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Hi everyone, and welcome back to Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast where we explore the stories behind classical music, one composer at a time. I'm your host, Carly Seifert, creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm so glad you're here today.

Okay, I have to make a confession before we even get started.

We have talked about Beethoven on this podcast before. Way back in Episode 12, we spent a whole episode diving into his nine symphonies. We've mentioned him in passing more times than I can count. And yet, somehow, in all this time, I have never given this man a full episode dedicated to his actual life story.

Friends, that is a tragedy of epic proportions. (Beethoven would appreciate the drama of that statement, I think.)

So today, we're fixing it. This is the story of Ludwig van Beethoven — not just the music, but the man behind it, because honestly, his life is filled with remarkable stories.

Before we get into it, I've made a playlist linked in the show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/187. It'll walk you through some of Beethoven's music over the next two weeks until our next episode airs.

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in December of 1770, in a small town in Germany called Bonn. His father, Johann, was a musician at the local court, and — I'll be honest with you — not exactly a warm and encouraging music teacher. Johann could see that young Ludwig had talent, and he pushed him hard, hoping to turn him into the next Mozart, who had been a famous child prodigy just a few years earlier.

Some nights, Johann would come home late and wake Ludwig up just to practice at the piano, sometimes until early morning. It wasn't a gentle introduction to music, and as a piano teacher and parent myself, it's hard to imagine a kid going through that. But underneath the harshness, Beethoven really did have an extraordinary gift, and by

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the time he was a teenager, people in Bonn were already taking notice.

When Beethoven was in his early twenties, he moved to Vienna, Austria — which, at the time, was basically the music capital of the world. He went there to study with a composer you might remember from a previous episode: Joseph Haydn, who we talked about back in Episode 17. Beethoven and Haydn didn't always see eye to eye (Beethoven was stubborn, even as a student), but Vienna is where Beethoven truly found his voice as a composer.

Beethoven built a reputation in Vienna as a brilliant pianist and an even more brilliant composer. He was known for his wild, passionate playing style — audiences said he would practically attack the piano with emotion. And then, in his late twenties, something happened that would change the entire course of his life.

Beethoven began to lose his hearing.

Think about that for a second. A musician — one of the greatest musicians who has ever lived — slowly losing the very sense he needed most for his work. It started subtly, with ringing in his ears and difficulty hearing certain sounds, and it got worse over the years until eventually, he lost his hearing almost completely.

Beethoven was devastated. He even wrote a letter to his brothers, pouring out how close he came to giving up entirely, and how it was only his love for music and everything he still felt he had left to create that kept him going. That letter still exists today, and it's such an honest, vulnerable thing to read.

Here's the part that gets me every time, though: Beethoven didn't stop composing. In fact, some of his most famous, most powerful music was written after he had lost most or all of his hearing. He couldn't hear the orchestra playing his own symphonies. He composed by feeling vibrations, by studying music theory so deeply it lived in his mind, and by an almost unbelievable amount of determination.

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You might remember from Episode 12 that Beethoven's ninth symphony includes a famous choral finale called "Ode to Joy." By the time Beethoven finished writing this symphony, he was completely deaf. At the premiere performance, he stood on stage facing the orchestra, unable to hear a single note of the music he had written. When the piece ended, one of the singers had to gently turn him around so he could see the audience on their feet, cheering and waving handkerchiefs in the air, because he couldn't hear a bit of it.

I don't know about you, but I get a little emotional every time I think about that moment.

Beethoven's music marked a turning point in history, too. He's often described as the composer who bridged two entire musical eras — the structured, elegant Classical period of composers like Mozart and Haydn, and the bold, emotional Romantic period that came after him. His music got louder, more dramatic, and more personal than anything that had come before it, and composers for generations after him were influenced by what he started.

Beethoven passed away in 1827, but let's be honest, his story doesn't really end there. His music is still some of the most performed, most beloved music in the entire world, nearly two hundred years later.

Don't forget to check out your Beethoven playlist at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/187 to explore more of Beethoven's music over the next two weeks.

And be sure to join me next time, when we start listening closely to one of Beethoven's most famous piano pieces — one you've probably heard before, even if you didn't know its name. We'll uncover a mystery that's puzzled music historians for over two hundred years: who exactly was Elise?

Until then, keep listening, keep learning, and keep making music. Thanks for joining me on *Busy Kids Love Music*!