Hershey Felder, 
Beethoven
Written & Performed by 
Hershey Felder 
Directed by 
Joel Zwick
Feb. 21 - March 24, 2019 
on the Lyceum Stage
San Diego’s beloved artist, Hershey Felder, returns with his latest smash hit celebrating the world’s greatest composer, Beethoven.

“A hypnotic production...a chamber music piece of exquisite beauty.” – Chicago Sun-Times

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This In Depth Guide was prepared by Joel Castellaw,
edited by Literary Manager Danielle Ward.
Cover Art by Studio Conover.

San Diego Repertory Theatre would like to thank and acknowledge the following
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Culture, San Diego County and The National Endowment for the Arts.
WE ARE EXCITED TO...

have the incomparable Hershey Felder performing again on our stage, this time with the music of Beethoven. We are honored to continue our work with Hershey Felder’s production company, Hershey Felder Presents, along with director Joel Zwick and a host of talented designers.

Hershey Felder has mesmerized our audiences as Leonard Bernstein as well as Irving Berlin. He premiered Our Great Tchaikovsky in our 42nd season to great success. He adapted The Children of Willesden Lane—written by Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen—directing the award-winning concert pianist, Golabek, in her one-woman show. Each unique piece offered a magnificent theatrical experience, and we can’t wait to experience Hershey Felder, Beethoven.

Beethoven has been quoted as saying, “Don’t only practice your art, but force your way into its secrets, for it and knowledge can raise men to the divine.”

It’s as if this statement was written with Hershey Felder in mind. His way of getting inside of the music and laying bare its creator is astounding. He has created an art-form all his own. And, if you read about his process on pages 21-22 of this Curious Report, you will see just how precisely he crafts story and song into its own symphony.

You will see that Felder doesn’t just practice his art, he perfects it. His has an incredible dedication and work ethic. Quality is paramount; every element, every note, every line is finely tuned towards a fully realized story that transports the audience through music that strikes deep in our soul.

“I suppose you could call me an auteur,” Felder says, summing up. “But I create and produce my own shows because the only thing I care about is quality. It’s not about ego—it’s about responsibility. I have to keep my promise to the audience.”

We promise you are in for a treat!

The mission of San Diego Repertory Theatre is to produce intimate, exotic, provocative theatre. We promote a more inclusive community through vivid works that nourish progressive political and social values and celebrate the multiple voices of our region. San Diego Repertory Theatre feeds the curious soul.
INTERESTING TIDBITS

The Beethoven Broadwood piano was owned by Franz Liszt sometime after Beethoven’s death. Liszt donated it to the Hungarian National Museum in 1874. It was restored in the early 1990s in a process that took great care to use period-appropriate restoration techniques and to do nothing to the instrument that would not be reversible. Subsequent to the restoration, pianist Melvyn Tan was allowed to take the piano on a concert tour in 1992, and EMI Classics released a landmark album of Tan playing the Beethoven Broadwood the same year (CDC 7 54526 2). To hear what Beethoven’s piano sounded like, samples are available online along with a video about the restoration process at the Period Piano Company website: [https://periodpiano.com/restoration-of-beethovens-piano/](https://periodpiano.com/restoration-of-beethovens-piano/)

Beethoven’s skill in improvising on the piano was much admired. He once engaged in an improvisational “duel” with a rival pianist, Daniel Steibelt, riffing on a piece of Steibelt’s sheet music that Beethoven actually placed upside-down on his music rack. Beginning with a theme that he first hammered out with just one finger, he developed an improvisation that dazzled onlookers while simultaneously ridiculing Steibelt’s music. Beethoven left his rival feeling so humiliated and out-classed that Steibelt refused to even be in the same company as Beethoven ever again.

Beethoven was the first musician ever to be given a salary just for composing whatever and whenever he wanted.

Beethoven’s death was followed by great mourning in Germany. Around 20,000 people attended his funeral in 1827.

Beethoven was mostly attracted to unobtainable women who were either outside of his social class or who were already married.

Beethoven’s music has influenced culture outside of the world of classical music. A disco version of his Fifth Symphony is featured in the film *Saturday Night Fever*. “Ode to Joy” from his Ninth Symphony is the melody for the anthem of the EU. His Seventh Symphony was used in the film “The King’s Speech.”

Beethoven really enjoyed a drink. Once, while stumbling drunk through town, he was mistaken for a tramp and arrested by a policeman who didn’t recognize him.
For musicians in late 18th and early 19th century Europe, there was no greater city for artistic expression than Vienna. The Austrian city became the creative epicenter for some of the most renowned composers of the classical era: Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Schubert and Ludwig van Beethoven. While composers and musicians had traditionally relied on support from the aristocracy and the church, public concerts became a new phenomenon at this time as an appreciation of music spread to a rising bourgeoisie, opening the doors to new opportunities for composers. Although Italian musicians still dominated in the performance of opera, Vienna and the surrounding Austrian empire gave rise to a new school called the “Viennese Classical Style.”

Aside from opera and church music, the most popular forms of music in the period around 1760 were the symphony, the string quartet, the string trio, the piano trio and the piano concerto. The Viennese became particularly enamored with the piano, and ahead of other cities in Europe, the newer fortepiano soon eclipsed the harpsichord in popularity.

Beginning with Haydn, the Viennese Classical composers began to experiment with contrapuntal patterns and strong opening themes, striving to create an overall impression of balance and proportion. The emphasis on formal structure and clarity produced a more compact sound and a departure from the ornamentation and vocal frills of the earlier Baroque era.

