

- 0. DEATH AND LEGACY - Story Preface
- 1. BEETHOVEN - UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD
- 2. LIFE IN VIENNA
- 3. LIVING WITH DEAFNESS
- 4. COMPOSING SYMPHONIES
- 5. FINANCIAL WORRIES
- 6. BEETHOVEN and HIS NEPHEW
- 7. ACHIEVING GREATNESS
- 8. DEATH AND LEGACY**



This image depicts a painting, by Franz Xaver Stöber (1795–1858), of Beethoven's funeral procession in Vienna. Created in 1827, the year of Beethoven's death, the original watercolor is maintained by the Beethoven-Haus Museum (in Bonn, Germany).

After such extraordinary turmoil in his young life, Beethoven's nephew Karl bought two pistols and shot himself on the 29th of July, 1826. He did not die and, after the lad was found, he asked for his Mother.

Questioned why he'd tried to end his life, Karl said he could no longer endure his Uncle's efforts to make him a better person. The young man felt tormented and unable to cope with the constant emotional strain.

After spending two months in the hospital, Karl went home with his Uncle. This time, however, Beethoven did not interfere as his nephew planned his own future - a career in the army.

During early December of 1826, after a two-day trip in an open milk cart, Beethoven developed pneumonia. Thereafter, he rarely left his bed. He was afflicted, among other things, with fluid collecting in his body.

Following an operation, to drain some of the fluid from his patient's abdomen, Beethoven's doctor kept the surgical site open (to allow continued drainage). Then ... the wound became infected, causing Beethoven to suffer greatly.

Unable to handle another surgery - he'd had several during his last illness - the maestro grew weaker. Advancing liver disease, and failing kidneys, were ending the life of Europe's most celebrated composer.

On the 14th of March, 1827 - while confronting a fifth operation (without anesthesia, in those days) - he wrote a letter to his friend, Ignaz Moscheles, in London:

Truly, a hard lot has befallen me! Yet I accept the decree of Fate, and continually pray to God to grant that as long as I must endure this death in life, I may be preserved from want. (See Beethoven's Letters, by Ludwig van Beethoven, edited by Alfred Christlieb Kalischer, et al, page 388.)

Knowing he was near death, Beethoven signed a Codicil to his Will which modified how his nephew, Karl, would inherit his uncle's estate. At the time of the signing, Beethoven reportedly said - in Latin - "Applaud my friends. The comedy is over."

By the 24th of March, 1827, Ludwig was in a coma. Two days later, as some of the maestro's closest friends gathered round him, Joseph Teltscher made a drawing of the dying man. At about 5:45 p.m., in the middle of a thunderstorm, he died.

Within hours of his last breath, a Beethoven mythology began to develop. Two days after his death, Beethoven's famously wild hair was considerably thinned-out by souvenir-takers. (A lock of that hair, which ultimately reached a laboratory in California, reveals the maestro had lead poisoning.)

Perhaps because Beethoven himself wanted his family to know what was wrong with him, Dr. Johann Wagner conducted an autopsy. He also opened Beethoven's skull - bits of which have survived all these years - since everyone was curious about the cause of the maestro's deafness.

Joseph Danhauser sketched Beethoven's head and hands and also made a death mask. Reports differ whether Danhauser completed his drawings before, or after, the autopsy.

Given the condition of Beethoven's face, depicted in the drawing, most scholars believe the autopsy came first and the drawings came second. Alexander Wheelock Thayer - assessing primary sources in his highly

respected, multi-volume biography - tells us the autopsy was performed first.

More than 20,000 people attended Beethoven's funeral in Vienna. It was the largest the city had ever seen. Karl, who was stationed in Moravia, was not there.

Beyond his own compositions (only one of which - the *Cavatina* from String Quartet in B-flat major, Opus 130 - reportedly made him cry), Beethoven gave a monumental gift to the music world. Composers who followed him would no longer have to create in a specific style or follow a prescribed format.

