

# Beethoven: Another Bach Fan

Module 10 of *Music: Under the Hood*

John Hooker

Carnegie Mellon University

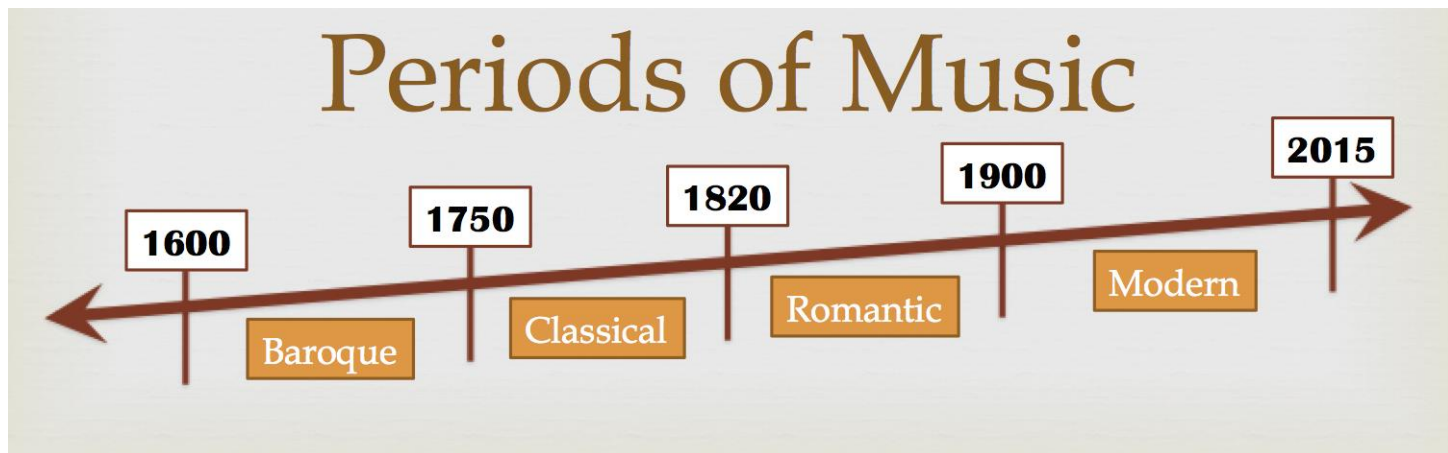
Osher Course  
October 2018

# Outline

- What is romanticism in music?
- Biography of L. van Beethoven
- Bach's legacy
- Commentary on *Moonlight Sonata*

# What Is Romanticism?

- The standard musical periods are misleading
  - **Baroque, Classical, Romantic** are inspired by art and literature.
  - Music has its own developmental dynamic



# What Is Romanticism?

- Baroque

- Composers developed the musical language we use today

- While trying to solve the problems posed by an abstract medium.
    - “Ornamentation” appears in music but is incidental.



# What Is Romanticism?

- **Classical**

- **Abstract music simplified for easy listening**

- Music borrowed one trait from the surrounding Zeitgeist...
    - The classical style in music was **universal** across Europe
    - As inspired by the universalism of the Enlightenment



# What Is Romanticism?

- Romantic

- Does not mean music is “emotional” or “expressive”

- These have been part of music since day one.





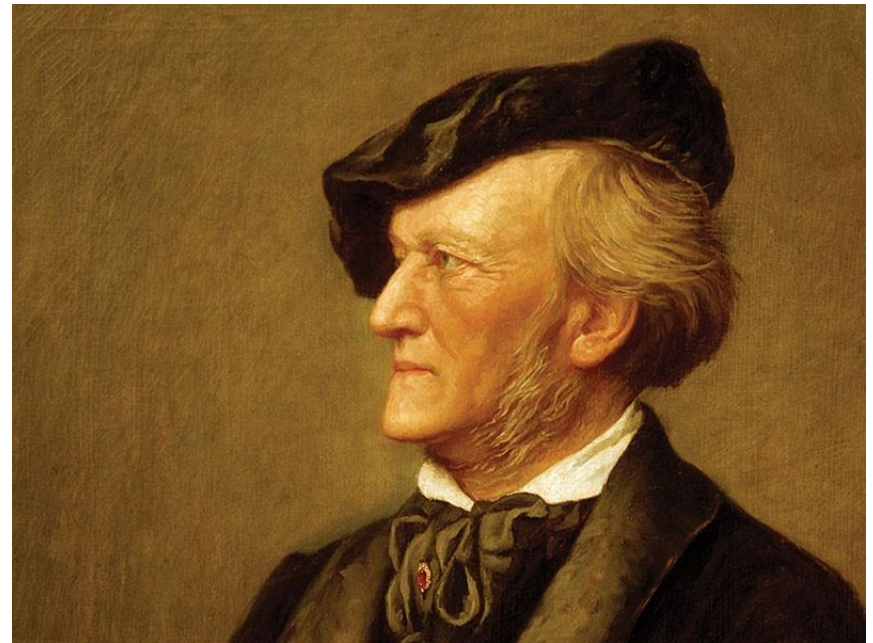
# What Is Romanticism?

