

The life of Beethoven

Musical lives

The books in this series will each provide an account of the life of a major composer, considering both the private and the public figure. The main thread will be biographical, and discussion of the music will be integral to the narrative. Each book thus presents an organic view of the composer, the music, and the circumstances in which the music was written.

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The life of Beethoven

DAVID WYN JONES



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To my daughter, Yolande

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1 The young courtier	1
2 A new career in Vienna	28
3 Cursing his creator and his existence	55
4 Drama and symphony	74
5 Patrons and patriotism	102
6 Empires of the mind	125
7 Towards a public comeback	144
8 Facing death	171
<i>Notes</i>	184
<i>Annotated bibliography</i>	191
<i>Index</i>	194

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 Christian Gottlob Neefe 9
- 2 Elector Maximilian Franz 15
- 3 First page of piano part of op. 1 no. 1 (1795) 43
- 4 Draft of aborted symphony in C major (1795–6); from ‘Kafka’ sketchbook 52
- 5 Engraving of Beethoven (c. 1801) (Johann Joseph Neidl) 53
- 6 Part of the Heiligenstadt Testament (1802) 66
- 7 The Theater an der Wien 71
- 8 Prince Lobkowitz 81
- 9 The Malfatti family 113
- 10 Engraving of Beethoven (1814) (Höfel) 121
- 11 Steiner’s music shop in the Paternostergassel 134
- 12 Archduke Rudolph 145
- 13 Opening bars of *Missa Solemnis* from the autograph score (1821–4) 154
- 14 Drawing of Beethoven by Stephan Decker (1824) 163
- 15 Invitation card to Beethoven’s funeral (1827) 182

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PREFACE

Beethoven has always been celebrated as one of the major creative figures in Western civilization. Even in his own lifetime he was regarded as someone who stood apart from the norm, while the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were to nurture this individuality to the point of deification. Artistic deification can so easily lead to petrification, and Beethoven is an instance of someone who has become detached from his original surroundings. While it is readily acknowledged that composers such as Handel, Verdi and Mahler engaged creatively with the musical environment of their time, there is an unchallenged reluctance to accept that Beethoven's career was conditioned in a similar way. Perhaps to a greater extent than is the case with any other composer, his life and output have been considered in isolation. The circumstances in which he lived, the influence of musical practices of the time, and his relationship with other musicians have tended to be undervalued or ignored in order to perpetuate the image of the composer as a single-minded artist.

This biography appears as part of a series entitled 'Musical lives', and it attempts to do just that: trace Beethoven's life as a working musician in Bonn and Vienna at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Accordingly this account places less reliance on the rich anecdotal heritage associated with the composer in favour of primary and contemporary documentation. With this emphasis on the context in which the composer lived and worked

it is hoped that Beethoven emerges as a more varied musical personality than posterity has often allowed him to be and with his individuality enhanced rather than circumscribed.

Many people have helped in the preparation of this volume and it is a pleasure to acknowledge them: Malcolm Boyd for his careful reading of the proofs; Gill Jones and her colleagues in the Music Library of the University of Wales, Cardiff for being unfailingly helpful in tracking down material and only slightly less amenable when I failed to return it on time; Angela Lester, who helped me disentangle some of the more tortuous passages of early nineteenth-century German prose; and Else Radant Landon for reading the manuscript and correcting many facts and misapprehensions about Vienna in Beethoven's time. Above all my wife, Ann, and daughter, Yolande, must be thanked for their understanding and support.

1 The young courtier

For thirty-four years, from the age of twenty-two until his death in 1827, Beethoven lived and worked in Vienna, a city that determined his artistic development. But he had been born in Bonn and maintained a real affection for the Rhineland, its people and his upbringing there. Letters to old friends and acquaintances from the Bonn period, such as Nicolaus Simrock the music publisher and Franz Gerhard Wegeler the physician, are unfailingly warm, occasionally nostalgic, even sentimental. In June 1801 he wrote to Wegeler:

you are still the faithful, kind and loyal friend – But you must never think that I could ever forget yourself and all of you who were once so dear and precious to me. There are moments when I myself long for you and, what is more, would like to spend some time with you. For my fatherland, the beautiful country where I first opened my eyes to the light, still seems to me as lovely and as clearly before my eyes as it was when I left you. In short, the day on which I can meet you again and greet our Father Rhine I shall regard as one of the happiest of my life.¹

That day was never to come, an unrealized desire that served only to intensify Beethoven's attachment: the more he grumbled about life in Vienna, the more sentimental he became about Bonn. Yet, this was not mere escapism, for it was founded on a memory of a musical world that had virtually disappeared, one that Beethoven would have been entirely happy to have joined.

Bonn was the capital of the electorate of Cologne and the seat of its archbishop. Along with a dozen or so other ecclesiastical principalities in the Holy Roman Empire, such as Bamberg, Basel, Mainz, Salzburg, Trier and Würzburg, Cologne exercised firm governmental control over its territory, though continuity and development were compromised because its ruling power was not hereditary. Each ruler had to be elected by an ecclesiastical chapter. While the Pope had some influence, elections were usually highly political with competing German states, even the foreign governments of Britain, France and Holland, taking an active interest. The geographical position of the electorate of Cologne made it especially susceptible to outside influence. The main part of the principality stretched along the west bank of the Rhine for some forty miles north of Cologne and twenty miles south of the city; there was a further parcel of land fifty miles to the east, running north of the town of Siegen towards the Rothaar mountains. Much of the revenue of the principality derived from its position on the ancient trading route along the Rhine, the gateway to Holland and the sea. A hundred miles to the south-west lay France, and sandwiched between the two was the Austrian Netherlands, part of the Habsburg monarchy. Increasingly during the course of the eighteenth century Cologne attracted the interest of Prussia which, as always, was anxious to limit the influence of the Habsburg dynasty.

