

Exhibiting Beethoven in 2020

David Wyn Jones



All content is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Received: 01/10/2020

Accepted: 12/10/2020

ORCID iD David Wyn Jones: [id 0000-0003-3185-9195](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3185-9195)

Institution (David Wyn Jones): Cardiff University; College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; School of Music

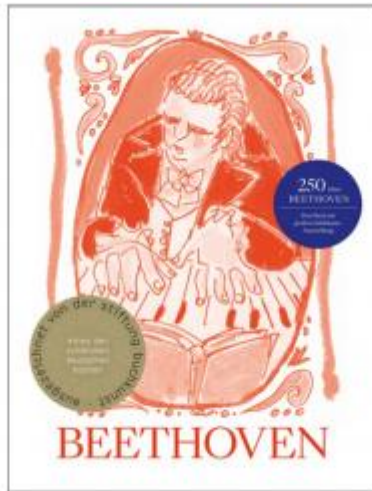
Published: 20/10/2020

Last updated: 20/10/2020

How to cite: David Wyn Jones, Exhibiting Beethoven in 2020, *Musicologica Austriaca: Journal for Austrian Music Studies* (October 20, 2020)

Tags: [18th century](#); [19th century](#); [Beethoven anniversary](#); [Beethoven reception](#); [Beethoven, Ludwig van](#); [Berlin](#); [Bonn](#); [Vienna](#)





“Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!” Die Beethoven-Sammlung der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

ed. by Friederike Heinze, Martina Rebmann, and Nancy Tanneberger
Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2020
208 pp., € 29.95, ISBN 978-3-7319-0914-9

<https://www.imhofverlag.de/buecher/die-beethoven-sammlung-der-staatsbibliothek-zu-berlin/>

Beethoven: Welt.Bürger.Musik

ed. by Agnieszka Lulińska and Julia Ronge
Cologne: Wienand, 2019
264 pp., € 39.80, ISBN 978-3-86832-555-3

<https://www.wienand-verlag.de/Programm/Neue-Buecher/Beethoven-Welt-Buerger-Musik.html>

Beethoven: Menschenwelt und Götterfunken

ed. by Thomas Leibnitz
Salzburg: Residenz, 2019
256 pp., € 30.00, ISBN 978-3-7017-3493-1

<https://www.residenzverlag.com/buch/beethoven>

[1] These three handsome, folio-sized volumes were published to coincide with Beethoven

exhibitions in Berlin, Bonn, and Vienna during the anniversary year 2020. Each of the associated organisations, the [Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin](#), the [Beethoven-Haus Bonn](#), and the [Österreichische Nationalbibliothek](#) in Vienna, will have been hugely deflated by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on public attendance of the exhibitions, from sudden closure to, at best, restricted numbers. In time the Beethoven anniversary may, indeed, become a historical event in its own right: a collective celebration of one of the major creative figures of Western civilization that was cruelly circumscribed by a virulent disease.

But we do have these three volumes, not just as an indication of a thwarted experience—this reviewer, for instance, was able to view only one of the exhibitions, in Vienna—but as a distinctive representation of Beethoven scholarship to set alongside new monographs, essay collections, articles, and complete CD sets produced in the anniversary year. The shared format of lavish color illustrations and short essays, designed to appeal to a wide readership, might suggest that they are competitive volumes. While some overlapping of content is inevitable, particularly portraits and engravings of the composer and the centrality of certain works such as the Ninth Symphony, the volumes have an individuality that makes them complementary rather than competitive. In total, there are fifty-seven contributors, but only one author, Julia Ronge (Beethoven-Haus Bonn), has contributed to all three volumes, with two further authors, Ulrich Konrad (Julius-Maximilians Universität, Würzburg) and John D. Wilson (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna), contributing to two volumes. Alongside this range of expertise and perspectives there is a clear sense that each volume is very much the product of its respective institution, in Berlin, Bonn, and Vienna.

