethoven’s personal and artistic crisis of 1802, a crisis precipitated above all by his incurable loss of hearing” (Kinderman 93). The *Eroica* Symphony, written in 1803 in Vienna, reflects some “extra-musical” ideas of heroism; in this symphony, he shows an ambivalent attitude towards Napoleon Bonaparte, for, at this time, his homeland was at war with France, engaging by Bonaparte. This composition gains some recognition for its “universal aspects of heroism, centering on the idea of a confrontation with adversity leading ultimately to a renewal of creative possibilities” (Kinderman 96); but we should also know that in 1803, Beethoven had also worked on other genres that centered on heroism. According to Joseph Kerman, Alan Tyson, and Scott G.

Burnham, Beethoven's "sense of triumph" over some tragicomic outcomes in his life lead him to write about heroism in more than one genre; we can see:

A similar spirit pervades the so-called Waldstein Sonata (op.53)...composed immediately after the symphony [*Eroica*] in the last months of 1803, and the 'Appassionata' Sonata (op.57), begun in the following year. Even the string quartets of this period, the three of op.59 completed in the summer of 1806 and dedicated to Count Rasumovsky, are cast in the same mould. (Kerman, Tyson and Burnham)

Another work of Beethoven that focused on heroism is his only opera, which the composer completed in 1805. The opera *Fidelio*, known by its English name as "The Faithful One," presents, according to Jeremy Yudkin, "the heroism of a woman who rescues her husband from unjust imprisonment" (Yudkin 134). However, this work has seen some unlucky days before its performance because of the French invasion in Vienna in November.

Alan Tyson writes about how Beethoven had a difficult time in his heroic phase with the criticism he received for his opera. He points out at the beginning of his article how:

Everyone interested in Beethoven knows what profound difficulties the composition of his only opera caused him-or, if he does not, the existence of three different stage versions, and of four separate overtures, should surely alert him. (Tyson 139)

As mentioned above, another critic, William Kinderman, stated that Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* failed after its "three performances in very unfavorable circumstances" in 1805. Realizing how happy Beethoven was when he wrote his opera and how his brother had proudly talked about his accomplishments from being "engaged by the Wiedener Theater" (Kerman, Tyson and Burnham) make it hard to believe that *Fidelio* did not meet much success. However, the disaster of his opera did not hold him back,; instead continued to compose and come up with

a new symphony of four movements, written in C minor and C major. The Fifth Symphony was known as his most “famous piece and probably the most famous symphony ever written” (Yudkin 137), with the last movement composed in C major. Beethoven changed the key for the last movement because the fourth movement is the triumphant conclusion to the symphony. He begins the first movement at a fast and vigorous tempo and then slows it down a little in the second movement to start rapidly again. With the combinations of all the instruments and the length of the Fifth Symphony, we can see why it could be his most famous piece. After the success of this symphony, he continues to compose in other genres, such as string quartets and concertos.

After realizing that the only part that links him to his art is fading away, however, even though this discovery, this period of his life was critical of his life, he decided to write in new genres, such as oratorio, that led to him becoming more famous and wealthy. The oratorio, written in 1803, the same year as his Third Symphony, “tells of the Agony in the Garden (and is known in English-speaking countries as *The Mount of Olives*).” This new genre Beethoven decided to compose introduced him to Vienna for the first time as a dramatic vocal composer. Knowing that he was deaf, he had a hard time composing and performing, which led him to withdraw from social events because the composer did not know how to tell people that he could not hear what they were saying. But after some time, he began to adapt to this new era of his life and embraced it while still composing the best songs ever created in the nineteenth century; one can say that his being deaf was a miracle because it stopped him from socializing and we will come to know throughout our study of Beethoven that he “regarded his deafness as a social rather than as a professional liability” (Tyson 140).

It is mentioned in one of the articles, "Beethoven" by Richard Capell, which we examine for this paper, that Beethoven wrote a letter to his brother telling him: "My art wins friends and consideration for me." (Capell 378). It seems like Beethoven was proud to tell his brother that what he composed benefits him, and knowing that when he became deaf, he could not tell anyone because Beethoven did not know how to do so, is heartbreaking because the one person he could have shared the bad news with was gone and that has broken him more than losing his hearing. We reach a period in Beethoven's life where productivity was lacking for the famous composer; Beethoven lost his brother in 1815 after his heroic phase, bringing so much responsibility into his life. He felt he needed his nephew in charge and began legal battles with his sister-in-law to have Karl under his care. He did win, but he was too strict and possessive to raise a boy who caused Karl to attempt suicide and finally wake up Beethoven from his maddened state.

Everyone who takes the time to study the arts Beethoven offered us would come across the fact that he began his career early in his life because his father lost his job because of alcohol; he had to work at the court to support his family. All this led to the extreme practice of an anonymous gift by his father; Richard Capell states that Beethoven's father was trying to provoke "a "marketable" brilliancy which the child did not very notably possess." (Capell 381). So it is likely that he is known as the greatest composer of his time; with his abilities to play many instruments, such as the pianoforte, organ, harpsichord, and viola, he outshines many composers of the nineteenth century and even before. Beethoven played the harpsichord in the theatre orchestra when the boy was twelve and became an assistant court organist when Beethoven turned thirteen. He also played the viola at the opera later. It feels as if each of Beethoven's compositions until a later composer of the nineteenth or next century revived his works and people began to talk about them and found a new interest in them. Capell agrees by saying, "Beethoven succeeded in being Beethoven with the aid of the spirit of a generation" (Capell 376).

Furthermore, Kinderman does not hesitate to mention that "*Fidelio* and the *Eroica* Symphony are two significant monuments of Beethoven's heroic style, and it is unsurprising that they share certain distinctive features (Kinderman 131).

Beethoven's compositions have made people talk, and even now, people continue to talk about his works and how in his later years, his compositions took a different turn; his work was a source of inspiration in his time, and after his death, his popularity keeps rising to motivate future musicians to create good music. Beethoven offers us remarkable compositions; among them, we can listen to *Eroica*, *Fidelio*, The Ninth Symphony, and the Fifth Symphony. Even though Beethoven was miserable, he did not fail to represent a significant figure of the nineteenth century and beyond.

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