For these reasons the political allegiances of the electorate of Cologne changed frequently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the end of the seventeenth century Louis XIV's France exerted control and influence, and in the early decades of the eighteenth century members of the Bavarian ruling family were successively elected to the archbishopric. When the most munificent of these Bavarian rulers, Clemens August, died in 1761 the archbishopric passed, unusually, to a local person, the dean of Cologne cathedral, Maximilian Friedrich.

It was in the interest of none of these various competing powers that the social and economic life of the electorate be allowed to decay. As a result Bonn, together with Augsburg and Salzburg, emerged as

one of the leading small cities in the Holy Roman Empire. There was no real division between the city and the court; without the court there would have been no town. By 1790 the population of Bonn was to reach nearly 11,000, many of whom were connected in some way with the court, as architects, administrators, bodyguards, chaplains, clerks, cooks, hunting masters, maids, musicians, painters, servants and so on. The town had a weekly newspaper, the *Bonner Intelligenzblätter*, dominated by court news, and its citizens had the chance of winning the electoral lottery.

Music played an important part in court life. The typical eighteenth-century division of music into three areas, church, theatre and chamber (that is, instrumental), was found here, and each was well represented. The private church was contained within the palace walls, as was a concert room and a theatre that seated 100 guests. The court musicians worked in all three venues, their number supplemented in church services and concerts by local people, and in the theatre by visiting troupes of actors and musicians. In 1773 the regular musical personnel of the Bonn court consisted of a Kapellmeister (Beethoven's grandfather, also Ludwig van Beethoven), seven singers (including Beethoven's father, Johann van Beethoven), two organists, seven violinists, two violists, two cellists, a double bass player and an organ blower. Grandfather Ludwig died on Christmas Eve 1773 at the age of sixty-one. Over the next decade the musical forces of the court were rejuvenated and expanded in number, from twenty-five to forty-one, a substantial complement of musicians, equal to all but the most extravagant of German courts, such as Mannheim and Stuttgart, and larger than many, including Haydn's Esterházy court and Mozart's Salzburg court. Ludwig van Beethoven's successor was Andreas Lucchesi, born in the Venetian territories and noted as an organist; at Bonn his composing interests shifted from opera to church music.

Of the two generations of the Beethoven family that had served the electoral court, Ludwig van Beethoven (1712–73) and his son Johann van Beethoven (1739/4–92), the former had the more distinguished career. He joined the court in 1733 as a singer, before working himself

up to be a worthy and conscientious Kapellmeister. It is likely that he composed church music for the court, though nothing has survived. Johann was his third child and joined the court at the age of twelve as a treble, later alto; after his voice broke he sang tenor, a post he held for over thirty years, albeit with more resignation than enthusiasm, supplementing his income with private teaching and some violin playing. Successive generations of musicians who devoted their lives to one court were not uncommon in the period and Ludwig and Johann naturally expected that a third-generation Beethoven, if musical, would continue the family tradition.

Johann van Beethoven had married Magdalena Keverich in 1767; it was her second marriage. Between 1769 and 1786 she gave birth to seven children (five boys and two girls), three of whom survived childhood, Ludwig van Beethoven, Caspar Anton Carl van Beethoven (1774–1815) and Nicolaus Johann van Beethoven (1776–1848).

Beethoven's precise birthdate is unclear. He was baptized on 17 December 1770 and since it was the custom to baptize children as soon as practicable after birth, typically the same day or the day afterwards, his birthdate was either 16 December or 17 December. In the baptism records the formal Latin 'Ludovicus' is used but there is ample evidence that the French form, Louis, was used in his childhood and youth, a habit that surfaces from time to time in his adult years too. French was a living second language in Bonn and Beethoven maintained a fluency throughout his life, if sometimes of a gear-crashing kind. His formal schooling probably began at the age of six or seven when he entered the town's Tirocinium where the basic curriculum seems to have consisted of reading, writing but no arithmetic. At the age of eleven boys had the options of entering the Gymnasium but Beethoven's formal education ended at the primary level. It is assumed that his father taught him the rudiments of music, the piano and perhaps a little violin, but Johann seems to have been relatively unambitious on behalf of his son. The contrast with the father-son relationship in the Mozart family could not be more striking. While Leopold Mozart devoted much of his adult life to raising

the phenomenally gifted Mozart, acquainting him with the full range of musical styles in Europe through many journeys, Johann was contentedly parochial, accepting the fact that Bonn's musical life was all that his son needed for a career that was to ape his own or, if he was particularly fortunate, that of the grandfather. Apart from one journey to Holland at the age of eleven, Beethoven's musical experience as a boy was totally formed in Bonn and its environs.

On only one recorded occasion did Johann van Beethoven seek to display his son as a prodigy. On 26 March 1778 in a concert room on the Sternengasse in Cologne, he arranged a concert given by two of his pupils, 'Mademoiselle Averdonc, court alto, and his little son aged six'. Beethoven was actually just over seven in March 1778 but the mistake was probably genuine rather than deliberate. The father's confusion led to Ludwig, too, being confused about his age until 1810 when he first saw his baptism certificate.

Gradually Johann passed the musical education of his son to court colleagues, to local musicians in town and to visiting musicians. The court organist, Aegidius van den Eeden, gave him lessons in organ and figured bass, supplemented later by instruction from other Bonn organists, Willibald Koch from the Franciscan monastery, Hanzmann from the Minorite order and Zensen, the organist of the minster.

The musical repertoire at the court, in church services, concerts and opera, was a broad one. As always, church music tended to be the most conservative and traditional, in the sense that the daily repertoire was as likely to consist of music that was several decades old as it was to feature newly composed works. The court library held masses by respected Viennese composers from the first part of the century such as Antonio Caldara, Franz Tuma and Georg Reutter alongside modern compositions by Albrechtsberger, Joseph Haydn and Gassmann. In instrumental music Bonn had easy access to the torrent of publications coming from the commercial musical capital of Europe, Paris, and from the international firm of Hummel, based in Amsterdam and Berlin. Music by Mannheim composers such as

Eichner, Holzbauer and Johann Stamitz was available, as was music by Austrian composers such as Dittersdorf, Haydn and Vanhal, and by French composers such as Cambini and Gossec. This diversity of repertoire was an appropriate reflection of Bonn's geographical position on the Rhine: a major trading station with easy access to Paris and Amsterdam while still maintaining links with the old network of music distribution in southern Germany and Austria through manuscript copies.