Although Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven each called Vienna home, they were brought together in just a few instances. Schubert and Beethoven had friends in common, and Beethoven in his last days was especially pleased to receive a gift of Schubert’s songs, yet it is believed the two never met. Following Beethoven’s death, Schubert joined the musicians who walked beside Beethoven’s coffin as it was carried through the streets. Regardless of their differences in temperament and approach to their work, these Viennese Classical composers brought profound changes to instrumental music through their innovations and the search for new avenues of expression.

The music scholar, H.C. Robbins Landon writes, “It is no accident that many of us look back upon the Viennese Classical Era with the same nostalgia which the Renaissance man felt for the glories of ancient Greece - when art could flourish and reach an apex of perfection that it has scarcely ever approached since.”
The term “Classical Music” is commonly used to refer to virtually all music written in the European tradition from as early as the 1400s, all the way through 1800s, as well as 20th and 21st century music that uses orchestral forces and/or the instruments of the orchestra. In truth, however, what we tend to regard as classical music encompasses a large number of different forms and styles – including Renaissance music, polyphony, Baroque music, Romantic music, chromaticism, serialism, minimalism and more. Musicologists, however, use the term “Classical” to refer to a distinct and relatively narrow era.

Beginning around 1750, the music of the Classical Period was characterized by an emphasis on melody, advancements in the development of instruments, the expansion of the size of the orchestra, and the emergence of the string quartet. Haydn and Mozart are two of the most important figures of the Classical Period. Musicologists generally place the end of the Classical Period around 1830, when it yielded to the Romantic Period, which places greater emphasis on expressivity and inventiveness.

Although Beethoven’s life and career as a composer sit squarely within the years of the Classical Period, he is sometimes viewed as a transitional figure – both late-Classical and early-Romantic. His musical style and innovations included:

- The development of more complex and extended structures within works such as the concerto, symphony and sonata.
- A greater use of the juxtaposition of different keys and notes, which lends a sense of vastness and drama to his music.
- The expansion of the development section of a movement in a sonata, symphony, or concerto so that this section became the heart of any given work. This is in contrast to Haydn, for example, who gave the exposition, or initial establishment of a work’s theme, the most weight.
- Continued expansion of the size of the orchestra, especially giving greater weight to violas and cellos. These changes lowered the tonal center of his music, resulting in a heavier and darker feel.
Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, which premiered in 1808, is perhaps the work that best exemplifies Beethoven’s status as the transitional figure from the Classical to the Romantic. The characteristics and innovations noted above are all present in this work, particularly the use of cyclic form. But it’s the overall impact of these various innovations working together to create an expressive effect that truly makes this symphony, to some, the first great Romantic composition. As Tom Service noted in The Guardian, “Beethoven's contemporary ETA Hoffmann wrote in 1813 that the Fifth incarnated the romantic axiom that orchestral music, untethered to words or other worldly concepts, could glimpse ‘the realm of the infinite.' This symphony, Hoffman wrote, ‘sets in motion the machinery of awe, of fear, of terror, of pain, and awakens that infinite yearning which is the essence of romanticism.’"

The pile of hand-copied performing parts used in the premiere of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. They include corrections hand-entered by the composer. The parts are currently kept on view in the museum of the Lobkowitz family in their former palace in Prague.
3: “MORE SOUND!”

One of the most lasting legacies of Beethoven’s work is the influence it had on the development of his primary instrument – the piano. Today we listen to Beethoven’s piano concerti and his sonatas, as well as those of his predecessors such as Mozart, on modern concert grand pianos, not often realizing that the instrument that Beethoven composed and played on was strikingly different from the one we are used to listening to today.

The piano evolved from the harpsichord, which was the queen of instruments in Europe throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. The action of a harpsichord is a plucking mechanism, and the sound produced by the harpsichord’s strings is similar to that of the harp and the lute. The harpsichord produces dazzling articulation of individual notes, but the musician playing this instrument has no control over volume or the duration of the notes. Responding to a desire for more control, Bartolomeo Cristofori invented the fortepiano – the precursor to the modern piano—around 1700, while under the patronage of the Medici family in Florence. Unlike the plucked string of the harpsichord, the hammered string of the fortepiano allows the performer to express subtle variations in volume. Its name, ‘fortepiano,’ means ‘loud-soft.’ Today, only three Cristofori fortepianos survive. Although it was a significant advancement from the harpsichord, Cristofori’s fortepiano had only a four-octave range and a much smaller voice than our modern pianos. The fortepiano evolved slowly throughout most of the 18th century, and then changed much more rapidly from the 1790s to the mid-19th century. Much of this rapid evolution coincided with Beethoven’s career as a performer and composer. Jan Swafford, writing in The Guardian in 2003, argued that Beethoven’s performance and compositional demands exerted a great deal of influence on how piano makers improved the instrument.

We don’t entirely know what sort of pianos Beethoven played in his teenage years as a theatre and court pianist in Bonn in the 1780s. The range had increased by now to five octaves, but the instrument still looked much more like a harpsichord than the modern piano. The tone was lighter and clearer than today’s pianos, but they had a more noticeable “thunk” when hammer met string.
In his years as Vienna's hot young virtuoso, Beethoven was impatient with the local piano-makers. To one of them, Streicher, he wrote: ‘The pianoforte is still the least studied and developed of all instruments; often one thinks that one is merely listening to a harp.’ In a period of rapid evolution, Beethoven nudged the makers: More sound! More durability! More high notes! At times he would write his music right up to the available top note, then with a kind of audible disgust fall back. By 1800, the range of new instruments had increased to six octaves—perhaps due to the demands Beethoven made on the instrument through his compositions.

