



On the Four Misfortunes to the Works of Beethoven

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Abstract: Beethoven is renowned for his masterful compositions, but his personal life was rife with challenges that deeply affected his work. This paper examines the ups and downs of Beethoven's life, including his struggles with family, friendship, love, career, political demands, and general life challenges. The study analyzes the four major misfortunes that impacted Beethoven's life, leading to a sense of hopelessness before he created his most notable works. The paper explores how these misfortunes impacted Beethoven's world view and creative output. The study concludes that the artist's personal challenges, particularly negative experiences such as sorrows and pains, had a significant impact on his creativity. It is through these struggles that Beethoven created masterpieces that conveyed the humanity and reality of the world. The study provides insights into Beethoven's life and offers a reference for future studies on the artist's personal experiences, particularly in his formative years.

Keywords: Beethoven, misfortunes, influence of works

I. Introduction

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was a famous German composer and musician, one of the representative figures of the Viennese classical school, and a great composer who "combined the best of classicalism with the first of romanticism"^[1]. His works were regarded as the most performed of the classical music repertoire and it lasted from the classical period to the romantic period in classical music^[2]. He was one of the great musicians who "set the standard for classical music and pioneered romanticism". His works have had a profound influence on the development of music and he is revered as a musical saint.

In honor of the music achievement he contributed to the world, a museum was built in central Bonn with the name the Beethoven House. The city Bonn was the place of his birth and it hosted a music day to celebrate since 1845. It has become an annual activity since 2007. The Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies, in the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library, in the campus of San Jose State University, California, serves as a museum, research center, and host of lectures and performances devoted solely to Beethoven's life and works^[3].

Beethoven was unpredictable and had little regard for what others thought of him. When he was happy, he was like a child who had been given a gift; when he was angry, he was like an angry lion; when he was composing, he was like a drug addict on drugs; when he was playing, he was like a wild horse running wild; when he was quiet, he was melancholic, with a sad pain in his eyes^[4]. Beethoven's maniacal and extraordinary life was marked by a vast array of musical works that have given great pleasure to the human spirit. As one of the pinnacle figures in the history of human music, the study of Beethoven and his works has never ceased.

II. Literature Review

Beethoven's unique ability to "pioneer Romanticism" is evident in the uniqueness of his works. In the past 200 years, many scholars and related literature have studied Beethoven's works at home and abroad, from macroscopic, phased and objective perspectives.

In general, scholars have divided Beethoven's musical style into youth (early), middle age (middle) and late life (late) for a macro analysis. William Drabkin put forward that as early as 1818 a writer had proposed a three-period division of Beethoven's works and that such a division (albeit often adopting different dates or works to denote changes in period) eventually became a convention adopted by all of Beethoven's biographers, starting with Schindler, F.-J. Fétis and Wilhelm von Lenz^[5]. Later writers sought to identify sub-periods within this generally accepted structure. Its drawbacks include that it generally omits a fourth period, that is, the early years in Bonn, whose works are less often considered; and that it ignores the differential development of Beethoven's composing styles over the years for different categories of work^[6]. A 1784 review in Johann Nikolaus Forkel's influential *Musikalischer Almanack* compared Beethoven's efforts to those of rank beginners^[7]. The three early piano quartets of 1785 (WoO 36) show his dependency on the music of the period. Beethoven himself was not to give any of the Bonn works an opus number, save for those which he reworked for use later in his career^[8]. The work of Beethoven is a very important part of the

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history of the artist.

As for domestic research, in Chen Yanru's 'Style and Analysis of Beethoven's Works', Wang Xi's 'A Comparison of the Styles of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas in the Early, Middle and Late Periods' and Li Lizhe's 'A Study of the Performance Techniques and Artistic Styles of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas in the Three Periods', an in-depth analysis of the styles of Beethoven's works is conducted according to these three periods.^{[9] [10] [11]}

In his article 'The style and analysis of Beethoven's works', Chen Yanru also analyses the reasons for the formation of Beethoven's musical style from four aspects: the influence of his musical predecessors, the influence of his life experiences, the influence of philosophical schools of thought at the time and the influence of the social environment. In 'A Brief Discussion of the Influence of Social Factors on the Style of Beethoven's Works', Chen Han analysed the factors influencing the style of Beethoven's works from three aspects, including interpersonal interactions, political background and emotional experiences. The two scholars' research has been widely agreed upon and provides an important reference for further research on Beethoven and his artworks.

III. The Influence of Four Misfortunes

Behind most of Beethoven's outstanding works, apart from his unruly character and profound musical knowledge, his eventful life also gave inspiration and source for his almost fantastical works^[12]. Beethoven's life was marked by many misadventures, which are reflected in his works in one way or another. This study analyses the direct causes of the style of some of his works through four major misfortunes in his life, from a perspective that lies somewhere between the macro and the micro.