A similar cosmopolitanism is evident in Bonn's operatic life during the composer's youth. Comic operas by leading Italian composers of the day, such as Galuppi and Piccinni, were given alongside regular performances of *opéras-comiques*. From the end of the 1770s Bonn participated in the new German trend of setting up companies devoted to German plays and opera (Singspiel). The director was Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Grossmann who assembled a company that performed at the court theatre during winter and toured elsewhere in the summer months. When it was resident at the court it used the electoral orchestra and, when necessary, the court singers too, including Johann van Beethoven. German translations of plays by Molière, Voltaire, Goldoni and Shakespeare were presented as well as the fervent plays of the new national tradition, the works of Lessing and Schiller. A similar mixture of translated and original works was evident in the operatic repertoire. German versions of Italian operas by Anfossi, Cimarosa and Salieri, and of French operas by Grétry, Monsigny and Philidor alternated with newer products of the German Singspiel movement, Holzbauer's *Günther von Schwarzburg* and, later, Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

The vitality of musical life at the court spilled over into the town itself. Johann van Beethoven taught at the homes of minor aristocrats and court officials, tasks he passed over to Ludwig as the young boy became musically competent and socially assured. One of the most enthusiastic musical amateurs in the town was Johann Gottfried von Mastiaux. In his spacious house in the Fischergasse he had a music room large enough to accommodate up to two dozen performers; he

and his five children played all manner of instruments, string, wind and keyboard. Mastiaux was an avid admirer of Haydn's music, amassing a virtually complete collection of the symphonies, almost certainly acquired directly from the composer.

Musical life in Bonn, therefore, was well organized, modern and vital. However, in comparison with larger centres, such as Hamburg, and certain courts such as Dresden and Mannheim, it lacked a commanding figure, a performer or composer who was of more than local significance, someone who could provoke the still dormant talent of the young Beethoven. That situation was rectified with the arrival of Christian Gottlob Neefe (1748–98).

Neefe had been born in Chemnitz in Saxony, a very different part of German-speaking Europe. He studied jurisprudence at the university in Leipzig and thrived in an intellectual society that included the musician Johann Adam Hiller, the philosopher Johann Jakob Engel, the engraver Johann Friedrich Bause and the painter Adam Friedrich Oeser. A widely read and cultured man, Neefe, like so many lawyers before and since, was increasingly drawn towards a career in music. Hiller nurtured his talents as a composer of German opera, works that were soon performed throughout the German states. In the summer of 1779 Neefe joined the theatre company in Bonn as its new music director, though still under the overall direction of Grossmann. Given that Neefe was a Protestant rather than a Catholic, a musician of national rather than local significance and a broadly educated man rather than a jobbing musician, Bonn was an unlikely place for him to settle; Leipzig or Hamburg would have been more conducive to his talents and upbringing. Two years after arriving he was offered the additional post of court organist on the death of van den Eeden. Neefe's combined income was now the same as that of Kapellmeister Lucchesi and he was rapidly establishing himself as the leading musical figure in Bonn. So what had probably been intended as a short stay turned out to be a permanent arrangement; Neefe was still in post when the electoral court was finally disbanded in 1794.

Neefe's own compositions included several German operas, such

as *Adelheit von Veltheim*, performed by Grossmann's company in 1780. Dealing with an elopement from a Turkish harem, the opera was hugely successful and may have encouraged Grossmann and Neefe to stage performances of Mozart's harem opera, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, three years later. Neefe also composed numerous songs (including settings of twelve odes by Klopstock), keyboard sonatas and a keyboard concerto. While in Bonn he exploited his linguistic and literary talents, translating the texts of Italian and French operas into German, writing his autobiography, a biography of Grossmann's wife, some poetry and several contributions to music journals.

A generation younger than Johann van Beethoven, Neefe became Bonn's favourite teacher of keyboard instruments and music theory. It is not known when Ludwig's lessons with him began, but by 1782 the boy was acting as his assistant in church services, playing the organ, and, in the following years, began deputizing regularly as a continuo player in opera performances. In 1784 Beethoven's contribution to the musical life of the court was officially recognized when he became a salaried member of the retinue. Formal lessons and informal apprenticeship alike were unforgettably characterized by Neefe's commanding personality, and the impressionable teenager learnt as much from his teacher's general attitude to music and its role in society as he did about playing the organ and realizing figured bass. Beethoven sometimes complained that Neefe was too severe with him but a decade later he readily acknowledged his inspiring influence.

I thank you for the advice you have very often given me about making progress in my divine art. Should I ever become a great man you too will have a share in my success.²

Neefe's teacher, Hiller, was a pupil, twice removed, of Johann Sebastian Bach and this pedagogic heritage made Beethoven the only member of the Viennese Classical School whose formative years were in any way influenced by the north German master. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* was central to Neefe's teaching and Beethoven soon knew the music intimately: the beginning of a life-long admiration



1 Christian Gottlob Neefe

for the composer. Neefe almost certainly would have encouraged Beethoven to explore the music of Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel. Even more important than this composer's music was his treatise on keyboard playing, *Essay on the True Art of Playing the Keyboard* (1753–62). Alongside authoritative paragraphs on the execution of ornaments and the realization of figured bass Bach provided many observations on the emotional commitment needed by a performer: 'A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved. He must of necessity feel all of the affects that he hopes to arouse in his audience,

for the revealing of his own humour will stimulate a like humour in the listener', and elsewhere, 'Play from the soul, not like a trained bird.'³ Twenty years later one of Beethoven's most illustrious pupils, Carl Czerny, was reared on this volume and one can easily imagine these exhortations being reaffirmed by Beethoven. Neefe followed C. P. E. Bach in emphasizing the duty of the composer to his art, and warned of the dangers of pandering to public taste.

