

## Beethoven's hearing disorder could probably be cured today

Medical-musical symposium creates interdisciplinary perspective on the phenomenon Beethoven - Free e-book published in English and German

Bonn, October 19, 2020



(from left to right) Prof. Dr. med. h. c. mult. Wolfgang Holzgreve MBA, Medical Director and Chairman of the Board at the University Hospital Bonn (UKB), Prof. Dr. med. phil. Claudia Spahn, Director of the Freiburg Institute for Musicians' Medicine and Prorector for Research at the Freiburg University of Music, Malte Boecker, artistic director of Beethoven Jubiläums GmbH, Prof. Dr. med. Bernhard Richter, Director of the Freiburg Institute for Musicians' Medicine.  
(Image Source: Universitätsklinikum Bonn (UKB)/J.F. Saba)

The Beethoven phenomenon is multifaceted – and raises many questions. What was the cause of Ludwig van Beethoven's hearing loss? How would modern medicine deal with his illness? What is the relationship between the increasing hearing disorder of the great composer and his musical creative process? What effect did the composer have on his time and beyond? These and other questions were explored by numerous scientists, doctors and specialists on October 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 during the symposium "Ludwig van Beethoven: the Heard and the Unhearing" at the University Hospital Bonn (UKB). The event is part of the anniversary celebrations BTHVN2020 for Ludwig van Beethoven's 250th birthday. **The lectures have already been published for the symposium as print and e-book versions in English and German and can be downloaded free of charge.**

### Interdisciplinary image, new perspectives, and healing possibilities

The results draw a complex, interdisciplinary picture from then to now – a kaleidoscope of scientific, medical, and psychosocial dimensions around the person of Ludwig van Beethoven, his work, and his impact. Thus, musicological perspectives on Beethoven were examined and classified in their historical dimension, the political and cosmopolitan impact of Beethoven and his works were examined more closely, and aspects of his vocal compositions were analysed with reference to his medical history. A special focus was also placed on the causes and effects of his hearing disorder and current treatment options – with particular results:

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The cause of Beethoven's hearing disorder, which increased with age, can be narrowed down based on the facts that have been handed down and can possibly also be treated today. Scientists currently see otosclerosis (a disease of the bone surrounding the inner ear) or sensorineural hearing loss (degeneration of sensory cells in the inner ear) as possible causes – both diseases can be treated with conventional and surgical measures. Even in case of serious findings, highly complex hearing implants such as the cochlear implant could have helped Ludwig van Beethoven.

### **E-Book „Ludwig van Beethoven: the Heard and the Unhearing“**

**in English:**

[https://www.bthvn2020.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Download/Ergebnisse\\_des\\_Symposiums\\_englisch.pdf](https://www.bthvn2020.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Download/Ergebnisse_des_Symposiums_englisch.pdf)

**in German:**

[https://www.bthvn2020.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Download/Ergebnisse\\_des\\_Symposiums\\_deutsch.pdf](https://www.bthvn2020.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Download/Ergebnisse_des_Symposiums_deutsch.pdf)

### **Comments on the Symposium**

Malte Boecker, artistic director of Beethoven Jubiläums GmbH, organizer of the symposium: *"Beethoven was a precursor of social distancing because of his hearing impairment. He felt increasingly isolated and transformed his social withdrawal into music that is still valid today. This makes him a role model to this day. So, it cannot be a coincidence that his birthday falls of all years in the year 2020. With Ludwig van Beethoven we celebrate that music gives resilience and joy even under the most adverse circumstances. I am very happy that we are intensively discussing Beethoven and the meaning of listening at this symposium."*

Prof. Dr. med. h. c. mult. Wolfgang Holzgreve MBA, Medical Director and Chairman of the Board at the University Hospital Bonn (UKB), cooperation partner and host of the symposium: *"We want to understand the phenomenon Beethoven. In our symposium, we have therefore taken both aspects – Beethoven's music and his illnesses – as starting points for a historical and impact-historical consideration of his life and artistic work from the perspective of music medicine."*

Prof. Dr. med. phil. Claudia Spahn, Director of the Freiburg Institute for Musicians' Medicine and Prorektor for Research at the Freiburg University of Music, cooperation partner and scientific director of the symposium: *"The perspectives gained on Ludwig van Beethoven, including the insight into how he suffered from his hearing disorder and other ailments, and yet still had the strength to play and compose great works, sharpen our awareness of the important psychosocial influences of creativity. Especially in today's crisis, Beethoven, who lived for and from music, can be a role model for us."*

Prof. Dr. med. Bernhard Richter, Director of the Freiburg Institute for Musicians' Medicine, cooperation partner and scientific director of the symposium: *"In his famous 'Heiligenstädter Testament' Ludwig van Beethoven expressed the wish that his illnesses as well as the impressions of his world of thought, which he reveals in this document, are being described as comprehensively as possible after his death, in order to 'reconcile' the world with him 'as much as possible'. We have tried to take this wish into account with our interdisciplinary approach."*

**About Beethoven Jubiläums GmbH:** *Beethoven's 250. anniversary is celebrated worldwide. The Beethoven Jubiläums GmbH, an affiliate of the Beethoven-Haus Foundation, is supported by the federal government, the land of North Rhine-Westphalia, the city of Bonn and the Rhein-Sieg-district and is instructed to coordinate a national program. Patron of the anniversary program with the slogan "Rediscover Beethoven" is the German federal president Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The celebrations will continue up to and including September 2021. An up-to-date overview of the projects can be found in the calendar of events at [www.bthvn2020.de/en](http://www.bthvn2020.de/en)*

**About the University Hospital Bonn (UKB):** The University Hospital Bonn (UKB) has about 36 clinics and 29 institutes and is the third largest employer in Bonn with over 8,000 employees. Every year, the UKB treats about 50,000 patients and about 35,000 emergencies and performs about 400,000 outpatient treatments. The medical faculty of the University of Bonn is ranked first in NRW in terms of scientific performance (evaluation of the state). The UKB has the second highest case mix index (severity of cases treated) among the 35 university hospitals in Germany. The nationally and internationally recognized expertise of the institute and clinic management, which has been expanded in recent years through excellent cooperation with the university and successful new appointments, is the basis of the UKB's performance.

**About the Freiburg Institute for Musician's Medicine (FIM):** The Freiburg Institute is a joint institution of the University of Music, the Albert-Ludwigs-University, and the University Medical Centre Freiburg. The FIM combines music and medicine and supports both healthy music-making and the health-promoting effects of music-making. It is part of the FIM concept that professors have a professional musical education and are artistically active. The institute's tasks extend to teaching, research and patient treatment. Research includes physiological and psychological principles of singing, speaking, and music making. In patient treatment, the FIM at the University Medical Centre Freiburg is the contact point for all musicians.