What Beethoven wanted from his own instrument was a huge range of volume and a range of attack, from a flowing legato to incisive staccatos. On the page he used a profusion of performance indications: directions for both pedals including half-pedal effects, several kinds of staccato, a variety of volume and note-attack indications that often serve, in practice, to juxtapose tenderness and violence. He wanted comedy, tragedy, and everything between. He played so fiercely that he once cracked a pianoforte in half with his power chords.

After 1803, Beethoven used a French piano by Erard. He wanted a more robust-sounding instrument than the Viennese ones, he wanted the piano with the biggest range, and he liked the Erard's pedals. But by 1813 Beethoven had had it with the Erard: 'My French piano is... quite useless,' he wrote. And by the mid-1810s, as deafness encroached... visitors found his pianos had strings shredded by his frantic pounding in a desperation to hear.

In 1818, he received a new piano as a gift from the Broadwood company, the leading piano manufacturer in England. On hearing of Broadwood's gift, Beethoven wrote:

*My dearest friend Broadwood, I have never felt a greater pleasure than that given me by the anticipation of the arrival of this piano, with which you are honoring me as a present. I shall regard it as an altar on which I shall place my spirit’s most beautiful offerings to the divine Apollo.*

The piano (serial #7362) features the English grand action, and has a six octave keyboard. Broadwood pianos were much stronger than Viennese instruments and consequently allowed a much greater string tension. This gave them the distinct and more powerful sound demanded by [Beethoven and other pianists] of the time.

To generate as much volume as possible, he played the piano with great force... Beethoven cherished the [Broadwood] piano, and he used it to write many of his later works including the sonata ‘Hammerklavier’ (op.106). He showed it off to his friends and continued to use it even after he received a more modern Viennese piano from Conrad Graf in 1826, the year before his death.

Although Beethoven’s Broadwood piano was perhaps the most advanced of its day, it would still take another three decades or so after Beethoven’s death for the piano to develop fully into the instrument that we know today.

This article was excerpted from Jan Swafford’s article, “More Sound!” published in The Guardian, 14 March 2003, with supplementary material from Nicholas Giordano’s “The Invention and Evolution of the Piano,” (Acoustics Today, Jan. 2016), David Crombie’s “Beethoven’s Broadwood Bicentenary: 1818-2018” World Piano News, 10 May 2018), and information from the Schubert Club Museum. Excerpt prepared by Joel Castellaw.
One of the most tragic aspects of Beethoven’s history is his deafness. Today we understand that deafness doesn’t have to be a tragedy, but Beethoven certainly experienced it as one. He began showing the first signs of deafness—difficulty hearing high-pitched tones—in 1796 when he was just twenty-five years old. Four years later, he composed his First Symphony and the piano sonata “Pathétique” (Op. 13 in C minor). The following year he began complaining of buzzing in his ears, and it is estimated that he had lost 60% of this hearing by this time. The next year, in 1802 at the age of thirty-one, he wrote a letter to his brothers Carl and Johann, which has come to be referred to as the Heiligenstadt Testament. In this letter, which was kept secret until after his death, he lamented his loss of hearing and the impact it had not only on his life as a musician, but also on his life in society. The letter is heart wrenching in its despair, but it also affirms that, in spite of his deafness, Beethoven felt compelled to continue composing and to bring forth all that he felt was within him.

In the years after this letter, Beethoven composed seven of his nine symphonies, two of his five piano concerti, his opera Fidelio and such piano sonatas as the “Appassionata” (Op. 57 in F minor) and the “Hammerklavier” (Op. 106 in B flat). He made his last public appearance as a pianist in 1814, twelve years after the Heiligenstadt Testament. Two years later he began using ear trumpets, the best technology available at the time to assist the deaf and hard-of-hearing. In 1818 he began using Conversation Books to have written conversations with friends. By 1823 he reported that he was totally deaf, although there is some evidence that he was completely deaf earlier than this, perhaps as early as 1816. Yet his output as a composer continued, and some of his greatest accomplishments were achieved after 1823, including the Diabelli Variations, the Ninth Symphony, the Missa Solemnis and the Late String Quartets (Op. 127, 130, 131, 132, 133, and 135).

Audiologist Robert Traynor explored the manifestations and causes of Beethoven’s deafness, as well as the evidence regarding how Beethoven managed to continue to compose while deaf, in a pair of articles in the journal Hearing: Health & Technology Matters in 2011. According to Traynor, Beethoven suffered from tinnitus (ringing in the ears), difficulty recognizing words, trouble hearing high frequency sounds and buzzing sounds in the ears. Traynor summarized several sources on the potential causes of Beethoven’s deafness, including the conclusions of Dr. Johann Wagner, who conducted Beethoven’s autopsy in 1827, as well as studies by the Conference of the French Academy of Sciences in 1928 and the Royal College of Surgeons in 2006. Traynor summed up these and other studies this way:
[The] cause of Beethoven’s deafness is essentially unknown, as is the case with many instances of deafness today. Lack of knowledge has not prevented the growth of an extensive literature in which various causes of Beethoven’s condition have been advanced with varying degrees of certitude. Putative diagnoses have ranged from syphilis, otosclerosis, neuronal atrophy, proliferative meningitis, labyrinthitis, chronic adhesive middle ear catarrh, Paget’s disease of bone, otitis media, neuritis acoustica, and hyperparathyroidism. On autopsy, his Eustachian tube was narrowed and the auditory nerves were atrophied. The latter finding confirms that he had nerve deafness, but does not indicate what caused it. Although the arteries to the ear were narrowed, vascular insufficiency would have produced middle ear deafness rather than nerve deafness (high tone loss).