A composer should not concern himself with the plebeian listener, who never knows what he wants, and understands virtually nothing . . . Woe betide the composer who wants to address such people. He will spoil his talent, that has been given to him, by having to compose minuets, polonaises and Turkish marches. And then – good night talent, genius and art.⁴

These are lofty views expressed with the characteristic rhetoric of late eighteenth-century German culture. Freedom of expressive intent, even if it meant intellectual exclusiveness, was to be constantly articulated by the adult Beethoven.

Neefe also had a strong sense of German identity, a new element in Beethoven's experience that contrasted with the pragmatic allegiances – Dutch, French, German and Italian – that had always been evident in Bonn. He never set foot in France or Italy, devoted his career to the development of German opera and song, and sought to displace the traditional primacy given to French and Italian music. 'You certainly know how German I think and feel' he once said. Patriotism and nationalism were to figure too in Beethoven's career, largely activated by the political upheavals that occurred during his life.

For over 200 hundred years, religion had prevented the fostering of a German national identity, but increasingly in the eighteenth century Protestant and Catholic areas of German-speaking Europe seemed willing to place such differences aside in a new nationalist quest. The Calvinist Neefe now worked in a Catholic court and, in a gesture that at least suggests a pragmatism that sought to diffuse tensions, he had his children baptized as Catholics. Beethoven's religious outlook was

to be equally undogmatic. Brought up in the Catholic liturgy, he was never in the equivalent position to Neefe where he had to embrace a different Christian creed, but he was never a church-going Catholic and his eagerness, for instance, to promote the Mass in C and the *Missa Solemnis* throughout Europe suggests that the Catholic creed meant as much, or as little, to him as the Calvinist one did to Neefe. Faith, in the broadest sense, however, meant a great deal to Beethoven, and led him to explore oriental religions, a curiosity one suspects that Neefe would have shared.

In his autobiography Neefe wrote that he was 'no friend of ceremony and of etiquette' and that he 'detested creeps and gossips', social attitudes that his young pupil was to raise to rudeness. The imagery of Neefe's further observation that he 'hated bad princes more than bandits' recalls a similar, though not exact, juxtaposition in a line from Schiller's 'An die Freude', a line that is omitted in the 'Choral' symphony but which Beethoven certainly knew: 'Beggars shall become princes' brothers'. For Neefe and Beethoven princes and patrons had a moral duty to support the work of the artist, something that would earn them respect; if they did not offer this support they deserved, and in Beethoven's case were to receive, contempt.

The high-minded tone of Beethoven's later tribute to Neefe suggests that he was consciously appealing to Neefe's character. Educated, principled, intellectually enquiring as well as high-minded, Neefe, the court organist, was set apart from his fellow musicians, and instilled these distinctive qualities in the young Beethoven.

One of the many manifestations of the new authority that German musicians, especially those from the north, wished to accord themselves and their art was the increasing number of journals devoted to music. One of the most ambitious and widely read in the 1780s was the *Magazin der Musik*, issued in Hamburg and edited by Carl Friedrich Cramer. Appearing twice a week, the periodical featured surveys of music in various towns, localities and courts. A 'Report on the electoral court of Cologne at Bonn, also other musicians in the town' was provided in a letter written by Neefe and dated 30 March 1783. He

begins with the leading figures at court, Mattioli the violinist, Lucchesi the Kapellmeister, and himself as court organist and music director of the theatre; details of their careers are given with, in the case of Mattioli and Lucchesi, an assessment of their principal qualities. As promised in the title of the account, there is a section on musicians not employed by the court. Pride of place is given to Mastiaux: 'a man who wishes and recognizes no other delight than music; it is his most favoured daily companion'. Altogether eleven town musicians are listed. The last is Neeffe's pupil, Beethoven, whose abilities are outlined in an appreciation that is noticeably longer than the majority:

Louis van Betthoven, son of the above-mentioned tenor, a boy of eleven, and with a most promising talent. He plays the piano very skilfully and with power, sight-reads very well, and to summarize; he plays mostly the Well-Tempered Clavier by Sebastian Bach, which Herr Neeffe placed in his hands. Whoever knows this collection of preludes and fugues through all the keys (which one might almost refer to as the *non plus ultra*) will know what that means. As far as his usual duties allow, Herr Neeffe has given him some instruction in thorough-bass. He is now training him in composition, and in order to encourage him has arranged for the publication in Mannheim of nine variations for piano on a march. This young genius deserves assistance, so that he can travel. He would certainly become a second Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, if he were to carry on as he has begun.⁵

Although Neeffe, like everybody else, thought Beethoven was a year younger than he was, his admiration is genuine rather than sensationalized. The report makes it clear that he ought to broaden his musical horizons through travel. Rich and diverse though musical life at Bonn was, it was also claustrophobic; Beethoven needed to experience music in other cities and in different circumstances so that, like Neeffe, he might enhance Bonn's musical life rather than just be part of it. The parallel evoked by Neeffe was that of Mozart, who between the ages of six and twenty-five had travelled throughout Europe as a pianist and composer. By the time he was twelve Mozart was known throughout Europe as a performer who also had several symphonies,

concertos, sonatas, an opera and a mass to his credit. Although Beethoven at the same age was certainly no Mozart, Neeffe felt that his talents should be nurtured in much the same way.

From the distance of over two hundred years it is easy to give Neeffe's words a significance that they did not possess to contemporary readers. Mozart was not then the man-myth he is now; he was not even the figure that he was ten years after the report was written. He was merely the most well-known example of a prodigy who had travelled widely to form his musicianship. While Neeffe's remarks are easily misconstrued by modern commentators, there is no doubt that if writer and subject had re-read this issue of the *Magazin der Musik* a few years later they would have been struck by its fortuitous prescience, for Mozart's music was about to become much more familiar in Bonn, largely through political circumstances rather than musical perception. The seeds had been sown a few years later.

