

LOUIS van Beethoven_(WT)

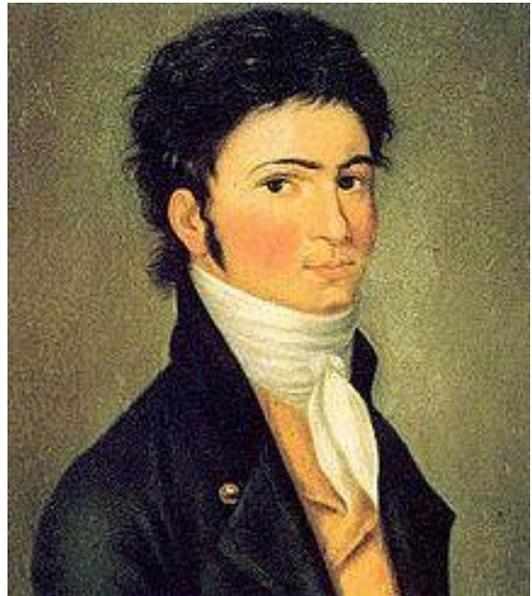


Synopsis

Ludwig van Beethoven was a revolutionary, a world spirit and the creator of immortal masterpieces like the ninth symphony and the 32 piano sonatas. The film LOUIS van Beethoven wants to visualize the man behind it.

The highly gifted child Louis grows up in the provincial town of Bonn in the late 18th century. An over challenged father, a rebellious actor and a contrapuntally strict court organist look after the young genius and shape Beethoven in very different ways. A fateful encounter with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Vienna and the political upheavals of the time, which culminate in the French Revolution, nurture a liberal spirit in young Beethoven, who only wants to serve his art but no master.

His missed love to Eleonore von Breuning and a family tragedy, caused by the early death of the mother and the lapse of the father into alcoholism, let Beethoven almost give up, until his old teacher reminds him of his responsibility to his extraordinary talent. The narrative is embedded in a moving, sometimes comical frame story, in which Beethoven quarrels with himself shortly before his death. Despite the great musical successes of the past, his late work asks too much of contemporary audiences. Already completely deaf, he is trapped in a dysfunctional family constellation at the country estate of his younger brother Johann. A lonely Beethoven fights both against Johann's resentful wife and for his suicidal nephew Karl, while looking back at missed opportunities and contemplating about the question of the right way of life.





Abstract

LOUIS van Beethoven tells the story of the revolutionary and world spirit Ludwig from two different perspectives.

There is the story of a young genius growing up in a time of great turmoil that changed Europe forever. On the other hand, there is the frame story, told from the perspective of a deaf and lonely man who is at odds with himself in spite of his great musical successes, who looks back on missed chances and asks himself questions about the right life without suspecting that his is about to end.

Our film starts with 8-year old Louis, who performs a piano concerto by Mozart at the royal theatre in Bonn for the Elector and his courtly entourage. Louis' father Jean wants to use his son's talent to turn him into a second Mozart and to improve his own position as a rather mediocre singer at the court orchestra. When Jean meets the free-spirited actor and gifted musician Pfeiffer, he offers him free room and board at the Beethoven's in exchange for piano lessons for the difficult to tame son.

Pfeiffer is impressed by the incredible abilities of young Louis and teaches him to be brave and to not simply follow strict rules in music. Together they start to improvise and to experiment. It is through Pfeiffer, that Beethoven learns about the revolutionary political ideas of the time, which fascinate him immediately. When Pfeiffer publicly blurts out his subversive thoughts at the local tavern, he is left with no other choice but to leave Bonn in great haste and Louis loses his first teacher and confidant. Soon after, another blow of fate follows, when Louis' youngest sister dies in infancy. For the third time the family loses a baby. After a rehearsal at the court theatre, the crestfallen father gets into a conversation with Christian Gottlob Neefe and asks him to teach Louis. Neefe feels honored and accepts the offer. A close relationship develops between teacher and student.

From an early age Louis develops a great need for freedom and a strong aversion to all kinds of power, especially the power of the aristocracy. Neefe, who has to fight for his position at court, is rather suspect of this fact. His attempts to guide Louis, fail most of the time.

