after:hours Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication

**Course Descriptor**

**Course Title:** Classical Music: Late Beethoven

**Type of Course:** Adult Education

**Credit:** Not credit bearing

**Weekly Session Titles and Descriptions**

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| Week | Session Title | Description |
| 1 | **‘Lateness’ and its Limits** | As an introduction to the topic of ‘Late Beethoven’, we start out by discussing ‘lateness’ and what we think that means for a composer and their music. We’ll explore where the idea came from, especially its roots in biographical explanations for how composers write their music. |
| 2 | **Reception** | Beethoven’s late works are now highly valued, but it was not an inevitable development. Many of the late works had very difficult lives after Beethoven’s death, some of them not entering the repertoire until the 20th century (and even then only reluctantly). We’ll think about some of the challenges these pieces presented that made them difficult to engage with. |
| 3 | **New Interests** | Here we look at all the aspects of Beethoven’s music that seemed new to his contemporaries. These are the shifts in his style (e.g. scale, harmony, formal oddities, counterpoint) that made people think that the works from his last decade should be discussed separately from the earlier work. |
| 4 | **Continuities** | For all that Beethoven’s late work is distinctive and exciting, it also did not spring from nowhere. Some aspects of the late works were already in evidence as part of earlier ones, sometimes even serving as themes that bring together all of Beethoven’s output. We’ll discuss which narrative seems more important to us now: the idea of a shift for the late works, or a continuous development. |
| 5 | **Piano Works** | The next few classes address the specific repertoires of pieces that Beethoven wrote in his last decade. We start with the piano works, and we will focus in particular on questions of scale and ‘completeness’: how does Beethoven make a piece feel in some sense ‘finished’? Does it always work? |
| 6 | **Missa Solemnis** | As one of the largest works of Beethoven’s output, the *Missa Solemnis* demands a lot from its performers and listeners. We’ll explore the challenges that it poses, but also have a think about its content from a spiritual perspective. It is often described as a ‘humanist’ work, but modern scholarship has shown that Beethoven’s Christian thought goes a lot deeper than previously assumed. |
| 7 | **The Ninth** | The ‘Ode to Joy’ section of the last movement of the Ninth Symphony is one of the most famous pieces of classical music of all time. It represents Beethoven’s own political stance, which has already shifted by the time he reached his last decade. It also went through a number of political afterlives of its own after his death, in ways that might shock or disturb us now. |
| 8 | **String Quartets** | The ‘last’ of any composer’s work always attracts special attention, and these pieces are no exception. Beethoven devoted his last years to a genre of music that already had a reputation for being the height of sophistication, taking it to even more obscure intellectual heights. These pieces became especially entangled with Beethoven’s biography, and indeed may have been the source of a tripartite sense of his output in the first place. |
| 9 | **Scholarship** | Beethoven’s late work proved especially important for the emerging tendency across Europe to treat music as an object of academic study. With their extreme challenges to performers and listeners, these pieces allowed professionalising practitioners to justify the need for research. Many of the threads that came out of the engagement with Beethoven’s work continue to inform the shape of the modern academic discipline of Musicology. |
| 10 | **Critical Approaches** | The central position that Beethoven occupies in the world of classical music has not gone unchallenged. Many critics have emerged over the years, with a wide range of motivations for questioning Beethoven’s place in the ‘canons’ of music. Issues of gender and race have come to the fore in recent times, suggesting that Beethoven’s position in the world is once again up for renegotiation. It is very unlikely that Beethoven’s music will ever end up ‘cancelled’, but there are some interesting things that we could do to think differently about it nonetheless. |

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| Course OverviewBeethoven is one of classical music’s titans, looming over whole swathes of musical activity even up to the present day.The set of pieces he produced in the last fifteen years of his life in particular have cast long shadows over subsequent generations of composers: complex, weird, but often startlingly beautiful, the late works are still some of the most challenging pieces for performers to execute and for audiences to hear even two centuries after they were written.On this course we will explore this repertoire from a non-musician’s perspective, diving into the different layers of understanding these pieces, from Beethoven’s own biography to the social and cultural contexts of Vienna around the early 1800s.We will also see the ways in which the world began to make sense of these pieces, often ignoring them until long after Beethoven’s death.The multifarious social, cultural, and political afterlives of these pieces form some of the key reasons that Beethoven remains so central to our musical thinking even in the present day.Required Previous Experience (if any)No previous experience is necessary.Required Reading Material or Special Equipment Needed (if any)* None specified

Learning OutcomesAt the end of this course you should be able1. understand aspects social and cultural history of Beethoven's day
2. to consider the reception of Beethoven's music at the time of its composition and later
3. to consider how Beethoven’s work and reception coincides with the emergence of musicology (the academic discipline of music), which was heavily shaped by the ideas around Beethoven's late works.

**Possible Further Study**Further courses on the after:hours programme might be useful to you.Additional informationThis course descriptor may be subject to change during the delivery of the course, depending on the specific direction and nature of the learner cohort, and is intended to be responsive to the group dynamics as they emerge during the delivery of the course. |