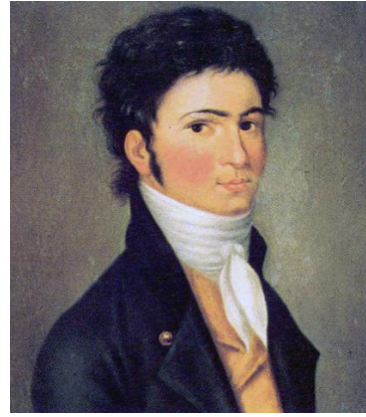


0. Beethoven's Hair - Story Preface



In this image, we see a portrait of Beethoven by Carl Traugott Riedel. It depicts the musical prodigy as a young man in 1801.

In 1802, Beethoven was going deaf. Increasingly upset about his condition, he wrote a letter (known today as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*) to his brothers Johann and Carl. The letter was found in Beethoven's desk, after his death. It had never been sent.

When he died in 1827, the great composer was 56 years old. He had been totally deaf since age 50.

During much of his adult life he had been plagued with extreme abdominal pain and related ailments. Although he sought help from numerous physicians, he had no relief. Despite his physical difficulties and his complete inability to hear, Beethoven composed the 9th Symphony (which is still used to celebrate major events such as the fall of the Berlin wall.)

Named for the village on the Danube where it was written, the *Heiligenstadt Testament* provides a rare glimpse into Beethoven's psyche. He begs his brothers to find out, after his death, what caused all his physical maladies. Nearly 200 years after he asked the question, we finally have the answer. And it comes from an unlikely source: Beethoven's own hair.

Many people snipped locks of Beethoven's famous hair immediately after his death. One of those locks, cut by a teenager, miraculously survived to this day. Ferdinand Hiller, then a 15-year-old musician, took a piece of Beethoven as a memento of the brilliant but irascible composer.

Hiller, who became a composer and conductor himself, placed his treasure into a locket and later gave it to his son Paul. The younger Hiller identified the object. The story of its travels, from Vienna to the United States, is a fascinating one. Likely, during the Holocaust, the locket bought safe passage for a Jewish family.

In 1994, Sotheby's auctioned the locket containing hundreds of strands of Beethoven's hair. It was purchased for \$7,300 by Americans who wanted to establish a Beethoven Center at San Jose State University. Eight strands of hair were submitted for careful study and DNA analysis.

After several years of work, scientists discovered a startling fact: Beethoven's hair contained huge quantities of lead - about 100 times the average. With little question, those researchers believe, Beethoven had lead poisoning.

That condition, also known as "plumbism," certainly would have caused his constant abdominal pain and depression. It may well have contributed to his death.

But the question now is: Did it cause Beethoven's deafness? At this stage of study and analysis, the answer seems to be "no."

Perhaps, however, there is more to learn from Beethoven's hair.

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

<https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Beethoven-s-Hair>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

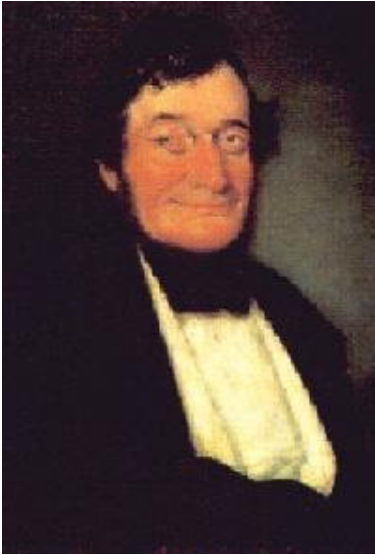
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Portrait of Beethoven

Image online courtesy, Wikimedia Commons.

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Beethoven's Brother, Johann

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Beethoven on his Deathbed

Image online courtesy, Wikimedia Commons.

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Portrait of the Great Composer

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Lock of Beethoven's Hair - The Guevara Lock

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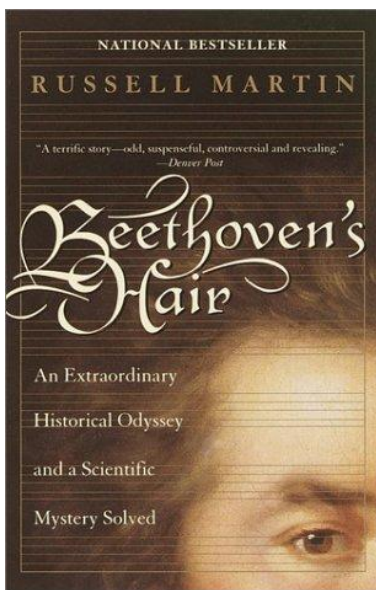
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Ferdinand Hiller

Image online courtesy, Wikimedia Commons.

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Russell Martin's Story: Beethoven's Hair

Image online courtesy, [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

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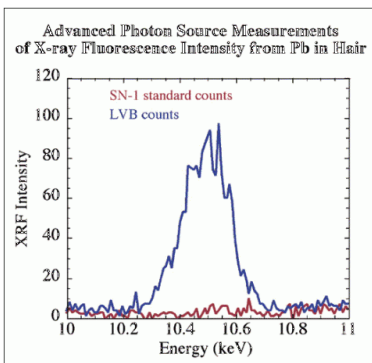


Paul Hiller Labeled the Object

Image online courtesy, Wikimedia Commons.

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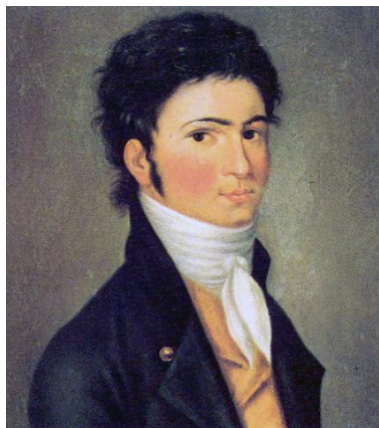


Graph Depicting the Lead Content

Image online, courtesy the [University of Western Australia](http://www.uwa.edu.au) website.

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Beethoven's Hair

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Beethoven - Birthplace in Bonn, Germany

This clip is from a documentary on Beethoven - part one.

View this asset at:

<https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-Birthplace-in-Bonn-Germany>



Beethoven - His Musical Compositions

This clip is from a documentary on Beethoven - part two.

View this asset at:

<https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beethoven-His-Musical-Compositions>