By the late 1770s Elector Maximilian Friedrich was an ageing man, and the succession had already become a subject of debate amongst the competing German-speaking states of Europe. To ensure a smooth transition of power, particularly if it involved a switch of political allegiance, many ecclesiastical principalities in the Holy Roman Empire elected, during the lifetime of the reigning ruler, a successor or 'co-adjutor' who then automatically succeeded to the throne. The Austrian ambassador in Bonn was Franz Georg Metternich-Winneburg (father of the famous Metternich who shaped Austrian politics in the early nineteenth century), who, in conjunction with Baron Belderbusch, began to encourage the view that the next elector should be a member of the Habsburg family. The youngest son of Maria Theresa, Maximilian Franz, had been destined for a military career but in the War of the Bavarian Succession he had contracted a debilitating disease that affected his knee joints, which, despite several operations, left him relatively immobile and unsuited to a military career. In 1780, at the age of only twenty-four, he became an obvious candidate for the co-adjutorship. Maximilian Franz took out the necessary minor orders so that he could become a ruling archbishop; the

Pope was persuaded to agree to the plan; and Prussia was kept in the dark long enough for it to be presented as a *fait accompli*. Archduke Maximilian Franz was elected co-adjutor in August 1780; exactly four years later in a ceremony in Cologne cathedral he was anointed archbishop and elector.

Like most members of the Habsburg family, Maximilian Franz was passionately fond of music. One of his first acts as elector was to ask for a report on the members of the musical retinue at court. Thirty-six members were succinctly evaluated by a bureaucrat who, at some point, had obviously crossed swords with Neefe:

No. 8 Johan Beethoven: his voice has virtually gone, has served for a long time, is very needy, a passable performer, and married . . .

No. 13 Christian Neefe the organist: in my unbiased opinion this person could really be dismissed because he is not particularly accomplished on the organ; moreover he is an outsider of virtually no merit, and a Calvinist . . .

No. 14 Ludwig van Beethoven, a son of the Beethoven mentioned in No. 8, is not in receipt of payment, has played the organ during the absence of Kapellmeister Lucchesi; he is of good ability, still young, calm and collected in performance, and poor.⁶

Despite the author's observations on Johann van Beethoven and Neefe, both were retained as the musical retinue was expanded and strengthened over the next few years. By 1790 it numbered over fifty people, making it one of the largest court establishments in Europe. There were now thirteen regular singers, but an even more significant increase had occurred in the orchestral forces: fifteen violins, four violas, two cellos, three basses, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, three bassoons, two horns, four trumpets and timpani. Neefe and Beethoven had dual responsibilities, the former as organist and violinist, the latter as organist and viola player. Maximilian Franz maintained the traditional tripartite division of musical activity: church, theatre and concert. While operas from France and north Germany continued to be performed there was a notable trend towards the end of the decade to mirror the contemporary scene in Vienna. Many



2 Elector Maximilian Franz

operas that had had successful runs in Vienna were played in Bonn, including Dittersdorf's *Doktor und Apotheker*, Martín y Soler's *L'arbore di Diana*, Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Il rè Teodoro*, and Salieri's *La grotta di Trofonio* and *Axur*.

An increasing familiarity with instrumental music from Vienna is discernible in this period also. Nicolaus Simrock was a horn player at

the court who also ran a shop in the town that sold all kinds of goods, from French carpets to prayer books, and wine to stationery. He sold music and was an agent for Vienna's leading music publisher, Artaria. Much of the output of that firm in the 1780s became available in Bonn, including symphonies, quartets and piano music by Joseph Haydn, Michael Haydn, Leopold Kozeluch, Mozart and Rosetti.

Within the court itself Mozart's name was a familiar one. The elector and composer were exact contemporaries who had been acquainted since childhood, when Mozart had visited the Imperial and Royal court in Vienna. In 1775 the nineteen-year-old composer had written the opera, *Il rè pastore*, to commemorate the visit of the then archduke to Salzburg. When, in 1781, Mozart moved to Vienna, Maximilian Franz was a frequent advocate of his abilities in the gossipy world of imperial musical politics. Soon the composer was marking Maximilian Franz as a possible patron:

I can say that he thinks the world of me. He shoves me forward on every occasion, and I might almost say with certainty that if at this moment he were Elector of Cologne, I should be his Kapellmeister. It is, indeed, a pity that these great gentlemen refuse to make arrangements beforehand. I could easily manage to extract a simple promise from him, but of what use would that be to me now.⁷

It is obvious from Mozart's letter, couched in a typical mixture of wishful thinking and obfuscation, that, at best, the possibility of employment at Bonn had been mentioned; there was no commitment. Certainly there is no evidence that, when the co-adjutor became elector two years later, Mozart was offered the position. History has been denied celebrating the artistic fellowship of Mozart and Beethoven in one court, but the elder composer soon became a talismanic figure for the teenage Beethoven, somebody whom Maximilian, Neeffe and others regarded as a model for the development of the Bonn composer.

It should be remembered, however, that this view of Mozart was the product of the political link between Vienna and Bonn and did not

reflect any kind of European perspective. If the court had wished Beethoven to become a court Kapellmeister who enjoyed international esteem then the clear role model would have been Joseph Haydn, still the hard-working Kapellmeister in the mid 1780s but a composer whose music was known and admired throughout Europe. But within the political circles of the Bonn court several factors would have weighed against this choice: Haydn was not a familiar figure in Habsburg court circles (indeed, there is some evidence that Joseph II disliked his music); Haydn was not a performer and could not have nurtured that side of Beethoven's musicianship; finally, he was from an older generation than Mozart and the elector. Mozart, on the other hand, was young (only fourteen years older than Beethoven); he was known in Habsburg circles; and in the mid 1780s he was enjoying marked success as a pianist-composer in Vienna.