The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin is the most important library for holdings of primary source material related to Beethoven, including autograph scores, sketches, letters, conversation books, the Heiligenstadt Testament, and the “Immortal Beloved” letter (“An die Unsterbliche Geliebte”). The editorial foreword to the Berlin volume immediately points out the irony of this situation: Beethoven himself visited the city only once, in May 1796, part of a journey that also took him to Prague, Dresden, and Leipzig. This observation is neatly turned on its head by an unexpected coincidence: that Beethoven performed in a building on the very spot where the [Haus Unter den Linden](#) of the Staatsbibliothek was built early in the twentieth century and which now holds a large part of these sources. Three essays document how the library acquired so much primary material in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, beginning with the acquisition of the autograph of the “Kyrie” from the *Missa solemnis* in 1841, through the extensive material sold by Anton Schindler and the Artaria family, to the Paul and Ernst Mendelssohn collection acquired in 1908. The much wider story of why Vienna lost out to Berlin is not probed; in addition to the actions of key players and ready finance there was surely a broader political process at work, Prussian ascendancy in German-speaking Europe in the nineteenth century at the expense of the Habsburg empire.

The Berlin volume is, therefore, an appropriate celebration of a central research collection with a title taken from one of its most prized possessions, the autograph of the Ninth Symphony, “Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt.” All the illustrations are from the Berlin library and ten of the twenty contributors are current or former members of staff. Many of the essays take the form of neat introductions to the kind of scholarly work that the holdings have engendered, often without reference to wider scholarship in that area; the essays on folksong settings, the *Missa solemnis* and the “Immortal Beloved,” for instance, are of this type. Authors from outside the library, but who have worked extensively with its material, offer essays with newer details and perspectives, including two complementary essays on Weber and Beethoven, a relationship

rarely explored in mainstream Beethoven scholarship. Covering a longer timespan, from the early nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century Dörte Schmidt's essay on *Fidelio* (130–45) is a fascinating read (including eleven illustrations) that takes in sketches, autograph score, early printed piano reductions, arrangements, and a collection of printed programmes for opera performances that were presented at the Berlin State Opera between 1934 and 1942, purchased at a flea market and presented as an art installation by the British visual artist Tacita Dean in 2005.

A very different kind of institution, the Beethoven-Haus, was the driving force behind the Bonn exhibition and its associated volume. With a complete focus on one composer, the Beethoven-Haus has a public presence on behalf of Beethoven and his music that is more outward looking than that of major research libraries, encompassing the new complete edition of the composer's music, a new edition of his letters, and, most recently, a new thematic catalogue. This authoritative presence is very much to the fore in the exhibition and the associated volume. As well as being the largest of the three volumes it reflects an exhibition that drew on Beethoven holdings from over seventy international libraries, archives, and private individuals, an ambition that is matched by the design and content of the volume. There is an unspoken intent to inform the reader, amateur and professional, about the composer, his times, his music, and his legacy, in a way that subtly avoids traditional outlooks. The title of the volume is deliberately low key, *Beethoven: Welt.Bürger.Musik* (World.Citizen.Music), announcing, rather than proclaiming, coverage that is refreshingly open-minded.

Beethoven's life is divided into five periods. The first three have very neutral titles, "Bonn: Beruf Musiker, 1770–1792" (Bonn: Occupation Musician), "Wien: Neue Horizonte, 1792–1801" (Vienna: New Horizons), and "Wege zum Erfolg, 1802–1812" (Paths to Success); the final two are a little more loaded and, for that reason, contestable, "Der Ruhm und sein Preis, 1813–1818" (The Price of Fame) and "Beethoven grenzenlos, 1819–1827" (Beethoven Without Bounds). For each of these sections the approach is the same, a factual chronology (including major historical events), an essay that reflects the given title, and three shorter essays (five in the last section) that address particular aspects. Especially valuable is the provision of an index of persons. The physical appearance of the volume matches this structure, moving through a spectrum of colors from red to charcoal black.

[2] In addition, each of the five sections contains three or more smaller bound inserts that present the personal views of instrumentalists, conductors, and some composers—but no singers—on what Beethoven's music means to them. For the most part these views are fairly traditional ones (though steadfastly sincere); I did find myself thinking that as inserts they could be easily removed by readers who felt that they jarred with the tone of the volume as a whole. However, Bernard Haitink's comment that the Sixth is "perhaps my most-loved" symphony (following p. 104) is revealing and there is an unexpected confluence of views between an unlikely couple, András Schiff and Tchaikovsky. The pianist expresses his boundless fascination with Beethoven's music but confides that his "musical trinity" consists of "Bach the Father," "Mozart the Son," and "Schubert the Holy Ghost" ("In meiner imaginären musikalischen Dreifaltigkeit ist J. S. Bach der Vater, Mozart der Sohn und Schubert der Heilige Geist," following p. 200). Using the same divine metaphor, Tchaikovsky has Beethoven as Jehova ("Meine Haltung ihm gegenüber erinnert mich daran, wie ich als Kind Jehova empfunden habe," following p. 216), but the continuation of the remarks (not given in the volume) makes it clear that the Christ figure—the one he loves rather than the one he fears—is Mozart.