Traynor also suggests that, whatever the cause might have been, Beethoven would have been a difficult patient. Traynor notes that musicians who face hearing loss “respond to a different beat and still are among the toughest clinical patients.”

So how is it that Beethoven was able to continue to compose, even as his hearing loss worsened from the age of twenty-five on? In an 1801 letter to his friend Karl Amenda, Beethoven had lamented his hearing loss, sharing that “my noblest faculty, my hearing, has greatly deteriorated.” But then he wrote, “Of course, I am resolved to rise above every obstacle, but how will it be possible?” Traynor explains how: the skills necessary—the ability to read music and to “hear” within what appeared on the page—were firmly established by the time Beethoven’s descent into deafness began. There is even speculation that, because he wasn’t able to listen to the music being written by other composers, he was at a particular advantage for the maintenance and development of a unique, distinct compositional style. Nonetheless, Beethoven was frustrated, depressed, at times manic over the impact of his condition. He yearned so desperately to hear his compositions that he tried a variety of methods to connect physically with his instruments. He sawed the legs off of pianos so that he could feel the resonances more fully through the wooden floors that the amputated pianos rested on. He tried holding a stick in his teeth and resting the stick against the keyboard of his piano, hoping to stimulate vibrations in his ears. There are stories of him writing strange compositions made entirely of low-range notes when he first began losing his ability to hear tones at the top of the register.

Not only was he unable to hear his music, he was also unable to hear the response of his audiences. When his Ninth Symphony premiered in 1824, he was onstage for the first time in twelve years. Although he did not conduct the symphony himself, he was present to give directions to the conductor, Michael Umlauf. Still facing the orchestra and soloists at the conclusion of the performance, he was oblivious to the response of the crowd. Alto soloist Caroline Unger reportedly took Beethoven’s arm and turned him to face the audience. Though he could not hear their thunderous applause, he could see their faces and their wild clapping. The composer bowed deeply to the concertgoers, and then he began to cry.
In April 1802, Ludwig van Beethoven left Vienna for Heiligenstadt, a village about five miles to the north. In the preceding weeks, he had been deeply depressed by the realization that he was going deaf; but there, surrounded by nature, he recovered his spirits and found a new sense of musical purpose. Wandering through the countryside, sketchbook in hand, he began toying with a theme in E flat major. Before long, he had the outlines of a completely new symphony—his third—clear in his mind. Though inspired by some of his earlier works, especially the so-called Eroica Variations (Op. 35,) it was unlike anything he had written before. Vast in scope and strikingly original in style, it was bold, daring, even triumphalist.

While Beethoven was laboring over the score, he decided to name the symphony after Napoleon Bonaparte, then First Consul of France. Beethoven had the highest esteem for Napoleon and compared him to the greatest consuls of ancient Rome. Beethoven’s enthusiasm for Bonaparte was unflinching. As soon as the score was finished, in early 1804, he wrote the Italian words “Sinfonia intitolata Bonaparte” (“Symphony entitled Bonaparte”) on the cover and left the manuscript on a table so that all his friends could see.

But Beethoven was in for a nasty surprise. Not long after Beethoven put the final touches to his symphony, on May 18th, 1804, Napoleon had declared himself Emperor of France. This infuriated Beethoven, and he immediately changed the dedication. Thenceforth, the work would be known simply as the Sinfonia Eroica (the “Heroic” Symphony.)

This episode has become the stuff of legend, giving rise to an abiding image of Beethoven as a lover of liberty, an admirer of the French Revolution and—above all—a republican. It is often thought that, having once admired Napoleon as the apotheosis of revolutionary principles, the composer, true to his republican beliefs, later reviled him for sacrificing them to his own ambition and, after removing the Third Symphony’s original title, held the name Bonaparte in contempt ever after.

But it would be dangerous to accept this unquestioningly. On closer examination, Beethoven’s relationship with Napoleon appears to have been more subtle than some suggest. As a young man, he was, admittedly, attracted by the ideals of the French Revolution. At the age of 19, he subscribed to a book of Jacobin poetry by Eulogius Schneider and, in the years that followed, peppered his writings with revolutionary sentiments. He often expressed his disdain for organized religion and rarely missed an opportunity to mock the superstitious nonsense peddled by “parsons.”
When Beethoven moved to Vienna to study with Haydn, he carried these views with him. On May 22nd, 1793 he wrote in his *Albumblatt* that he still loved liberty above all things. As he began to forge a career as a composer in his own right, however, his democratic fervor started to abate. Welcomed into the salons of the Viennese nobility, he adapted himself to the tastes of his patrons. He put on aristocratic airs, claimed descent from an old baronial family and—for a time—even adopted the nobiliary particle “von.” He also became more conservative in his outlook. Though he remained a passionate defender of liberty and of secularism, he now came to believe that the French Revolution may have gone too far. Like so many of his noble friends, he looked back on the Reign of Terror with horror. He was still not a monarchist; but he was no longer a militant republican either.