Beethoven had flung open the door to musical freedom. Walking through that door, future composers could follow their own path. And that, for many, is Beethoven's greatest legacy.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DEATH-AND-LEGACY-Beethoven>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DEATH-AND-LEGACY-Beethoven>

Media Stream



Ignaz Moscheles

Image of Ignaz Moscheles, online courtesy Beethoven-Haus, Bonn.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ignaz-Moscheles>



View from Beethoven's Death Room

Drawing of Beethoven's study, by Johann Nepomuk Hoechle. Online, courtesy [Web Gallery of Art](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/View-from-Beethoven-s-Death-Room>



Beethoven on His Deathbed

Facsimile drawing of Beethoven on his last day - March 26, 1827 - by Joseph Teltscher. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. Original drawing maintained at the British Library.

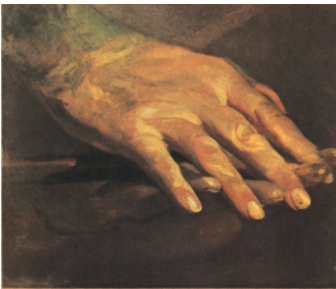
View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-on-His-Deathbed>



Josef Danhauser

Portrait of Danhauser by Friedrich von Amerling, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Beethoven's Hands - After Death

Beethoven's hands, by Josef Danhauser. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-s-Hands-After-Death>



Beethoven Death Mask

Image of Beethoven's death mask, online courtesy Princeton University.

Quoted letter, from Stephan Breuning to Anton Schindler, from *Beethoven as I Knew Him*, by Anton Felix Schindler, ed. by Donald W. MacArdle, page 332.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-Death-Mask>



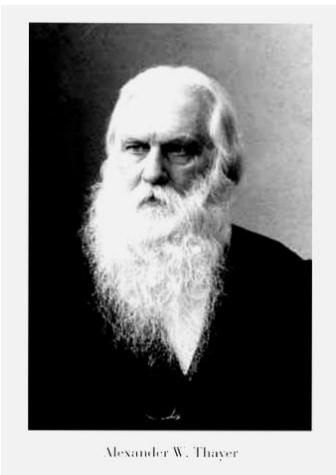
Beethoven After Death - Danhauser Drawing

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Quoted passage, from Alexander Thayer's *Life of Ludwig van Beethoven, Volume 3*, online courtesy Google Books. (See [pages 310-311](#).)

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-After-Death-Danhauser-Drawing>



Alexander W. Thayer

Alexander Wheelock Thayer

Photo from *Ludwig van Beethovens Leben. Nach dem Original-Manuskript deutsch bearbeitet. Zweite Auflage*. B&H, Leipzig, 1907.

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Alexander-Wheelock-Thayer>



Scene from Beethoven's Funeral

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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DEATH AND LEGACY

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Last Months of Beethoven's Life

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

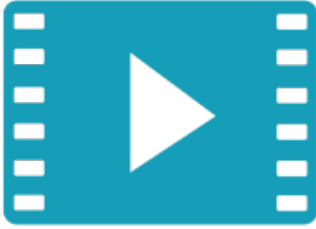
Archduke Rudolph

Charles Hazlewood

Himself - Presenter

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Last-Months-of-Beethoven-s-Life>





Cavatina - String Quartet in B-flat Major

Cavatina, the fifth movement from Beethoven's String Quartet in B-flat major, Opus 130, by The American String Quartet. Clip online, courtesy The American String Quartet at their YouTube channel.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Cavatina-String-Quartet-in-B-flat-Major>



Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - First Movement

Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra (NBCSO) in their March 22, 1952 performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67, first movement, at Carnegie Hall. Clip online, courtesy GreatPerformers Channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-s-Fifth-Symphony-First-Movement>



Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - Second Movement

Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra (NBCSO) in their March 22, 1952 performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67, first movement, at Carnegie Hall. Clip online, courtesy GreatPerformers Channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-s-Fifth-Symphony-Second-Movement>



Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - Third Movement

Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra (NBCSO) in their March 22, 1952 performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67, first movement, at Carnegie Hall. Clip online, courtesy GreatPerformers Channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-s-Fifth-Symphony-Third-Movement>



Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - Fourth Movement

Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra (NBCSO) in their March 22, 1952 performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67, first movement, at Carnegie Hall. Clip online, courtesy GreatPerformers Channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-s-Fifth-Symphony-Fourth-Movement>



Beethoven's 5th Symphony - Graphical Score Animation

Video composed and online, courtesy [Smalin's Channel](#) at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-s-5th-Symphony-Graphical-Score-Animation>