

# Montgomery Philharmonic

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## Montgomery Philharmonic 2014 - 2015 Concert Season – SINGULARITY

### Ludwig van Beethoven – He Changed the World – October 12, 2014

#### About Ludwig van Beethoven –

Ludwig van Beethoven was a German composer and pianist. A crucial figure in the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras in Western art music, Beethoven remains one of the most famous and influential of all composers. He began his professional study as a pianist in 1779 in Bonn with Christian Gottlob Neefe, a court-appointed organist who also taught him composition. Beethoven's first job was working as Neefe's assistant, and during this time, his first works were published—a set of piano variations and three sonatas. Soon afterward, Beethoven moved to Vienna, intending to study with Haydn. It is not clear how long he actually studied with Neefe, but he did study counterpoint with Haydn. At the same time, Beethoven established himself as a piano virtuoso and violinist.

In the early 1800's, Beethoven began to write symphonies, chamber music, and piano sonatas, and he also accepted piano students. The first signs of tinnitus began to appear at this time, and by 1811 he was having great difficulty playing his own work, the *Emperor Concerto*; by 1814 he was completely deaf. Beethoven's deafness has been attributed to lead poisoning. He kept his wine in a ceramic container that had a lead-based glaze, and a recent analysis of a few strands of his hair found that it had abnormally high levels of lead. Beethoven's last period of composition began in 1815. At this point, he became an innovator in various forms of composition and his music had a striking intellectual depth and intensity of expression.

- **Born:** December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany
- **Died:** March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria
- **Full Name:** Ludwig van Beethoven
- **Compositions:** 9 symphonies, 7 concerti, 1 opera, 1 ballet, numerous works for piano including 32
- piano sonatas, 16 string quartets, and dozens of other chamber music works
- **Parents:** Maria Magdalena Keverich, Johann van Beethoven
- **Siblings:** Kaspar Anton Karl van Beethoven, Nikolaus Johann van Beethoven, Ludwig Maria van Beethoven

Ovt, Creatures of Prometheus, opus 43

Two Marches for Military Band, WoO 18 & 19

March for Military Band, WoO 24

Symphony No. 2

#### *Symphony No. 2, Opus 36 (1801-02)*

Beethoven wrote the *Second Symphony* during one of the most difficult periods of his life—just shortly before he left for the Austrian resort of Heiligenstadt. His time there marks one of the lowest points in his life because he was trying to come to grips with his increasing deafness. Beethoven was told to go to Heiligenstadt to rest so that his hearing could improve, but unfortunately it did not. In the book “Beethoven's Hair,” we learn that the likely reason that he became deaf is because of lead poisoning from drinking wine out of a ceramic tankard that had a lead-based glaze. The lead leached into his wine and contributed to his deafness.

Whether or not the symphony was actually composed while Beethoven was at Heiligenstadt is controversial. We do know that the symphony was started late in 1800 and finished in 1802 and that he left for Heiligenstadt in April 1802. What we do not know for sure is the exact date when this symphony was finished. Some scholars think that the symphony was finished before he left for Heiligenstadt, while others have found evidence that the symphony was completed as late as October 1802.

The symphony did not sit well with the critics at all. “Beethoven's *Second Symphony* is a crass monster,” wrote the critic of Vienna's *Zeitung für die Elegante Welt*, “a hideously writhing wounded dragon that refuses to expire, and though bleeding in the Finale, furiously beats about with its tail erect.” Another, less venomous critic of the time thought the symphony was forced and admonished its “striving for the new and surprising.” Even the generally admiring critic of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* had some reservations about the work: “It would undoubtedly gain . . . by the curtailment of a few sections as well as the sacrifice of certain far too unusual modulations.”

Interestingly, the *Second Symphony* was an immediate success with Beethoven's public and the orchestra members. People loved the sudden dynamic changes. They loved its brusqueness and fierceness. The unifying concepts in the symphony are not themes, harmonic structure, or rhythmic cells but, rather, sharp contrasts: rough and smooth, fortissimo and pianissimo, the use of *sforzando* accents in the horns and strings in soft passages—stinging punctuation amid smooth textures. The lack of modulations in the final movement places the symphony at the door of the Romantic period of music, without crossing over the threshold. With his *Second Symphony*, Beethoven gives us a peek into what is yet to come and his ability to not only change *music*, but to change the *world* with music.

**Instrumentation** – 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in Bb, 2 bassoons, 2 horns in C & F, 2 trumpets in Eb & C, timpani, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

#### Artifacts –

Leonard Bernstein's Score used with the New York Philharmonic

#### An NPR Interview with Christoph Eshenbach



1. Beethoven: Symphonies No. 1, Op. 21 & No. 2, Op. 36 & No. 4, Op. 60 & No. 5, Op. 67 - Wiener Philharmoniker & Karl Böhm

2. Beethoven: Symphonies Nos. 2 & 5 - Cleveland Orchestra & George Szell

3. Beethoven: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2 - Berlin Philharmonic & Herbert von Karajan

4. Beethoven: Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 36 - Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92 - Leonard Bernstein

5. Beethoven: Symphonies No. 6 "Pastoral" & No. 2 - Paavo Järvi & Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen



1. Beethoven: Symphonies Nos. 2 & 7

2. Beethoven: Symphonies Nos. 1, 2, 4 & 5

3. Beethoven: The Symphonies by Gundula Janowitz, Waldemar Kmentt Box set, Extra tracks, Hybrid SACD - DSD edition (2003) Audio CD

4. Claudio Abbado: Beethoven - Symphonies 1-9

5. Beethoven: Symphonies 2 & 4

6. Symphonies Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Full Score (Dover Music Scores)

7. Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph

8. Conversations with Beethoven (NYRB Classics)

9. Beethoven's Hair: An Extraordinary Historical Odyssey and a Scientific Mystery Solved

#### YouTube Video Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9nEHLvzzlw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qukZqUnZH74>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONCG1MZgbGY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VANjfp7vUvA>