It was thus that Beethoven came to admire Napoleon. He was under no illusions; he knew perfectly well that, as First Consul, Napoleon was already trampling on revolutionary principles and he was still enough of a Romantic idealist to grumble about it. On April 8th, 1802, for example, Beethoven wrote to his publisher, Franz Anton Hofmeister, to express his disappointment that Napoleon had concluded a concordat with the pope and thereby shattered his hopes for the separation of Church and state. But Beethoven nevertheless saw Napoleon as a necessary corrective for the excesses of the Revolution. In keeping with his new-found conservatism, he lavished praise on the Consul for producing political order out of chaos and for safeguarding the people from themselves. It was for this reason that Beethoven had Napoleon in mind when he was writing his Third Symphony.

It was only after Napoleon crushed Austria in the War of the Fifth Coalition (1809) that Beethoven’s enthusiasm began to cool noticeably. Shaken by the French bombardment of Vienna and fearful of being professionally compromised by his association with the Bonapartes, he felt obliged to repudiate Napoleon for the first time. There was no looking back. As the emperor ranged across Europe, it became difficult for Beethoven to regard him with anything but contempt. No friend to liberty or to order, he was now little more than a conqueror. Though Austria was forced to ally with France for a time, opinion in Vienna remained firmly against him.

Napoleon’s defeat in the Peninsular War set the seal on the composer’s change of heart. Shortly before the emperor sailed away into exile on Elba, Beethoven—who now identified liberty with Germanic patriotism—professed himself to be on the side of the allies and even penned a short orchestral work in celebration of Wellington’s victory at the Battle of Vitoria. The breach was complete.

The music of the Eroica Symphony is perhaps the most revolutionary composition Beethoven had written up to this time. The first movement is characterized by considerable shifts in themes, tempo, and harmony, and the length of this movement was unprecedented in its day. The second movement is a funeral march. The third movement scherzo shifts the tone to something more mirthful—which confused commentators at the premiere. Most innovative of all is the finale, in which the theme emerges slowly through an unusual set of variations. Beethoven based this theme on his ballet music for The Creatures of Prometheus. Lewis Lockwood has observed that the finale was conceived of first, and the rest of the composition flowed from this conception. As Christopher Gibbs writes:

“It seems natural that Beethoven would be attracted to, or perhaps we should say, identify with, Prometheus, the rebellious Greek Titan who incurred the wrath of the gods of Mount Olympus by stealing their sacred fire. Prometheus resisted, took risks, and suffered in order to help humanity. The hero's music provides a fitting conclusion for this "Heroic" Symphony.”
6: **LOCKS OF LOVE**
by Joel Castellaw

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe, as well as here in the United States, it was common for people to keep locks of hair from loved ones as mementos and keepsakes. These locks could commemorate someone’s life, be given as a token of friendship or love, or serve as a tangible reminder of someone who has died. Hair does not decompose. So for some, the locks symbolized the aspiration for eternal life. These locks of hair were sometimes pressed between the pages of family papers. They were fashioned into jewelry, some of which was quite elaborate. A common method of preservation was to place the hair into a locket.

Upon his death, a strand of Beethoven’s hair came into the possession of composer Ferdinand Hiller. The Beethoven Center at San Jose State University currently houses this lock of Beethoven’s hair. Known as the “Guevara Lock” because most of the money paid for it at auction came from Dr. Alfredo Guevara, it comprises 582 strands of hair, three to six inches in length. Some of the strands are brown, some are white, and some are grey. The Beethoven Center website describes the provenance of the lock and locket that contains it:

“The original provenance of the lock of hair is clear from an inscription written on the back of the frame of the locket: ‘This hair was cut off of Beethoven's corpse by my father, Dr. Ferdinand V. Hiller, on the day after Ludwig van Beethoven’s death, that is, on 27 March 1827, and was given to me as a birthday present in Cologne on May 1, 1883. Paul Hiller’ [English translation].

“Ferdinand Hiller was a German conductor and teacher who traveled to Vienna in 1827 at the age of fifteen to visit the dying Beethoven. Hiller later wrote down details of two of his visits (March 13 and 20), including the fact that during the March 20 visit Beethoven whispered, ‘I rather think I shall soon be setting out on the upward journey.’ The lock of hair stayed in the Hiller family until sometime in the 20th century. It next surfaced in 1943 when it was given to a Danish doctor named Kay Alexander Fremming as payment for providing medical treatment for Jews trying to escape from the Nazis. The lock of hair stayed in the Fremming family until it was sold at auction at Sotheby’s in December 1994.

“When the frame was opened in 1995, a fragment of paper with writing on one side, backed by a French newspaper, was discovered. We believe this to be a piece of the original authentication document, possibly in the hand of Ferdinand Hiller. Although not much of the text remains, you can make out the words ‘Beethovens’ and ‘abgeschnitten’ (‘cut off’).
“Also found inside was a statement by Hermann Grosshennig, a restorer of art objects in Cologne, who in 1911 examined and reframed the hair. He notes that the hair was newly sealed to keep it dust free (‘neu beklebt damit staubfrei’) and maintained in its original state (‘Urzustand erhalten’). On the back of his document is a pencil drawing of how the hair was to be coiled inside the frame.”

Here is a timeline of the provenance of the lock of hair:

**March 27, 1827**  
Cut from Beethoven's head by Ferdinand Hiller the day after Beethoven's death.

**May 1, 1883**  
Given to Hiller's son Paul as a birthday gift.

**1911**  
Examined by a conservator in Cologne and resealed in a locket with a wooden frame, with Paul Hiller's inscription placed underneath the glass backing.