The Bonn–Vienna, Beethoven–Mozart axis resulted in 1787 in the composer being sent to Vienna to study with Mozart, a journey almost certainly encouraged and underwritten by the elector himself. Unfortunately, next to nothing is known about the visit. Beethoven probably arrived on 7 April and stayed a little longer than two weeks, leaving about 20 April because of the serious illness of his mother. It is not known where he stayed; it could have been with a member of the Waldstein family or, if formal lessons had begun, with the Mozart family, then living in the Landstrasse. A nineteenth-century anecdote relates that Beethoven played some piano music that left Mozart rather unimpressed, but when the sixteen-year-old improvised he remarked enthusiastically: 'Mark that man; he will make himself a name in the world.' Extant exercises by two regular pupils of Mozart, Thomas Attwood and Babette Ployer, indicate that Beethoven would have started with species counterpoint, moved on to the writing of canons and, then, over a period of a few months, to minuets and slow movements. If Beethoven was privy to what Mozart was composing and planning, then he might have caught him putting the final touches to the C major quintet (K515), contemplating a journey to London and enthusing about his latest opera commission, *Don*

Giovanni. As regards public concerts, Mozart himself had not given any that season and none was held during Beethoven's short time in the city. Had he gone to the opera it would have been to performances of *L'inganno amoroso* by Guglielmi or *Le gare generose* by Paisiello.

Beethoven's anxious return journey took him via Augsburg and he arrived in Bonn in late April. His mother died on 17 July. A few months later Beethoven wrote a letter to Joseph Wilhelm von Schaden, an acquaintance he had met in Augsburg. This is his first extant letter, written with some of the power and eloquence that were to characterize his correspondence in later years:

I must confess that as soon as I left Augsburg my good spirits and my health too began to decline. For the nearer I came to my native town, the more frequently did I receive from my father letters urging me to travel more quickly than usual, because my mother was not in very good health. So I made as much haste as I could, the more so as I myself began to feel ill. My yearning to see my ailing mother once more swept all obstacles aside so far as I was concerned, and enabled me to overcome the greatest difficulties. I found my mother still alive, but in the most wretched condition . . . She was such a good, kind mother to me and indeed my best friend. Oh! who was happier than I, when I could still utter the sweet name of my mother and it was heard and answered; and to whom can I say it now? To the dumb likenesses of her which my imagination fashions for me? Since my return to Bonn I have as yet enjoyed very few happy hours. For the whole time I have been plagued with asthma; and I am inclined to fear this malady may even turn to consumption. Furthermore, I have been suffering from melancholia, which in my case is almost as great a torture as my illness.⁸

This expression of filial affection is virtually the only first-hand evidence of Maria Magdalena Beethoven's part in her son's upbringing. These feelings of reverence remained with Beethoven for the rest of his life, causing him special pain when a bizarre rumour circulated in Germany and England that he was the illegitimate son of the King of Prussia. While the melancholy that Beethoven mentions was the

understandable reaction of an adolescent to the death of his mother it was part, too, of a more general languor; as a teenager he seems to have lacked that sure determination that characterized him as an adult. While he was perfectly willing to be the protégé of Neefe, Maximilian Franz and others, and to undertake a journey to Vienna, there is little of the independence and ambition apparent in the teenage careers of Haydn and Mozart, for instance. Following his mother's death he immersed himself, quite contentedly, in the musical life of Bonn: playing the organ, piano and viola, and teaching keyboard instruments. His youthful attempts at composition decline after his return to Bonn, as if he had temporarily lost interest. If Neefe and Maximilian Franz still regarded Beethoven as Bonn's equivalent to Mozart then there was little striking evidence in 1787, either in achievement or aspiration, to justify the comparison.

Rather than a series of compelling events that presaged greatness, the remaining five years in Bonn constitute a period of quiet, though steady development. For several years Beethoven had taught the piano to two members of the Breuning family, aristocrats who had served the electoral court for several decades. Eleonore von Breuning was only a year younger than Beethoven and soon the formal piano lessons developed into love. Beethoven was never to marry, and the relationship with Lorchen, as she was affectionately called, was the first of many love affairs with ladies from a higher social class than himself. Lorchen later married a doctor from Bonn, Franz Wegeler, who was to record his reminiscences of Beethoven:

Ludwig made his first acquaintance with German literature, especially poetry, in the von Breuning family in Bonn where he also received his first introductions to social life and behaviour . . .

An unforced atmosphere of culture reigned in the house in spite of youthful high spirits . . .

Beethoven was soon treated as one of the children in the family and not only did he spend the greatest part of the day there but even many nights. He felt free there, he could move around with ease, and everything combined to make him cheerful and to develop his mind.⁹

A prominent member of the Breuning social circle was Count Ferdinand Ernst Waldstein. Born in Bohemia in 1762, he arrived in Bonn early in 1788 and over the next few years established himself as the elector's most trusted adviser, with a roving ambassadorial role that involved him in practically all decisions that affected the relationship of the court with the outside world. As might be expected of someone who had gained the trust of the Habsburg family, he was a capable musician who even composed a little. He took an interest in Beethoven's career, recognizing a talent that could become an appropriate symbol of the ambition of the Habsburg dynasty. Near the end of the carnival season in 1791, Waldstein organized a *ridotto* in the court theatre. Members of the nobility turned up in old German dress and witnessed a ballet depicting some of the clichés of German nationhood: a march, a drinking song, a hunting song, a troubadour song, a war song and a peasant dance. Beethoven was entrusted with the composition of the music, the so-called *Ritterballett*, a notable step forward in his court career.

