

Beethoven: Another Bach Fan

Module 10 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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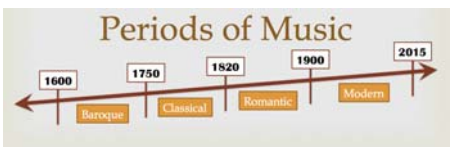
Outline

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

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What Is Romanticism?

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



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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.



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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



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What Is Romanticism?

- Romantic
 - Does not mean music is "emotional" or "expressive"
 - These have been part of music since day one.



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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

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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*.



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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**.



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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.



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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



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Biography

- Late career
 - *Missa Solemnis*, age 53
 - *9th 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



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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



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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.



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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 19th c.



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Bach's Legacy

• Bach's influence on Beethoven

- Development
 - Beethoven liked to develop short themes, as in a fugue.
 - For example, *5th 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*...

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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.



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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?

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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



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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**



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Moonlight Sonata

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



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Moonlight Sonata

- **Third movement** [Audio file](#)
 - **Anger at the world.**
 - Beethoven would have destroyed the piano playing this.
 - **Angry, but defiant – he refused to be defeated.**



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