



Beethoven

Character, Cultural Restrictions,
and his "Immortal Beloved"

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Who hasn't heard Beethoven's Ode to Joy? While musicologists locate Ludwig van Beethoven as the last master of complex compositions, two film producers locate him in the last years of a vexing, miserable life. Over the next seven weeks, this subject discovers why Beethoven's life overflowed with anxiety caused by creative work, family matters, social restrictions and health problems. For anyone interested in

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A mystery worth exploring, two interesting films have been made that depict conflicting views on the characterization of composer Ludwig van Beethoven. While both films expose his life of extraordinary musical productivity, and exasperating psychotic episodes caused by deafness, these films diverge in their portrayal of Beethoven's astonishing levels of anxiety. Was it brought about by his Job-like infirmity caused by acute deafness, or was it a mysterious woman that frustrated him with unrequited love? At the center of Director Bernard Rose's *Immortal Beloved*, Johanna van Beethoven is believed to be the object of Beethoven's "immortal beloved" letters, found in his apartment upon death. The problem with Rose's theory results from the facts: there's no credible evidence that Johanna, Beethoven's much despised sister-in-law, was his immortal beloved. And at the center of Director Agnieszka Holland's *Copying Beethoven*, she exposes the maestro's focus on creating Ode to Joy, his ninth and final symphony, all the while living in unbearable artistic isolation because of hearing loss. While

it has been said that the "creative power of his compositions broke the mold for classical music forever," the facts remain that the milieu around Beethoven's life centers on family battles and a heightened frustration caused by cultural restrictions that bruised and barred him from functioning in the very society that revered him. For anyone interested in contemplating their own lives to see some kind of blueprint emerge, the details of the maestro's life will expose an occupational triumph over the human condition rarely seen except through the lens of history. The example of Beethoven's life will make you ask yourself: What is life really about?



Over the next seven weeks, we'll discover why musicologists locate Ludwig van Beethoven as the last great master of classical music, and how the last years of his life was filled with a heightened sense of extraordinary anxiety.