- Romantic

- Romantic music leaves behind the cult of simplicity

- Reintroduces counterpoint, development of motifs (as in fugues)
    - Finds its own solution to logical structure.
    - Uses complex harmony, key relationships.
    - Even moves beyond tonality.
    - **Beethoven** does all of these, except the last.

Richard Wagner



# What Is Romanticism?

- Romantic

- But Romantic music borrows two traits from its cultural surroundings

- Focus on the **individual** (or ethnic group).
- Interest in “**nature**”
- Beethoven’s music is about **him**
  - The “suffering artist”
  - He also explored natural sounds in *Pastoral Symphony*.





# Biography

- Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770-1827
  - Father wanted him to be a child prodigy like Mozart
    - Poor teacher, alcoholic, punished son for missing notes.
    - Ludwig later studied with Gottlob Neefe, who taught him composition and **introduced him to Bach.**
    - Beethoven learned the *Well-Tempered Clavier* from memory.
    - This influenced the **rest of his career.**



# Biography

- **Early career**
  - First published composition, age 12.
  - Court organist in Köln, age 14.
  - Moved to Vienna, age 22
    - Initially supported by Prince Maximilian Franz.
    - Studied with Haydn.
    - Obnoxious but widely admired.
    - Began to lose hearing, about age 28.
    - Contemplated suicide.



# Biography

- Middle career

- Eroica Symphony, age 35

- New type of symphony

- Fidelio (opera), same year.

- “O welche Lust,” hymn to freedom

- Several symphonies

- Including Pastoral, No. 6, with sounds of nature

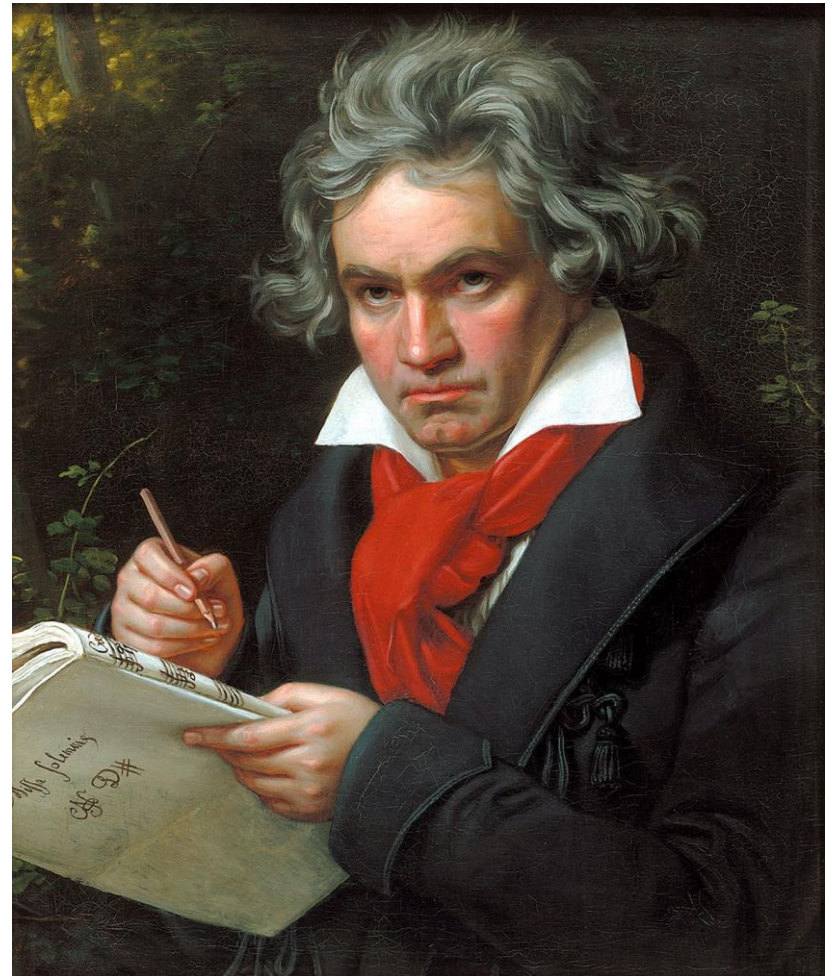
- Began receiving annual grant from royalty, age 39

