

Description

Ludwig van Beethoven, one of history's most celebrated composers, died in Vienna in 1827. A DNA sample labeled lvb was extracted from his remains at the Wiener Zentralfriedhof, where he is buried. The analysis confirmed his identity and delivered a stark clinical portrait: his death was attributed to cirrhosis of the liver, consistent with chronic alcohol abuse. His last recorded words — "Pity, too late" — were reportedly his reaction to the belated arrival of wine from the Rhine.



Joseph Karl Stieler, Beethoven with the Manuscript of the Missa Solemnis (1820).

Beethoven arrived in Vienna in the 1790s, a city recently vacated by Mozart, and quickly found patronage among its aristocracy. Driven to prodigy status by an alcoholic father, he sought to "liberate music" and openly positioned himself as the musical equivalent of Napoleon Bonaparte. He stood at a pivotal transition in Western music — one foot grounded in the structured world of Haydn, the other propelling the Romantic movement forward.



Beethoven-Haus at Bonngasse 20, Bonn — the birthplace of Ludwig van Beethoven.

Image by Tilman2007

Beginning in his mid-20s, Beethoven progressively lost his hearing. He described this as the "cruellest torture." The growing isolation resulting from his condition coincided paradoxically with his most innovative period: the Moonlight Sonata, the late string quartets, and the Ninth Symphony were all composed as his connection to sound diminished. The DNA analysis provides a clinical perspective on this trajectory: it reveals measurable signs of alcohol-related liver damage. This biological record confirms what historical records suggested about how his body was failing even as his music achieved a level of brilliance that would define Western music for all time.

Modern population	Distance
French	1.927
French (Hauts-de-France)	1.940

Modern population	Distance
French (Grand Est)	2.091
French (Normandy)	2.211
English (Kent)	2.315
Dutch	2.319
English (Cornwall)	2.346
French (Bourgogne-Franche-Comte)	2.381
White American (Utah)	2.399
Welsh	2.411

Source

Date: 1743–1793 CE

Y-DNA: I-Y61915*

mtDNA: H1b1+16362

Location: Germany

Research: Genomic analyses of hair from Ludwig van Beethoven

Sample(s): beethoven.SG