**? - Oct. 1943**  
Property of an unknown Jew, possibly a member of the Hiller family.

**Oct. 1943**  
Given to Dr. Kay Alexander Fremming, a doctor living in Gilleleje, Denmark, as payment or as a gift for his assistance to Danish Jews escaping to safety in Sweden during World War II.

**Dec. 1, 1994**  
Sold by the Fremming family at a Sotheby's auction in London to four members of the American Beethoven Society (Ira F. Brilliant, Caroline Crummey, Alfredo Guevara, and Thomas Wendel) for £3,600 (about $7,300).

**Dec. 1995**  
Under laboratory conditions, the locket is opened and 160 of the 582 hairs are extracted for Guevara to keep. Also found inside the locket is a fragment of the original authentication document and the conservator's statement from 1911.

**1996**  
The remaining 422 strands, along with the frame and documents from inside the locket, go to the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies. Scientific testing begins on a few strands from Guevara's share of the hair.

**October 17, 2000**  
The book *Beethoven's Hair* by Russell Martin is published by Broadway Books. Results of scientific testing are announced.

**2005**  
A film version of the book *Beethoven's Hair*, by Thomas Wallner and Larry Weinstein, is released by Rhombus Media.

**2007**  
The Guevara Lock of Hair is placed on permanent exhibit at the Beethoven Center.

**2015**  
Strands sent for testing in the Beethoven Genome project. Testing of the lock of hair reveals high levels of lead and contributes to speculation that the cause of Beethoven's death was chronic lead poisoning.
We do not know exactly when Beethoven started his musical training, but by the age of six his instruction had progressed rapidly under the strict guidance of his father Johann, who made his living as a court singer and private music tutor. Family friends recounted seeing little Ludwig practicing for long hours, sometimes standing on a footstool in front of the keyboard instrument. Despite the severity of his early training, Beethoven’s natural talent and inclination for music shined through the drudgery. By the age of seven he was performing in public on the “clavier,” a word used to describe either the clavichord, harpsichord, or fortepiano.

Beethoven’s father took him out of school before he turned eleven and made the path to a professional musical career his son’s full-time pursuit. He engaged several other teachers to instruct Ludwig. The court organist Gilles van der Eeden gave him lessons on the fortepiano as well as the organ and thoroughbass (a method of improvising harmony from a figured bass line). For lessons in composition and music theory, Beethoven turned to Christian Gottlob Neefe, who succeeded van der Eeden as the court organist. Young Ludwig was appointed Neefe’s assistant in 1784, just before he turned 14.

Beethoven’s duties as a court musician were considerable. He played organ at the court and assisted Neefe at the Minorite Church. Whenever Neefe was away for an extended period, Beethoven also served as the rehearsal fortepianist at the theater and sometimes played viola in the orchestra. He did find some time to exercise his creative energy by composing music. By the age of twelve he had composed a set of variations and three sonatas for fortepiano. With these compositions, Beethoven transferred his skill on the keyboard to the printed page. He also composed two small pieces published in the collection, Anthology for Keyboard Lovers, intended for the amateur musician.

The first published notice of Beethoven, written by his teacher Neefe, appeared in a German music magazine when Beethoven was twelve:

“He [Beethoven] plays the keyboard skillfully and powerfully, sight-reads very well, and plays The Well-Tempered Clavier of Sebastian Bach. Whoever knows this collection of preludes and fugues in all keys (which one could call the non plus ultra) will know what that means. This young genius deserves the support to enable him to travel. He would certainly become a second Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart if he were to continue to progress as he has begun.”

According to reminiscences, Beethoven did visit Mozart in 1787, and Mozart requested that the fortepianist play something for him. Mozart, assuming that what Beethoven had played was a carefully prepared show-piece, praised it in a somewhat cool manner. Beethoven, observing Mozart’s tone, begged Mozart for a theme on which to improvise, one of Beethoven’s greatest musical gifts. Beethoven improvised in such a style that Mozart, who paid more and more attention and interest as Beethoven proceeded, finally went to some friends in the adjoining room and excitedly exclaimed, “Keep your eyes on him. Some day he will give the world something to talk about.”
In 1790 in Bonn, Beethoven met Joseph Haydn for the first time and showed him the manuscript for his latest composition, a funeral cantata for Joseph II. Haydn was sufficiently impressed and encouraged Beethoven to continue his studies in Vienna. After Beethoven’s arrival there in 1792, he worked not only with Haydn but with several others including Johann Baptist Schenk, Emanuel Aloys Förster, Anton Salieri, and Johann Albrechtsberger.

You may recognize Salieri’s name from the play (and movie) *Amadeus*, in which he is the bitter rival of Mozart and instrument of Mozart’s untimely death. In truth, Salieri was a prominent and respected court musician, teacher, and composer of numerous operas whom Beethoven turned to for instruction in vocal composition. Salieri was also a leader of the Tonkünstler-Society and conducted the orchestra for Beethoven’s first public appearance in Vienna, in which Beethoven performed as a soloist for one of his own concertos. Beethoven expressed his respect for Salieri by dedicating his first three Sonatas for Violin and Fortepiano, Opus 12, to this teacher.

Beethoven’s most famous pupil, Carl Czerny, is perhaps best known today to piano students the world over as the composer of keyboard studies designed to develop advanced skills. By the time he was ten, Czerny had already made his public debut and could play many of the works of Mozart and Clementi from memory. Beethoven heard him play his own “Pathétique” Sonata and immediately offered to give him lessons. Carl later described these lessons in detail, recalling how Beethoven had him practice scales in all keys and exercises from the keyboard method book by C.P.E. Bach. Although the lessons did not continue regularly or for an extended period, Czerny became a lifelong friend and a champion of Beethoven’s music. He transcribed many of Beethoven’s orchestral works (including all nine of the symphonies) for fortepiano duet. His commentary on the interpretation of Beethoven’s piano sonatas, was published in his *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano School* in 1839.

