

0. BEETHOVEN and HIS NEPHEW - Story Preface

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This image depicts a facsimile of the original autograph of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* Opus 123, Kyrie movement. It is a working-copy sheet of the music Beethoven considered to be his finest. The maestro's staff so little understood his contribution to the world that his cook used sheets of the Kyrie in which to wrap kitchen utensils during Beethoven's annual summer-holiday trip. [Staatsbibl. der Stiftung Preuß. Kulturbesitz, mus. ms. aut. Beethoven 1]

Karl van Beethoven died in 1815. Thereafter, a great deal of Ludwig's emotional life was spent in a custody battle with his sister-in-law. He was forty-five years old when the fight began.

For nearly two years, Beethoven - then Europe's greatest composer - wrote nothing. Directing his attention toward his nine-year-old nephew simply consumed too much time.

Deafness in his ears was not Beethoven's only deafness. He was also deaf to the pleas of others to stop fighting Johanna over the care of her child. He would hear nothing of sharing custody, however. He was completely obsessed with becoming a "father" to young Karl.

The odds were stacked against Johanna. In January of 1816, the Austrian court gave Beethoven sole custody of his nephew. Ludwig seemed the only person happy with the result.

If adults were never able to measure-up to Beethoven's high standards, what chance did Karl have? How could he live-up to the expectations of a perfectionist uncle?

Despite his strong desire to provide the best for Karl, Beethoven could not effectively raise the young boy. He often sought advice from his friend, Nannette Streicher, but some of his actions made the child believe his uncle disapproved of him.

Initially, Beethoven transferred his intensity for creating music to caring for his nephew. He would tell his staff that without Johanna's influence, Karl would be a better man. Yet, he deprived the child from seeing his mother and, when he skipped school to be with her, Beethoven exploded with anger. He did much, in other words, to drive the child away from him.

His staff, in fact, had little appreciation for Beethoven's work and sometimes little regard for the man. Two stories - from *Beethoven, A Character Study*, by George Alexander Fischer - are interesting:

To illustrate the slight regard his servants had for Beethoven and their absolute ignorance of the value of his work, an incident related by Schindler [the maestro's friend and secretary] about the loss of the manuscript of the Kyrie of the Mass in D [also known as the Missa Solemnis] is in point. On reaching Doebling in 1821 on his annual summer migration, he missed this work and the most diligent search failed to bring it to light. Finally the cook produced it; she had used the separate sheets for wrapping kitchen utensils. Some of them were torn, but no part was lost. No copy had yet been made, and its loss would have been irreparable.

... and ...

*Complaints about servants appear frequently in his correspondence . . . "I have endured much from N. (Nanny) to-day," he writes in a letter to his good friend Madame Streicher, who was very helpful to him in his domestic matters [especially regarding his nephew]. On one occasion, when her conduct became unbearable, he threw books at her head . . . He reports soon after to Madame Streicher, "Miss Nanny is a changed creature since I threw the half dozen books at her head. Possibly, by chance some of their contents may have entered her brain, or her bad heart. At all events we now have a repentant deceiver." (Fischer, *Beethoven, A Character Study*, pages 184-187.)*

After a time, Beethoven dealt with his nephew crisis as he had dealt with other troubling situations in his life. He threw himself into his music, filling more of his sketchbooks.

Johanna took Ludwig back to court after Karl ran away from Beethoven's home. She argued that her brother-in-law was disregarding her son's best interests.

Forced to abide by legal rules - as he battled for control over his nephew in court - Beethoven composed by breaking rules. During the second custody battle, Beethoven worked on his extremely complicated piano solo, the *Hammerklavier*. Its music is unrelenting, difficult-to-play and emotionally explosive. One can almost hear its creator's pain.

Yet, when the court battle was over, Johanna lost all control of her son. Karl soon went back to boarding school. He must have wondered, time and again, what all the fighting was about.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BEETHOVEN-and-HIS-NEPHEW-Beethoven>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/BEETHOVEN-and-HIS-NEPHEW-Beethoven>

Media Stream



Karl van Beethoven - The Nephew

Image online, courtesy Mad About Beethoven.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Karl-van-Beethoven-The-Nephew>

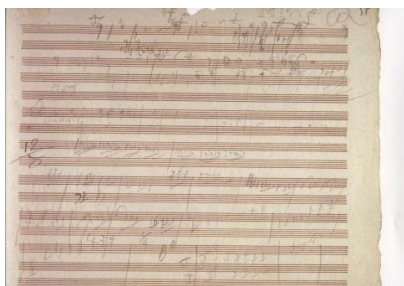


Nannette Streicher

Image of Nannette Streicher online, courtesy Beethoven-Haus, Bonn.

Quoted passage from Beethoven-Haus, Bonn.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Nannette-Streicher>



Beethoven's Sketchbooks

Image of sketchbook page for the Piano Sonata in E, Opus 109, Second Movement, online courtesy Dr. William Kinderman, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Quoted passage about Beethoven's sketchbooks, online courtesy Beethoven-Haus, Bonn.

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BEETHOVEN and HIS NEPHEW

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Beethoven the Famous Composer

Clip from "Beethoven," a 2005 [BBC television](#) production, featuring [Charles Hazlewood](#) and starring Paul Rhys as Beethoven.

Online, via [BBC Worldwide](#) Channel at YouTube. Copyright, BBC, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the program.

Director:

Ursula Macfarlane

Key Cast Members:

Paul Rhys

Ludwig van Beethoven

Jack Shepherd

Joseph Haydn

David Bamber

Prince Lichnowsky

Alice Eve

Countess Giulietta Guicciardi

Nicholas Farrell

Stephan von Breuning

Tom Goodman-Hill

Anton Schindler

Gareth David-Lloyd

Older Karl

Casper Harvey

Young Karl

Sarah Hadland

Johanna van Beethoven

Christian Coulson

Archduke Rudolph

Charles Hazlewood

Himself - Presenter

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-the-Famous-Composer>



Custody Battles for Young Karl

Clip from "Beethoven," a 2005 [BBC television](#) production, featuring [Charles Hazlewood](#) and starring Paul Rhys as Beethoven.

Online, courtesy [BBC Worldwide](#) Channel at YouTube.

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Christian Coulson

Archduke Rudolph

Charles Hazlewood

Himself - Presenter

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Custody-Battles-for-Young-Karl>



Birth of the Hammerklavier

Clip from "Beethoven," a 2005 [BBC television](#) production, featuring [Charles Hazlewood](#) and starring Paul Rhys as Beethoven.

Online, courtesy [BBC Worldwide](#) Channel at YouTube.

Director:

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Key Cast Members:

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Johanna van Beethoven

Christian Coulson

Archduke Rudolph

Charles Hazlewood

Himself - Presenter

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