Neefe gets Louis an invitation to the Breuning family's mansion, where he meets Eleonore and her brother Stephan as well as their mother Helene von Breuning, an art-loving woman, who will be promoting the wild Louis. Helene von Breuning's good connections to the court allow young Beethoven to travel to Vienna in order to get lessons from the idolized star Mozart. The trip is a disappointment for Beethoven. While Mozart recognizes Beethoven's talent, he is much too preoccupied to look after him. A humiliated Beethoven realizes that even the great Mozart is dependent on the patronage of Princes and aristocrats, that he has to compose after their instructions and give lessons in order to earn money. Louis does not want to lead a life like that. Frustrated he returns to Bonn to find his mother on her deathbed. Shortly after his youngest sister Marie, still an infant, dies as well. These blows of fate completely throw Louis' father Jean off balance and he sinks into alcoholism. At just 17, Louis has to take over the household, the education and care for his younger brothers.

Eleonore, whom Louis worships and who he had missed during his time in Vienna, invites him to the Palais Breuning. There he finds himself in the world of the aristocrats, the powerful and the rich and he is made aware of the fact that he himself did not grow up in these conditions. He can give Eleonore piano lessons and the two fall in love with each other, but Beethoven misses the chance to build a relationship with the young woman against all conventions. He will regret this his whole life.

When Louis begins to establish himself with a position as a violist at the court theatre in Bonn and as a local music star, his old teacher Neefe arranges an audition for him with the great Josef Haydn. A few weeks later, Louis follows Haydn to Vienna. Louis will never see his hometown again and live in Vienna from now on.

A frame story, which is intertwined with the main story throughout the entire film, takes place over thirty years later shortly before Beethoven's death in 1826. Beethoven and his nephew Karl are on their way to Gneixendorf, where Beethoven's younger brother Johann lives. Beethoven has found great success in Vienna, but his health causes him a lot of trouble

and he is completely deaf. His later music is no longer understood by his contemporaries, he has financial problems and needs to take care of Karl's education. After the death of his other brother Kaspar, Beethoven had taken custody of his nephew - against the wishes of the boy's mother. Karl, who is unable to cope with this, tried to kill himself a few days earlier, as a last resort to evade the care of his uncle, who is as famous as he is imperious. In order to protect Karl from the social ostracism that followed such an action at this time, Johann has offered them refuge at his country estate at Gneixendorf. When Beethoven and his injured nephew arrive there, we witness with fascination a highly dysfunctional family. Beethoven looks down on his brother Johann and his petit bourgeois existence. He regards Johann's wife with contempt, he thinks of her as stupid, resentful and not worthy of his brother. Not just Beethoven's publisher who refuses to pay his retaining fee, but also his family does not know what to make of the Great Fugue he is working on so feverishly on the top floor. But most of all Beethoven in his last days indulges in the memory of the great, unfulfilled love of this life and needs to concede that despite his lifelong striving for freedom and independence he has remained a "servant to the Princes and the aristocrats" in a way. The journey back to Vienna in the bitter cold proves fatal. He never recovers from the pneumonia caught there and dies in Vienna on March 26th 1827.



Director's Note

Ludwig van Beethoven has accompanied me since childhood: as composer of piano pieces, which I tried to get to the bottom of without ever being able to do justice to them as a piano player, as a student of a high school named after him in Bonn, as a listener, overwhelmed by a music so ingenious that one asks himself what human being could come up with something like this. And his complete deafness when he composed his later masterpieces, which asked too much of contemporary audiences and which could only be performed adequately a hundred years later, like the late string quartets, the modernity of which still leaves us speechless today - those I had already dismissed and no longer perceived as a handicap.

My decision to approach the subject of Beethoven in a big film also came pretty early, after I had seen Milos Forman's "Mozart"-film "Amadeus", which suddenly gave a surprising new face to the sentimentalized „Wolfert“.

Why not do the same with Beethoven, whose music is almost even more famous around the globe today And who's persona is crushed in public perception by a cliché as well: the angry, stubborn curmudgeon, aloof, a misanthrope, owing to his deafness, but also to his genius which was so far above his contemporaries.

I began to study Beethoven, searched for the narrative thread in his life, which promised the biggest dramatic added value (just like Peter Schaffer had perfectly succeeded in doing with Mozart with the myth of the mysterious client and his – fictional –connection to Salieri.)

How do you find these maybe ten key years in the life of a great man, which explain him and his genius and which are of interest to a wide audience, not just those who - like me - are fascinated by him and his music?

