

During his performing heyday, Beethoven was known as more than a brilliant pianist. His ability to improvise was legendary, and he often competed with other skilled musicians who vied for audience favor.

This scene recreates, in part, an actual contest with Daniel Steibelt. History tells us that Steibelt put his music aside, playing the work by heart. When it was Beethoven's turn to play the same piece, he showed the score to the audience, then turned it upside down.

Alexander Wheelock Thayer tells the story behind the video-clip scene:

When Steibelt came to Vienna with his great name, some of Beethoven's friends grew alarmed lest he do injury to the latter's reputation. Steibelt did not visit him; they met first time one evening at the house of Count Fries ...

Eight days later there was again a concert at Count Fries's; Steibelt again played a quintet which had a good deal of success. He also played an improvisation (which had, obviously, been carefully prepared) ...

This incensed the admirers of Beethoven and him; he had to go to the pianoforte and improvise. He went in his usual ... manner to the instrument as if half-pushed, picked up the violoncello part of Steibelt's quintet in passing, placed it (intentionally?) upon the stand upside down and with one finger drummed a theme out of the first few measures.

*Insulted and angered, he improvised in such a manner that Steibelt left the room before he finished, would never again meet him and, indeed, made it a condition that Beethoven should not be invited before accepting an offer. (Thayer's *Life of Beethoven*, Volume 1, Revised and Edited by Elliot Forbes, [page 257](#).)*

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

Credits:

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

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

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Beethoven-as-a-Brilliant-Pianist1>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Beethoven-as-a-Brilliant-Pianist1>