Czerny transmitted his knowledge and appreciation of Beethoven’s music to his pupil Franz Liszt, who studied fortepiano with him after the family moved to Vienna in 1822, when Liszt was 10. Czerny took his pupil to meet Beethoven, and the “little Liszt” wrote in Beethoven’s conversation book inviting him to attend his concert on April 13, 1823. Many years later, Liszt recounted that after the concert Beethoven praised his excellent performance by bestowing a “consecration kiss.” Scholars still argue about whether the story is true. However, there is no doubt that Liszt held a special reverence for Beethoven’s music and was a major influence in making it better known to nineteenth-century audiences. His edition of Beethoven’s sonatas was first published in 1857, and he transcribed all of Beethoven’s symphonies and several other works for solo fortepiano. Among his many philanthropic activities was his very generous financial support and fund-raising for the Beethoven monuments in Bonn (erected in 1845) and Vienna (erected in 1880). He was also responsible for the initial preservation of Beethoven’s Broadwood piano after Beethoven’s death, eventually gifting it to the Hungarian National Museum, where it resides to this day.
In one sense, Felder’s piece is about ghosts, which of course conjures images of graveyards. Beethoven is buried in the Weiner Zentralfriedhof, or Central Vienna Cemetery. At 2.5 million square meters, or about 620 acres, and with over 300,000 graves and crypts containing the remains of more than 3 million persons, it is one of the largest cemeteries in the world. It is so large that it has its own railway station, as well as a bus service inside the cemetery.

It is a working cemetery, not a tourist attraction, but it does have a special section called the Ehrengräber (Honorary Graves) devoted to famous personages. It is in this section of the cemetery that Beethoven’s grave can be found.

Beethoven’s grave is a fitting monument to the composer.
Among the other notable composers buried there are Franz Schubert (died 1828), Johannes Brahms (died 1897), Johann Strauss, Jr. (died 1899) and Arnold Schoenberg (died 1951).

The Ehrengräber contains a memorial to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (died 1791), although his actual grave is in another Vienna cemetery—the St. Marx Cemetery. Antonio Salieri (died 1825), a contemporary of Mozart’s and teacher of Beethoven’s, is buried in the Zentralfreidhof, but not in the section of honorary graves.

A memorial to Mozart is flanked by the graves of Beethoven and Schubert. Even if Beethoven was somewhat antisocial in life (perhaps due in part to his deafness, but also a result of his temperament), in death it seems as though he’s keeping good company.
It takes a tremendous amount of skill to keep an audience interested—especially if you’re the only one performing. You have to be funny, compelling, creative, exciting enough to keep people watching and more. In order to craft a rousing one-person performance, the performer has to be more than themselves. They have to be several people, or at least several versions of a person. They’ve got to be all over the place—literally and figuratively—because in theater we crave movement, progression, change, action. So, why do we choose to watch a one-person show instead of watching a Netflix original series with a cast of our favorite actors or go to a big production musical?

- The performer is empowering to their viewers, reminding us of what just one person can do.
- They’re impressive. In a monodrama, for example, to see an actor who’s memorized an entire hour or two of text—along with the capacity of being able to play 30 different characters—is simply amazing. It’s not something the average person, even the average actor, can easily do.
- They’re immersive. The audience agrees to invest in the performer and nothing else. We promise to hear them out and support them from the beginning to the end. Somewhere along the way we, as people in the audience, grow. Our commitment to this person has brought us to become smarter, more virtuous or somehow just better people.

**Some History on the One-Person Show sampled from Paula T. Alekson’s, “A Cast of One”**

The American one-person show found its roots in the “platform performances” of the late nineteenth century, in which authors, public speakers, and actors “masquerading” as professional elocutionists gave readings or recitations from published works of literature to polite audiences for their cultivation and edification. These events were purposely held in non-theatrical venues as a way to distinguish them from theater entertainments (such as vaudeville), which, were still regarded as immoral amusements created by sinful and degenerate individuals. The lecture, Lyceum, and Chautauqua circuits featured American platform personalities such as Edgar Allen Poe, Henry David Thoreau, Alexander Graham Bell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Daniel Webster, Anna Cora Mowatt and Charlotte Cushman. When Charles Dickens toured both Great Britain and America reading excerpts from his various works, he caused a sensation by embodying his numerous and diverse characters as he read. Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens) spent much of his non-writing career appearing on the platform as lecturer and humorist, and he perfected a presentational technique which transformed his literature into performance texts. Lectures and readings eventually metamorphosed into one-person performances on the platform circuit as the focus of the performative material turned from literature to character sketches and monologues written expressly for performance. Eventually one-person showpieces began to appear on both the vaudeville and the legitimate stages, and sketches and monologues gave way to monodramas, or one-character plays. A surge in the number of one-person shows occurred in the American theater in the 1950s and has never really decreased, owing not only to the popularity of the form, but also to its economical nature—a cast of one and, quite often, no set!