The music makes it easy for us: almost everyone has heard the most famous opening motif of a musical piece, the three striking quaver notes in G, followed by the elongated E of Beethoven's 5th Symphony. Almost everyone can

hum along to „Ode to Joy“, not just in Bonn, but also in Tokyo, Los Angeles or Vladivostok. – Much less is known about the man behind the music. The man who, owing to his deafness, turned into a loner in his old age, who changed his apartments yearly, his servants almost daily, who could be irascible and imperious. – But he had a fine sense of humor, irony, as well as a clear view of the world. And he was a revolutionary spirit to the end, who quarreled with the princes of the world and who indeed saw in himself a Prince of music superior to the secular rulers. His break with Goethe is legendary, after Goethe during their stroll through the park of the Bohemian Teplitz bowed and scraped to the imperial majesties passing by.

Beethoven embodies like no one else the emancipation of the artist from a dependency on his employer, bordering on serfdom, usually the Prince or a wealthy aristocrat – to a free citizen, acting autonomously and living on the earnings from his artistic activity. In this way, Beethoven is representative of the social development of his time, which is marked first and foremost by the tremendous turmoil of the French Revolution. But where does this revolutionary spirit come from, this tremendous self-confidence, which might be normal today but which was extremely unusual at the time in its consistency of upending class prejudice?

LOUIS - I do not want to be a servant! primarily narrates Ludwig van Beethoven's childhood and youth in Bonn. It is a „Coming of Genius“-story. One might assume that it is the old story of the un-recognized genius in the provinces who feels stifled by the limits of his provincial town and therefore sets out into the wider world to Vienna.

But far from it: Bonn on the eve of the French Revolution, with the reform-minded, liberal young Electedor Max Franz, forms the background that shaped Beethoven in its modern and free-thinking philosophy. A fact that will surprise today's audience just as much as it surprised me when I began to study the personal circumstances of young Beethoven more closely. – In fact, this small, obscure royal seat on the Rhine, close to the French border, was in no way inferior to Weimar at this time. – Schiller's plays were performed here at a time

when his work was still banned in other German states. The music-loving Elector, a glowing Mozart-fan, promoted his music at court and enabled Beethoven as a hidden genius to tackle the music of his great idol Mozart from an early age. – The environment wasn't only musically but also intellectually stimulating. The Elector sent for lateral thinkers like the classical and German philologist Eugenius Schneider, who was eventually sent to the block during the turmoil of the French Revolution. Schneider introduced him to Schiller. There was an endless coming and going of actors, like Tobias Pfeiffer, who breathed the spirit of resistance into Ludwig when he was still a child, a spirit that would stick with him for the rest of his life.

And last but not least, Christian Gottlob Neefe, a composer of only average ability, befriended the boy out of the educational ideal of the Freemasons and quickly realized that his abilities were not sufficient to truly form this genius.

This world spirit exploding in the provinces, which seized young Beethoven is representative of a time in turmoil like arguably no other time since. Eventually, this was the key for me to dramatize Beethoven. His struggle with himself, his almost precarious surroundings, still fully dominated by class society, his rebelling against it, his resignation after he may finally be face to face with his revered role model: Mozart! – The encounter of the two in the year 1787, is not recorded but by now considered as very probable by musicology forms the midpoint of the story, the question, which way our hero will take.

Thanks to Neefe – of all people – Louis doesn't end up languishing in the province or being swallowed up by the coalition wars. The undistinguished composer Neefe pushes him selflessly to where his genius can blossom.

But it is also a „Coming of Age“-story: the first love, which one doesn't recognize at the time in its profundity. And a love that one dwells on for a lifetime, as the missed chance. – It simultaneously forms the bridge to the framework plot:

One year prior to his death Ludwig van Beethoven travels with his ward and nephew Karl to his brother's country estate in Gneixendorf, so that Karl can recover unnoticed from his suicide attempt – at the time a punishable act that was socially and religiously ostracized –, before he will report for duty in the imperial Austrian army. – Beethoven is at odds with himself. After his success with the 9th Symphony, his newest compositions -, the late string quartets-, are no longer understood by the audience. He is supposed to rewrite the final movement of the „Great Fugue“ -quartet in B major, against his will, against his feeling. – And he is struggling with a response letter he wants to write to the love of his youth Eleonore von Breuning, after years of silence. – Again and again his thoughts wander back to Bonn, to his youth. – At the same time he suspiciously eyes the delicate bond forming between Karl and his cousin Amalia, which he doesn't approve of because he considers her too common for his beloved nephew.

He has replaced the aristocracy of birth with the aristocracy of the mind. – And yet he knows better: He is in danger of giving up hope in the face of the Restoration, the pushing back of all reforms, the increasingly philistine culture, ... but he himself acts like a narrow-minded man, conscious of his class. In the end the two find each other. – And Beethoven senses that the time will come when his true genius will be recognized.