- On condition he would not leave Vienna



# Biography

- Late career
  - Missa Solemnis, age 53
  - 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, same year.
    - Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in last movement
    - One of the towering achievements of Western music
  - Late string quartets
    - Pathbreaking music, still challenging today





# Biography

- Approach to composition & performance
  - Experimental, innovative
  - Much rewriting
    - The opposite of Mozart.
  - Overexpressive playing
    - Banged on the piano
    - Played either *pp* or *ff*
    - Extreme tempo changes





# Biography

- **Illness**

- Chronic intestinal problems
- Deafness and roaring/buzzing in both ears, 24/7
- Liver disease
  - Apparent cause of death.
- His music is about him...
  - But because his problems are very human, it is about everyone.



# Bach's Legacy

- Changing fashions

- He was out of fashion after his death.

- People wanted **easy listening**.

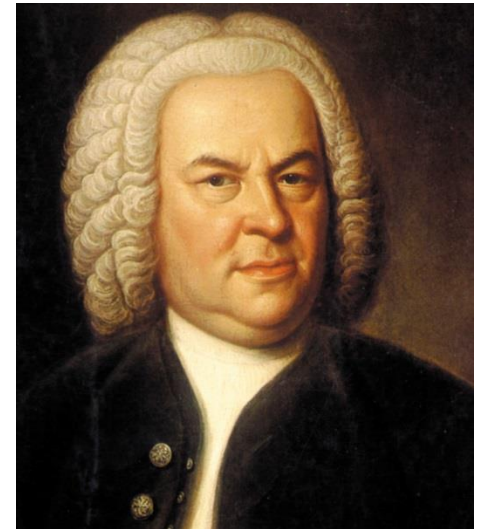
- Grandsons reportedly sold some of his manuscripts as wrapping paper.

- Mendelssohn's teacher reportedly found *St Matthew Passion* in a cheese shop.

- Others found manuscripts being used to wrap fruit trees.

- But a few musicians retained interest in Bach, including Beethoven's teacher Gottlob Neefe.

- Mendelssohn “rediscovered” Bach in early 19<sup>th</sup> c.



# Bach's Legacy

- Bach's influence on Beethoven
  - Development
    - Beethoven liked to develop short themes, as in a fugue.
    - For example, 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony.
  - Counterpoint
    - Beethoven strove to master counterpoint.
    - Used fugues in some of his greatest works
      - Hammerklavier piano sonata, Op 106
      - C-sharp minor String Quartet, Op 131 (used in movie *A Late Quartet*)
      - The Great Fugue (string quartet, Op 133)
  - *Moonlight Sonata...*

# Moonlight Sonata

- Nothing to do with moonlight
  - *Sonata quasi una fantasia*
    - “Moonlight” was coined by a music critic after Beethoven’s death.
    - A hit even in Beethoven’s lifetime.
    - Said to be the most popular piano piece ever.



# Moonlight Sonata

- **First movement**

[Audio file](#)

- **Consists mainly of arpeggios**

- Although structure is conventional, the piece seems strikingly original.
- Who would think of writing a piece consisting almost entirely of arpeggiated chords?



# Moonlight Sonata

- **First movement**

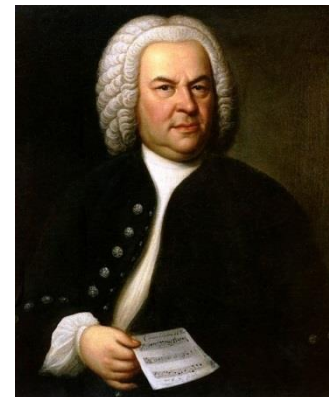
[Audio file](#)

- **Consists mainly of arpeggios**

- Although structure is conventional, the piece seems strikingly original.
- Who would think of writing a piece consisting almost entirely of arpeggiated chords?
- Someone did...

Audio file: [C major prelude](#), *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 1

- Another example of Bach's influence



# Moonlight Sonata

- **First movement**

[Audio file](#)

- **Actually a funeral march**

- Signaled by “dotted” rhythms.
    - Compare with:

[Marcia Funebre](#) in *Eroica Symphony*  
Chopin’s [Marche Funèbre](#)

- **Beethoven’s life ambition is seemingly dead**



# Moonlight Sonata

- Third movement [Audio file](#)
  - Anger at the world.
    - Beethoven would have destroyed the piano playing this.



# Moonlight Sonata

- Third movement

[Audio file](#)

- Angry at the world.

- Beethoven would have destroyed the piano playing this.

- Angry, but **defiant** – he refused to be defeated.