Waldstein was also a member of the *Lesegesellschaft* in Bonn, a reading circle open to all members of the town regardless of status; it satisfied the intellectual curiosity of its members in all manner of subjects including agriculture, geography, history and politics. In the last area the society remained wholly unaffected by the anti-monarchist views in France; indeed it rejoiced in the active patronage of the elector himself. When Maximilian Franz's brother, Emperor Joseph II, died in 1790 it was natural that this staunchly pro-Habsburg organization should want to mark the occasion. Severin Anton Averdonk, brother of Johann Helena the court singer, had already written a text. Waldstein – perhaps prompted by Neefe, who was also a member of the society – suggested that the task of setting it to music should be entrusted to the young Beethoven. The result, the 'Cantata on the death of Joseph II', was his most impressive composition to date, a five-movement work of great power and expressive range, framed by a chorus in C minor, 'Tot stöhnt es durch die öde Nacht' ('Death echoes through the empty night'). For reasons that remain unclear the can-

tata was not performed. It cannot have been because Beethoven had provided something that was fundamentally unsuitable, since he was asked to write a second cantata, to celebrate the succession of Leopold II to the Habsburg throne; this, too, remained unperformed in Beethoven's lifetime.

This notable year, 1790, ended with a brief visit to the Bonn court by Joseph Haydn. He arrived around Christmas, accompanied by the impresario Johann Peter Salomon; both were *en route* to London, where Haydn was to be the resident composer at the Hanover Square Concerts organized by Salomon. At the age of fifty-eight, Haydn was making his first visit outside Austria, and the journey had already become a highly gratifying one, as the composer was greeted with enthusiasm by local musicians in the towns where he stayed overnight. Bonn must have been particularly welcoming since it represented a homecoming for Salomon: he had been born there in 1745 and had played in the court orchestra for a few years before embarking on an international career. Salomon and Haydn attended mass at the court chapel, the setting of the Ordinary being by Haydn himself. Beethoven probably played the organ in the service, or perhaps the viola. The leading musicians at the court, a group that must have included Beethoven, dined with Salomon and Haydn, all paid for by the elector. Beethoven showed Haydn his most recent compositions, probably one or both of the cantatas, and the older composer was deeply impressed.

Only one work from Beethoven's years in Bonn is regularly played today, the B \flat piano concerto (itself heavily revised in the 1790s when a new finale was provided), which gives only the merest glimpse of the diversity of Beethoven's output by 1790, the time of Haydn's visit. A complete picture cannot be established. Alongside known completed works such as the two cantatas, three piano quartets, another concerto for piano (in E \flat) and a collection of small pieces for piano, there are extant fragments of works, such as an oboe concerto and a violin concerto, that may once have been complete. There is a third, large category: works that were begun but never completed, including a

symphony in C minor. Taking all the evidence – completed works, fragments, aborted works and sketches – it is clear that by the end of the decade Beethoven had at least attempted to compose in most genres: piano music, ensemble music, concerto, symphony, dance, liturgical music and operatic aria.

In November 1791 the journal *Musikalische Korrespondenz*, issued in Speyer, included a lengthy report by the musician and writer Carl Ludwig Junker on the abilities of court employees at Bonn following a two-day visit the previous month. It is an enthusiastic report, especially valuable for providing a contemporary assessment of Beethoven rather than one projected back from his later fame. On the first day of the visit Junker ate his meal to the sound of a wind octet in the background, including a performance of the overture to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. He then went on to a performance of Paisiello's *Il rè Teodoro* which he thought well sung and even better played by the court orchestra under the direction of its leader, Franz Ries. The following morning there was a rehearsal at ten o' clock in Ries's rooms for the evening concert. Junker noticed the young average age of the players; one of them, Nicolaus Simrock, the horn player and shop owner, told him 'We don't have the usual cliques and double dealing here, the fullest unanimity prevails, we love each other as brothers, as members of a society.' It was the elector's nameday and shortly before the beginning of the rehearsal Ries was summoned to receive a gift of 1,000 thalers for the orchestra. The concert itself was at six in the evening and the assembled musicians were strikingly dressed in red and gold livery. Following a Mozart symphony (not identified), a vocal number, and a cello concerto, there was a symphony by Pleyel, an aria by Righini, a double concerto for violin and cello and, finally, a symphony by Wineberger. The performances could not have been more precise: 'Such an exact observance of *piano*, *forte*, *rinforzando*, such a swelling and gradual growth of sound, followed by a subsidence of the same, from the maximum intensity to the gentlest sound – this could otherwise be heard only in Mannheim.'

Beethoven probably played the viola in the orchestra but Junker

took the opportunity too of hearing the composer improvise on the piano, providing the earliest eyewitness account – apart from Mozart’s brief comment – of his extraordinary abilities in this area:

The greatness of this amiable, light-hearted man, as a virtuoso, may in my opinion be safely estimated from his almost inexhaustible wealth of ideas, the altogether characteristic style of expression in his playing, and the great execution which he displays.

A comparison with the travelling virtuoso Abbé Vogler is offered, Junker maintaining that Beethoven is a much more expressive player, ‘more for the heart’. All this remarkable musical talent and activity is supported by an elector, ‘an enthusiastic lover of music’ and ‘the best and most humane of princes’. Maximilian Franz, Neefe, Waldstein, Mastiaux, the Breuning family and perhaps even the young Beethoven himself could have taken pride from Junker’s penultimate observation:

Until now it was customary to think of Cologne as a land of darkness, in which the Enlightenment had not taken hold. When one goes to the court of the elector, one forms an entirely different view. In particular amongst the members of the Kapelle I found entirely enlightened, healthily reflective and thinking men.¹⁰

There is no reason to suppose that Beethoven was other than wholly content with life as a courtier, a young conscientious member of a sophisticated and progressive musical environment. His broadly based employment as a viola player, organist, teacher, pianist and composer was beginning to show particular promise in the last two areas, ones that were likely to take him one day beyond Bonn. But in 1791 the glimpses of his personality that are offered – a rather shy individual, happy with close friends of all social classes, though otherwise awkward – do not suggest that he would ever have taken the initiative to broaden his horizons.