To me, this story is now more relevant than ever: the innovations, the dawn of a new age in the eighties and nineties of the 18th century absolutely do show parallels to the spirit of the 1960s and 1970s. – Musically, too, these years after the classical period and their continuations were arguably the most formative years in the history of music.

Once again we find ourselves in a time that wants to turn back everything, that discusses the ideals of freedom and questions whether power should really come from the people. How different then was this Bonn of the revolutionary years, this optimism, this hope across

all three estates, to break the chains and to experience the opportunities of an un-bound freedom?

„Joy, beautiful spark of divinity, daughter from Elysium, we enter, drunk with fire ... “!

Beethoven’s music sets the rhythm of the film. Beethoven’s revolution is the music, it bridges, connects the plot lines and takes the audience on a journey that leads from Rameau, all the way to Scarlatti, Bach, Handel, Mozart to Beethoven. – We need to listen to the music that the young Beethoven listened to in order to appreciate what was revolutionary about his work. – Thus, Louis – I do not want to be a servant also wants to convey something of the musical roots of Europe, at a time when one didn’t ask about national borders yet.

In 2020 we will celebrate Ludwig van Beethoven’s 250th birthday, the composer of the European anthem, a citizen of the world, in whose honor the city of Kobe in Japan will perform the 9th Symphony with 9000 singers from all over the world.

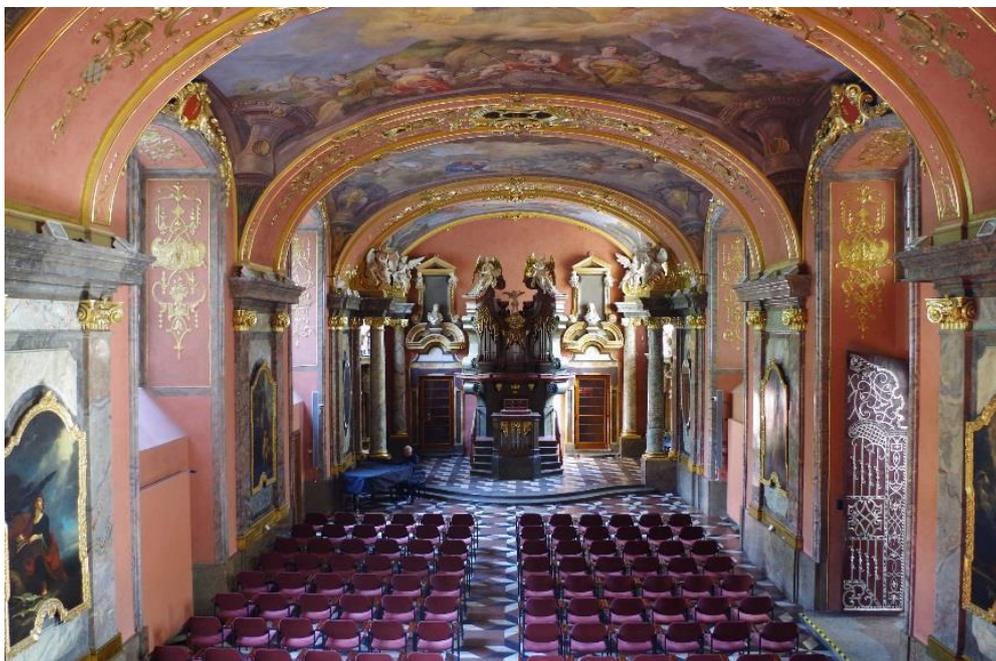
Niki Stein, Berlin, October 2018



Court theatre



Court chapel



Producer's Note

When in the spring of 2017, the editor Elke Kimmlinger (WDR) asked me if EIKON wanted to participate in a pitch for a big TV movie on the occasion of Ludwig van Beethoven's 250th birthday, I was immediately electrified. To deal with the life and work of one of the greatest composers of all time on film, seemed to me both a great gift and an interesting challenge. There are not many historical figures whose lives present this much drama, conflict and grand emotions. Imbedded in a most interesting epoch around the Enlightenment and the French Revolution with countless connections to today's world and our current political and social situation. And this - to top it all - in the context of a literally incredible music.

Soon after I met the director and writer Niki Stein, who came to us with a worked out and very convincing idea of how to rise to the challenge to portray the complex character of Beethoven on film. His agent When -to his surprise- Niki Stein found a piano in my office and the score for one of Beethoven's late piano sonatas, it quickly became clear that we would undertake this project together. A short time later we could convince the broadcaster WDR of this as well and together we set to develop this phenomenal subject matter.

