

This Day in History... March 26, 1827

Death of Beethoven

On March 26, 1827, legendary composer and pianist Ludwig van Beethoven died in Vienna, Austria.

Beethoven's exact birthdate is unknown, though some historians believe he was born on December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany. He was baptized on December 17, and at the time, it was customary for children to be baptized the day after they were born.

Beethoven's family was originally from Brabant, Belgium. At the time of his birth, his father was a musician in the court of Bonn.



2011 stamp honoring Beethoven



Beethoven owned pianos from Stein, Böhm, Graf, Érard, Streicher, and Broadwood – these last two being his favorites.



Though Beethoven never visited the US, it's believed the first performance of his music in the US occurred in Charleston, SC, in 1805.

Beethoven discovered his love of music at an early age. His musician father eagerly taught the young boy day and night, when he wasn't working. On March 26, 1778, when he was just seven years old, Beethoven made his first public performance at Cologne. As Beethoven's talents outgrew his father's teachings, he started getting lessons from noted musicians including Gottlob Neefe. Neefe saw his potential and taught him music as well as philosophy.

In 1782, Beethoven published his first song, "9 Variations in C Minor" for piano. This led Neefe to reflect, "If he continues like this, he will be, without a doubt, the new Mozart." Two years later, Beethoven was made organist of the court of Maximilian Franz, elector of Cologne. Franz also noted his talent and in 1787 sent him to Vienna to expand his musical training. While there, he met Mozart, who reportedly said: "don't forget his name – you will hear it spoken often."

That trip was cut short by the death of Beethoven's mother, but he would return to Vienna in 1792. There he began studying with Joseph Haydn, among others. Beethoven quickly impressed the people of Vienna with his skills, especially at improvising on the piano. After making his first public performance in Vienna in 1795, he went on a tour that included stops in Prague, Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin, and Budapest.

In 1800, Beethoven presented his first symphony in Vienna. He was young and his music was unusual for the time – extravagant and risqué. It was around this same time that Beethoven started to lose his hearing. Though he was angry about it, he was driven to continue his music. In the coming years, he wrote several more symphonies and an opera, *Fidelio*.

In 1809, Beethoven considered leaving Vienna. His wealthy friends didn't want him to and offered him an annual grant of 4,000 florins. This made him the first independent composer. It also allowed him to create songs freely without needing to worry about his finances. During the last decades of his life, he wrote some of his most famous and renowned works. He also befriended inventor Johann Nepomuk Maelzel, who created several devices to help him continue to write music as his hearing failed. The most notable of these was the metronome.

While traveling back from his brother's home in 1826, Beethoven caught a bad cold. That mixed with other health problems, led to his death on March 26, 1827. Between 10,000 and 30,000 people attended his funeral. Over the course of his life, he composed nine symphonies, five piano concertos, one violin concerto, 32 piano sonatas, 16 string quartets, and the Mass *Missa Solemnis*.



NYC's Central Park has a bust of Beethoven in the area where public concerts are normally held.



A Beethoven statue was unveiled at San Francisco's Golden Gate during a Beethoven festival that coincided with the Panama-Pacific Exposition.

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