1. The first misfortune

Beethoven was born into a poor family life. His father was a tenor in a common choir and was described by Western music historians as a 'drunkard and a fool', so one can imagine the conditions of Beethoven's childhood. Nevertheless, the musical talent of the young Beethoven continued to emerge, and his father tried to turn him into a second Mozart, but he did so by force. Beethoven's mother died in 1787 at the age of 17, while he was studying composition with Mozart in Vienna, and when he heard the sad news, he rushed back to his hometown and took up the burden of his family. The death of his mother was a great blow to Beethoven, but even more unfortunate was the struggle in life with his "drunken and foolish" father, which, together with the heavy burden of his family, left the young Beethoven exhausted^[13].

Beethoven was unable to devote himself to his works during this period, so by the time of his second visit to Vienna in 1792, he had produced relatively few works. During this period he mainly composed variations, the only ones that are slightly better known are the Prelude in F minor and the Knight's Ballet. During the first few years of his studies in Vienna, Beethoven had not yet fully extricated himself from his difficult family circumstances, and although he produced a number of excellent works at this time, he still respected the traditional writing style of Haydn and Mozart and did not dare to break away from it due to his family's financial situation and social pressures. These works, although brilliant and moving, were still written to please, to go with the flow, and to be presented as purely entertaining art. Although the works of this period did not do much to make Beethoven famous, they were the first to reveal his musical talent and were highly appreciated by the music connoisseurs of the time and the Viennese upper classes.

Beethoven continued to compose in this way until the creation of his Op. 10. In the first and third pieces of Op. 10, in particular, people can sense Beethoven's stubborn and arrogant personality, which began with Op. 10, writing only for himself. However, despite the fact that Beethoven "wrote only for himself", his compositions at the time were bound to the most daring ideas within the framework of Haydn and Mozart. Moreover, by 'writing only for himself', Beethoven had, on another level, broken away from the shadow of his family.

2. The second misfortune

On 2 April 1800, Beethoven met his audience for the first time at a gala concert, which was very well received by the audience. The concert was an extraordinary success, and afterwards Beethoven was even more appreciated by the Viennese public, and a most promising future opened up before him. In 1801 he wrote to his two friends, Dr. Wegele and Pastor Amanda, "I am in great pain, and I will curse my fate I will challenge my fate, but at certain times in my life I am again the most wretched man God has ever created." With both physical and psychological torment, one can understand a heartbreaking pain in Beethoven's early piano sonatas.

The work that best exemplifies Beethoven's state of mind at the time is the Symphony No. 5 in c minor, also known as the Symphony of Destiny. The first chapter of the piece begins with the warning words "Fate is knocking at the door", and the whole piece gives a good sense of Beethoven's "stranglehold on fate". The first movement expresses the desire for a better, happier life and the strong will to overcome fate and the belief in victory; the second movement expresses the optimistic mood and message; the third movement challenges and cries out to fate. The fourth movement expresses the overwhelming joy of victory, and although there is an abrupt break at the climax of the development section and the threat of fate comes again, the author's triumph over fate can no longer be stopped. The whole piece is glorious, soaring, impassioned and inspiring, allowing people to feel that Beethoven was a brave, resolute hero who was not afraid of hardship, and at the same time to appreciate the trials and tribulations of life and the physical and psychological damage that the "hero" had to endure in the course of his struggle against fate. In addition, the sharp contrast between

the ups and downs of the melody reflects the "hero's" challenge and cry to fate, perhaps Beethoven's loneliness, his moans of illness, his anger or his accusation of life's misfortunes^[14].

Of course, Beethoven was not in pain every day during this period; he was happy and joyful with the sweetness of his love and the prosperity of his career, and his works about beauty and sunshine, such as the Moonlight Sonata and the Field Sonata, were written after he suffered from an ear disease.

3. The third misfortune

In 1801, Beethoven fell in love with Keri-Edie Gichotti and began his second romance. Although she was already married to the Duke of Garmburg, the beautiful Cherie-Edie was enamoured of Beethoven's talent and the melodies he composed. In the early stages of their relationship, she gave Beethoven immense happiness and pleasure, and Beethoven dedicated his most beautiful "Moonlight Sonata" to her. At this time Beethoven was in a state of immense joy, and in a letter to Dr. Wegele he said: "I live a sweeter life, and I have to go further with people, because the charm of a dear girl has made me grow into such a transformation. She loves me, and I love him, and for the first time in two years I have had such a happy moment." However, this "sweeter" love soon pushed Beethoven towards the third misfortune of his life, the one that almost led him to the point of no return.