Eight months after Junker’s article, Joseph Haydn called again in Bonn, on his way home to Vienna from his first, overwhelmingly successful journey to London. Six symphonies (Nos. 93–8) had been

given their first performance in the two seasons of the Hanover Square Concerts organized by Salomon, and Haydn was expected to return for the following 1793 season. The idea was mooted that Beethoven should accompany Haydn to Vienna and then to London. Haydn himself had already been impressed by Beethoven's talents as a composer and perhaps he and Salomon were intrigued by the idea of promoting the unknown talent of someone from Salomon's birthplace. For Beethoven or, at least, for those who had an interest in his development, the advantages were twofold: lessons from a figure who was unequivocally recognized as the foremost composer in Europe and the opportunity to travel to London, a city whose richness and diversity of musical life made it the musical capital of Europe. With Haydn's guidance Beethoven's increasingly evident abilities as a composer and as a pianist would have been ideally suited to concert life in the British capital. Discussions with Haydn offered something more concrete than the putative connection with Mozart had ever yielded. After Mozart's untimely death the previous December the elector and his advisor, Waldstein, might well have come to reflect that Beethoven was not, after all, going to project the image they desired: a Habsburg protégé who was to move in court circles and strengthen the links between Bonn and Vienna. Instead, Beethoven was about to be taken on by a quite different figure, an outsider, much older, but paradoxically socially more free, and someone who had demonstrated that he could profit from the commercial opportunities that musical life in London offered. If Beethoven was excited by the prospect of a journey with Haydn to Vienna and to London, political events in the late summer and autumn of 1792 were seriously to weaken the comfortable certainties of life in Bonn.

From the earliest days of the French Revolution Bonn had been a favoured destination for fleeing émigrés. Drunk with savage idealism revolutionary leaders in France presided over, rather than controlled, a ghastly increase in the use of the guillotine in August 1792, while simultaneously expounding plans to extend the Revolution beyond France to the natural geographical boundaries of the Pyrenees and

Alps to the south and east, and to the Rhine to the north and east. Elector Maximilian Franz and the Habsburg regime in Bonn were in the middle of a potential battlefield. By deed and temperament he was one of the most enlightened of enlightened despots and the potential destruction of his humane idealism by the barbarism of France was deeply unnerving. Family loyalty meant that he had to support the Austro-Prussian alliance against France but, simultaneously, he hoped to appease the enemy by, for instance, indicating that Bonn was no longer willing to be a haven for French refugees. But 1792 was no time for old-fashioned Habsburg wheeling and dealing of the kind that had secured the electorate in the first place. By mid October the order had been given to leave Bonn, and the elector and his court spent most of the subsequent winter in Münster.

It was in this deeply unsettled atmosphere that Beethoven, himself a dutiful member of the *ancien régime* who had honoured Joseph II and Leopold II in two cantatas, prepared to leave Bonn for Vienna. In his last week in Bonn his friends compiled a *Stammbuch*, an autograph album of good wishes, reminiscences and injunctions to do well, written in the usual mixture of rhetoric and sentiment, and illustrated with the occasional drawing.¹¹ Eleonore Breuning (Lorchen) quotes three lines from Herder:

Freundschaft, mit dem Guten,
Wächset wie der Abendschatten
Bis des Lebens Sonne sinkt

(Friendship with the good grows like the evening shadows until the sunset of life)

Eleonore's brother, Christoph von Breuning, concentrates on the promised visit to London; 'bard' is probably a reference to Salomon:

See! Albion long beckons to you, O friend.
See the shady grove that it offers the singer.
Hurry then straight away
Over the surging sea,
Where a more beautiful grove offers its shade to you,

And the bard so kindly extends to you his hand,
 [He] who fled
 From our dominions to Albion's protection.
 There may your song echo full of victory,
 Loudly, wildly through the grove and over the sea's tumult
 To the domain
 From which you joyfully fled.

While it is possible to regard the urgency of Breuning's remarks as the product of the general unease in Bonn, none of the fifteen entries refers directly to contemporary events. Two, however, evoke the familiar Bonn metaphor, that Beethoven was to be the new Mozart. The physician Johann Heinrich Crevelt creates a picture of Beethoven's future success under the protective aura of Mozart's genius that 'hovers over you / And, smiling at you, lends its approbation'. Crevelt was writing on 1 November, the eve of Beethoven's departure, and almost certainly he took this image from a previous entry written by Count Waldstein:

Dear Beethoven!

You are going to Vienna in fulfilment of your long-frustrated wishes. The genius of Mozart is mourning and weeping over the death of its pupil. With the inexhaustible Haydn it has found refuge but not occupation; through him it wishes to be united once more with another. Through uninterrupted industry you will receive: *Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands.*

The final *bon mot*, 'Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands', has been quoted endlessly, signifying a moment in history when the young Beethoven assumed his role in the divine succession. But viewed in a less exalted manner, Waldstein's words are rather clumsy and uncharitable, if not meaningless. The idea of Beethoven becoming the second Mozart had been a long-held one, dashed by Mozart's premature death the previous December. However, the notion that his genius was now embodied in the unsuitable Haydn is awkward: Haydn as a mere conduit, or the keeper of the flame, does that com-

poser's contemporary reputation scant justice, as Waldstein's contradictory 'inexhaustible' suggests. He never intended that these thoughts be quoted and they were not written as a testimonial or a letter of introduction; conceived quickly, they were merely meant to encourage the young Beethoven on his travels.

The *Stammbuch* reveals the affection in which Beethoven was held and the hopes that were entertained for his future. In musical terms this was highly promising. As a pupil of Haydn he was to go to Vienna and from there to London; meanwhile his position at court was to be kept open for his eventual return. Political events, however, were already threatening the very existence of the electoral court. The idyll of Beethoven's youth had come to an end. He was never to return to Bonn.