

An Interview with Ludwig van Beethoven

Interview conducted in the month of July in the year 2018 by Joe Kulick

Kulick: Hello Mr. Beethoven, thank you for meeting with me today. I'd like to mostly talk about your piano influence in music, however I think there is some history that I would like to know first before we dive into your piano works, is that okay?

Beethoven: Hello and it is a pleasure to be asked for an interview after all this time. Please call me Ludwig. Please feel free to ask me anything you need!

Kulick: I don't want to spend much time on this subject, but please just tell me a little about your early life and the influences that had a part in your success throughout your career.

Beethoven: I was born in Bonn Germany, where I was brought up by court musicians. I wasn't a terribly famous or a composer in my young years like that old fogey Mozart, but I knew I would be a better musician and composer than him, so I wasn't in a hurry. I played a lot of piano when I was younger and toured quite a bit with my father. The pianos back then were terribly fragile and I broke a few in my time from playing like a real man (unlike my predecessors). I did write some pieces and even took lessons from Hayden and Mozart, but they didn't really know too much and were stuck in their ways. They were always saying I couldn't write things in my music, like parallel fifths, but they were wrong. This is why people play my music more than theirs now a days. Enough about them, I'm more worth talking about. I knew that if I kept practicing piano when I was a kid, I was going to be something someone has never seen before! In 1792 I moved to Vienna because people needed to hear real music, my music. From there, I suppose the rest is history. People finally realized how amazing of a composer I was and began giving me and my music the attention it really requires.

Kulick: You're so surprisingly modest Ludwig! Tell me, how did you change the game when it comes to piano?

Beethoven: I didn't change the game Joe, I merely discovered it. I knew that no one could possibly compose for this instrument like I could (Mozart was too distracted with being a show pony and didn't care about the music). I think what you're referring to is my influence on solo piano performance in a concert setting right? Well, solo piano in my time (or before I got a hold of it) was only really performed for private events, for those people who thought they had any value in the world. You know, kings, princes, counts, etc. This is where many of my pieces were performed, but I knew it could be something more. I had the opportunity to push the means of a piano sonata in both difficulty and the way it was viewed by the public. Instead of writing for the level of people below me, I wrote to the level of gods. Mozart's and Hayden's sonatas were okay, and I used their influence in my first few sonatas, but I decided I was going to go beyond their level of writing. I even told my friend Wenzel that from now on, I'm going to take a new path. I decided to add a fourth movement to my sonatas. Now I hope I don't sound like I'm bragging, but I felt three movements wasn't enough to fully convey the messages that sonatas should have. So after I finished my 13th sonata, I began experimenting with many different musical elements. *Please stop me if I get too technical on you now.* I started changing some of

the standard forms, and adding some opportunities for expression for the player. Mozart and Haydn must have had hearts of stone, because they apparently didn't care about that. I also started to experiment with some keys, tonalities, and development ideas that were a little, how do I say...Daring! Some even say that my 29th sonata was unplayable, I don't really see why though, Liszt played it a few years later. People even say now that my sonatas are considered the most influential piano writings in history, maybe after Bach's well-tempered clavier. They're wrong though, mine were more influential than Bach's.

Kulick: Speaking of that influence, in what ways have you seen that your sonatas have influenced playing?

Beethoven: Well Joe, I think it's quite simple actually. Look at the music of Liszt and Chopin. Two very different styles, both players were nearly as good as me. The level of music I wrote helped motivate people to finally want to be good at the piano and play things that were showy and musical. Liszt has done this quite well! There isn't much he cannot play, and from a very young age he has been an amazing pianist. Without my sonatas for him to work on, he certainly wouldn't have gotten as good as he was! If you take a look at Chopin, there obviously so much emotion and exploration in his writing. If I hadn't incorporated those more musical traits into my writing, everyone would still simply sound like Mozart and no one wanted that.... Finally, if I hadn't required piano manufacturers to build a better piano that could be used for more than tea party music, there wouldn't have been the growth in this music that we've seen through the centuries. I think it is all very obvious the impact my writing has had on the world, and I hope that you can see that too.

Kulick: Fantastic! It's been a pleasure talking with you, there is a lot of cool information here! Is there anything you'd like to add?

Beethoven: Thank you so much! It's always a pleasure discussing my incredible abilities with people who appreciate as much as I do. I think that is all I have to say for today. Thank you again for asking me for an interview, please let me know if you have any more questions in the future.

Kulick: Certainly! Thank you!

This interview is not based on actual conversations with Ludwig van Beethoven as he has been dead for almost 200 years. This is simply a dramatization of facts that we know about Beethoven's life, we can assume many of the arrogant comments probably would have happened had he been interviewed however.

Sources:

Curtis institute of music – Video lectures on Beethoven's Piano Sonatas - Coursera

Lcsproduction.net – Three periods of Beethoven

A lot of information was taken from class notes

Classic FM's Beethoven Piano Sonatas: how the composer broke the mould