About a year and a half, and several screenplay versions later we can happily say that we have found the story for our film. In Niki Stein's narrative the crucial questions about Beethoven's singular life are being asked and made visible for a large audience in a way that is as exciting as it is moving: What does it mean to be a genius for the man and the artist himself, for his family, teachers and friends? How is great, immortal art created and what price needs to be paid for it? What role do the great upheavals of the time play and is it possible to make freedom audible in music?

Schopenhauer wrote: „The composer reveals the innermost nature of the world, and expresses the profoundest wisdom in a language that his reasoning faculty does not understand.“ For this reason, the philosopher came

to the conclusion that with a composer, more so than with any other artist, „the man is entirely separate and distinct from the artist.“ In *LOUIS van Beethoven* we cut our own path and connect the man and the artist Beethoven in two crucial stages of life: youth and old age. We show how in his early years in Bonn the young genius could develop into a liberal spirit under the influence of rather unconventional teachers and within a problematic family constellation into a liberal spirit. In parallel, the viewer experiences and feels how shortly before his death and in spite of his great musical successes Beethoven despairs of his solitude as a man and of being so far ahead of his time as an artist that no one understands him anymore.

Our film will be shot in late summer of 2019 and is scheduled as a big TV event for broadcasting on ARD in the anniversary year 2020. Principal co-producers are WDR and Degeto, we are in talks with ORF and additional broadcasters. An application for subsidy with the Filmstiftung NRW is in preparation. For the global distribution we are in negotiations with Beta Film. Musical cooperations are planned with the Beethovenhaus Bonn, the WDR Symphonieorchester and the Deutsche Grammophon.

Berlin and Cologne in October 2018

Ernst Ludwig Ganzert

Exteriors Bonn and Vienna



Biography Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn in 1770, Ludwig van Beethoven became known from an early age as a child prodigy and eventually turned into one of the most important composers in the history of music. Ludwig was the second-oldest of seven children, only three of whom survived infancy, apart from him and his two younger brothers Kaspar und Johann. Ludwig's father Jean was a tenor in the court orchestra at Bonn, where Beethoven's grandfather had previously been the music director (Hofkapellmeister). Jean early recognized the extraordinary talent of his son and arranged for a good musical education. Ludwig gave concerts from the early age of seven. Among Beethoven's teachers in Bonn were the court organist Gilles van den Eeden, the singer and actor Tobias Pfeiffer, the violinist Georg Rovantini and the composer and music director (Kapellmeister) Christian Gottlob Neefe. With the local aristocratic family von Breuning Ludwig had a close, almost familial relationship. Helene von Breuning was one of Beethoven's earliest patrons, he gave piano lessons to her children Eleonore and Lorenz and formed a lifelong friendship with her son Stephan.

In 1786 the Elector Max Franz sponsored a journey to Vienna for Beethoven to meet with Mozart. There is no record of an actual encounter between the two. Shortly after his return his mother died and Ludwig's father lapsed deeper into alcoholism, de facto turning Ludwig into the head of the family and making him responsible for the care and education of his two younger brothers. Nonetheless Beethoven managed to continue his musical education. From 1789 Beethoven was also a student at the university in Bonn. After an encounter with Joseph Haydn in Bonn in 1792 Beethoven moved to Vienna the same year. During the next years Beethoven studied with Haydn, Albrechtsberger and Salieri. The young Beethoven was successful in Vienna and found his way into higher aristocratic circles. At the same time as his success as a composer Beethoven's hearing worsened to the point of absolute deafness. At the premiere of his world-famous 9th symphony in 1824 he was not able to hear it. His legendary late works, the piano sonatas opus 106-111 and the late string quartets, too, are the works of a deaf man.

Beethoven supposedly had numerous relationships with women, but they were always limited to rather short periods. In 1815 Beethoven's brother Kaspar died and left behind a 9-year old son named Karl. After a custody dispute with Karl's mother Johanna, Ludwig was eventually granted custody of his nephew. In 1826 Karl survived a suicide attempt, after which he and his uncle spent several weeks at the country estate of Ludwig's brother Johann in Gneixendorf. On the journey home Ludwig contracted pneumonia from which he never recovered. He died on March 26th 1827 in Vienna. His funeral procession was attended by an estimated 20,000 people.



Interiors Bonn and Vienna