Initially, their love was strongly opposed by Cherie-Étienne-Guicciotti's father, and later, Beethoven was humiliated by their disparate social status, which led to constant conflict. Beethoven was deeply in love with her, even though he felt that she did not understand his noble soul. However, before Beethoven could even consider breaking up with the girl he loved, in 1803, Cherie-Edie married the Duke of Gallenborg. Beethoven's heartbreaking pain reached its peak when he learned of his girlfriend's marriage. In his History of Western Music, Landorme writes: "It was a desperate time, and it caused Beethoven more pain than he had ever known in his life. Bent on killing himself, he wrote his famous Heiligenstadt will, in which he poured out his anguish to people, to nature, and to God." Although Beethoven was ready to commit suicide as a result of this misfortune, he nevertheless quickly regained his composure. In his heart to a friend he wrote: "Yes, I feel that my youth has just begun, and every day I draw nearer to that goal which I seem to feel but cannot say". This heartbreaking 'fall' to a confident 'rise' is concentrated in the 1st and 2nd of Op. 27, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of Op. 28 and Op. 31. The Second Symphony was also completed at this stage. In the Second Symphony, the listener can clearly discover that Beethoven has emerged from his crisis and overcome his suffering, and can also appreciate his inner world in pursuit of happiness.

4. The fourth misfortune

Beethoven's fourth misfortune came from his family; in November 1815 his brother died at the age of 41, leaving behind an eight-year-old son, and after five years of litigation Beethoven was finally granted custody of his nephew. Without an heir, Beethoven intended to devote himself to raising his nephew, but this nephew was a "constant troublemaker for his uncle, a worthless thing", as he once put it: "I have become worse, because my uncle wants me to be better." In the summer of 1826, Beethoven's nephew shot himself after committing numerous foolish acts. Although he did not die, the incident almost tortured Beethoven to death. His friend Schindler said, "At that time Beethoven was like a 70-year-old man, tired, weak and bereft of will".

After gaining custody of his nephew Beethoven wallowed in worry, pain and sorrow for quite some time. During this time, Beethoven composed very little, lost his courage and motivation to live, and many people asserted that "Beethoven was useless". However, for Beethoven's music, it was a period of darkness before the dawn. After his ups and downs, his sorrows and his joys, and his "struggle" with his nephew's various foolishnesses, Beethoven was no longer the proud, unbeatable Beethoven who thought his talent was supreme, but the Beethoven who did not talk about nobility, did not seek fame, and made himself peaceful and joyful. At this time, Beethoven said to a friend: "I have done too little for art I even despise my earlier works". From then on, Beethoven began to break out of the framework set by Haydn and Mozart, often abandoning the "quartet" pattern in search of a more flexible and complex form of musical composition. For example, in the Sinfonia No. 6, Op. 126, the theme section is 15 bars instead of 16, and in the slow movement of the Piano Sonata, Op. 106, the initial melody is 25 bars instead of 24 or 32. The continuity of 8 or 16 bars is also interrupted by the insertion of a response, for example in the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony and the Fourth String Quartet, etc. Finally, Beethoven created a developmental form, which is now commonly known as the 'Grand Variation'. This variation embodies Beethoven's idea of writing freely and without constraints. In 1824, with the great success of his Ode to Joy, Beethoven opened his heart to joy and said to his friends: "I have at last fulfilled my lifelong dream of long-cherished dream, which is to sing the praises of joy, joy overcoming pain, joy liberating mankind and leading them to God".

IV. Conclusion

The ups and downs of life, and the great sorrows and joys, have a great impact on the artist's creativity, especially as sorrow and pain can stimulate the artist's desire to create, making his works more reflective of humanity and more moving, and also playing a crucial role in the formation of the stylistic characteristics of the artist's works at a certain period or stage. Beethoven's 'madness' and sentimental nature in art made it easier for him to incorporate his state of mind and his understanding of human nature into his works of art when faced with life's misfortunes. Thus, when one looks at Beethoven's works written during these four periods, one can feel the trembling in his soul, in addition to his heart.

On 26 March 1827, Beethoven died with the regret that he had "done too little for art". Beethoven's dramatic life was completely immersed in his musical works. His uncertainties, dreams, aspirations, fears, pleasures and pains are all essential material and important themes for his art. As Beethoven's good friend Dr. Wegele said: The Beethoven I knew was always full of a fiery heart, but his enthusiasm was very unfortunate. He was always alternately experiencing hope and enthusiasm, disappointment and defiance, which undoubtedly became his finest inspiration and source of inspiration.

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