**DID YOU KNOW?** Whoopi Goldberg first began to work on her one-woman show material with the founders of The REP at the Sixth Ave Playhouse, later returning to do one-woman fundraisers for us on the Lyceum Stage.
Hedy Weiss, writing in *American Theatre*, introduced her article on Hershey Felder this way:

> When President John F. Kennedy welcomed an audience of Nobel laureates to the White House in 1962, he famously remarked that it was the most extraordinary collection of talent that had ever gathered there, “with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”

That quip easily could be reworked to apply to Hershey Felder: actor, pianist, writer, director, composer, conductor, mentor, producer and conjurer of the spirits of George Gershwin, Frédéric Chopin, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Liszt, Leonard Bernstein and Irving Berlin.

Weiss goes on to credit Felder with having “devised a type of performance that feeds on his unique gifts as a seductive portraitist, compelling storyteller and superb concert pianist. Musical biographies? That doesn’t come close to suggesting what it is Felder does.” If our production of *Beethoven* is your first encounter with Felder’s artistry, you’re in for an amazing experience unlike any other theatre piece you have ever attended. As director Randall Arney puts it, “Hershey does something that no one else does—he has the ability to forge an astonishingly personal, deeply connected relationship with his audience. He can hold an audience at attention, teach them things, bring such nuance to many different characters, then sustain the incredible focus required for playing the most technically demanding music. He is prolific, indefatigable.”

If you have seen Felder’s performances before, it’s likely you’re coming to this one because you have fallen under his spell. You may wonder, with awe, how he manages to conjure the spirits of these composers so completely. How can he create characters, act, perform piano masterworks and engage directly with the audience, doing all of these things simultaneously?

In a talk at Google in 2017 during the run of *Beethoven* at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, Felder describes his process. He explains the difficulty of playing the piano while simultaneously delivering lines, sometimes playing several characters at the same time, and getting the rhythms of the music and the speech rhythms to line up correctly, while also maintaining the distinct vocal characterizations he has created for each of the historical persons being depicted. Referring specifically to a segment of *Beethoven* that centers around the “Moonlight” Sonata, Hershey shares, “The amount that’s going on – the voices going,
three different characters are going, words are going, and playing the Beethoven is quite complicated. The evenness and the color [of the music], and then the voices, so all of that is going on while I’m busy yacking at you, and – worse – I’m looking at you!”

Hershey then illustrates his process by way of analogy. He plays a little bit of music from Bach in which there are multiple keyboard lines, or voices, being played simultaneously, and then extends that technique to what he does onstage in a performance like Beethoven. He tells that he first learns the piano part completely, “You must know the treble, you must know the bass, you must know everything inside the piano part. Then you learn your text. Then you take the text and it needs to be placed exactly as another voice [within the music] – just like Bach, where you have all these voices going in counterpoint. So the voice that I’m speaking actually becomes another voice in the score, and it’s placed exactly at the right place. Then, I have to give you complete, natural inflection, so that even though now I’m acting and talking to you as an actor, the moment I go to the instrument, I have to somehow give the illusion that the actor is still talking or the character is still talking when, in effect, I have turned a completely different system on. I’m talking to you. I look at the keys only when I absolutely need to. So the sound is going on. The story is related to the color of the sound. In my eye, as I am looking at you, I am seeing the score of Beethoven’s page, and the words right exactly where they need to be. But, the craft I have developed to such a degree whereby I am giving you the illusion that that person is actually talking off the fly, right then and there, about those notes. It has taken me twenty-five years to figure out how to do it, and everybody who comes says, ‘Oh, I play the piano and I talk to the audience, I’m going to do this. It’s easy, it’s fun.’ I say, ‘Yeah, give it a shot.’ Because it looks so simple.”

Hershey acknowledges that he is regarded as having invented a new form in creating his theatre pieces about composers, and then he shares, “If I did, that’s great. I hope people follow along and do it and tell these kinds of stories, because they’re important, and audiences want to hear them. And if I’ve learned anything over all these years it’s that what engages people above all is the story as it relates to the human. It’s the story. It’s the human story. Because ultimately what interconnects us are our stories, and if we don’t have that, then we’re simply not human.”
BEETHOVEN TIMELINE

1770
Beethoven born in Bonn

1783
First music published

1787
Travels to Vienna to meet Mozart

1792
Returns to Vienna and begins studying with Haydn

1800
Beethoven’s first benefit concert in Vienna; First Symphony is performed

1801
Beethoven writes of his deafness for the first time in a letter to a friend

1805
The opera Leonore is completed; Later revised and renamed Fidelio

1808
The Fifth and Sixth Symphonies are performed for the first time

1814
Fidelio is performed for the first time

1815
Beethoven’s brother dies; Beethoven seeks custody of his nephew, Karl

1816
Beethoven wins sole custody of Karl

1818
Completes the Hammerklavier Sonata; begins work on Ninth Symphony

1820
Begins work on the Missa Solemnis

1824
The Ninth Symphony and the Missa Solemnis premiere in Vienna

1825-1826
Writes what will turn out to be the last of his string quartets

1827
Beethoven dies in March
1. When you think of Beethoven’s music, what is the first song or set of notes that comes to mind?

2. Beethoven wrote some of his most memorable music after his hearing started to fail—a feat that may seem impossible to some, yet he prevailed. What would you attempt to do if you knew you could pull off a seemingly impossible feat?

3. Beethoven suffered from a variety of chronic illnesses—colitis, rheumatism, typhus, abscesses, jaundice and chronic hepatitis, just to name a few—which likely contributed to his being ill-tempered and antisocial. How do you think you would respond to living with chronic illness?

4. Was there someone that you looked up to in your youth that was inspirational to you? If so, who and why?

5. If you could sit down and talk with one person from music history who is no longer living, who would you choose and why?