

From Private Portrait to Public Image: Beethoven's Life and Music Reflected Through Contemporary Portraiture.

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Abstract

“From Private Portrait to Public Image: Beethoven’s Life and Music Reflected Through Contemporary Portraiture” is a detailed study of the portraiture of Beethoven during his lifetime, and the way in which elements of the music and life of the composer are reflected in these images. Throughout his life the musical genius of Beethoven infused a creative dynamism and power into his compositions that ensured his place in the history of music as the first true “heroic figure.” Indeed, the social transition from court musician to individual composer against the background of Romanticism, the continually evolving styles of his music, and his battle to overcome the suffering and frustration of the deafness that afflicted him for much of his life are common themes in Beethoven studies and research today. However, there is still much that can be learnt from the portraiture and other works of art that cultivated the image of the composer at different stages of his life. By studying these depictions it is possible to not only trace the development of the way Beethoven’s physical features were portrayed during his life, but also to reveal the way in which the composer became a public figure as much for his personal character and behaviour as for the revolutionary nature of his music.

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