In keeping with the ambition of the volume the editors have assembled an international team of contributors, from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The topics, presumably sanctioned if not suggested by the editors, carefully avoid the routine. Those in the third section, 1802–12, are especially characteristic of this approach. Julia Ronge's opening essay (105–17) skilfully exposes Beethoven's daily routine, the nature of his musical sketching, verbal outlines of works, composing at the piano, and his habitual seeking of an accurate musical text. Although the title of the section "Wege zum Erfolg" might lead readers to expect a familiar topic of discussion, Beethoven's professed "New Way" in 1801–1802, it is not even mentioned. Other absent topics in the section as a whole are "Heiligenstadt Testament," "Heroism," Symphonies Nos. 3–6, and the monster concert of December 1808. Instead Ronge's essay is followed by a survey by Steven M. Whiting (118–22) of the changing opera scene in Vienna at the time (the background to *Leonore*), the respectful but distant admiration of Goethe and Beethoven for each other by Julia Clout (128–33), and Beethoven's relationship with the many doctors that treated him by William Meredith (137–42), an essay in which the Heiligenstadt Testament gets a passing mention rather than being used as a prompt for yet another exploration of personal crisis and renewed resolve. In these essays, as elsewhere in the volume, the appropriateness of the illustrative material to the written text is impressive, with many images that will be unfamiliar to even the most expert reader.

This discursive and richly allusive biography of the composer concludes in 1827, not with an extended account of Beethoven's final illness and his public funeral, but with a broader account by Daniel Schäfer (236–44) of life expectancy at the time, rituals surrounding death, and memorialization. It is followed by a single essay (244–51) on Beethoven reception that takes the reader back to Bernard Haitink's favorite symphony, the *Pastoral*. Here, the art historian Ilona Sármany-Parsons introduces the reader to a dedicated music room in the Villa Scheid in Vienna, built in 1897. The walls were adorned with five large paintings by Josef Maria Auchentaller in fashionable *Jugendstil* (art nouveau), depicting the five movements of the symphony, with titles derived from, or alluding to, those of Beethoven, "Elfenreigen" (Fairy Dance), "Elfe am Bach" (Fairy at the Stream), "Fröhliches Zusammensein" (Cheerful Gathering), "Doppelbild Sturm—Donner" (Double Image Tempest—Thunder), and "Angelusläuten" (Ringing of the Angelus). The five haunting images are reproduced on facing pages. The essay then moves to more familiar territory, Max Klinger's sculpture of Beethoven and Gustav Klimt's "Beethoven-Fries," both in the Vienna Secession Building. While that building is a much-visited evocation of a determining image of the composer, the former, like the exhibition and catalogue itself, is a thoughtful reminder of competing perspectives in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

The title of the Vienna volume occupies the middle ground between the rhetoric of the Berlin title and the restraint of the Bonn title, *Beethoven: Menschenwelt und Götterfunken* (Mankind's World and Divine Spark), a knowing nod to three lines from *An die Freude*, "Alle Menschen," "der ganzen Welt," and "Freude, schöner Götterfunken." Organized by the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek and presented in the historical setting of the *Prunksaal* (where Beethoven may well have met van Swieten), the content of the exhibition was a richly resonant one, reflecting the extensive holdings of not only the [Musiksammlung](#) but the library as a whole, supplemented by a few items from other libraries including part of the autograph score of the Ninth Symphony (from Berlin). Of the three volumes, only the Vienna one can legitimately be described as an exhibition catalogue. The 197 items are systematically listed in the second part of the catalogue, with library call numbers and captions, and illustrations of all items are presented either within relevant essays in the first part or as a running sequence in the second part of the volume.

The fifteen essays in the first part of the volume are arranged in broad chronological order, from the Bonn environment to Beethoven's reception in nineteenth-century Russia, with no pretence at covering the ground, engaging with troublesome periodization, or, indeed, any kind of underpinning agenda. The *Musiksammlung* has its own treasures to display, such as the *Stammbuch* from 1792 and the autograph score of the Quartet in F minor (op. 95), but it is particularly rich in Viennese editions, from Beethoven's lifetime and afterwards. Michael Ladenburger's essay (77–85) provides a compact introduction to Beethoven's dealing with publishers in general, but printed editions by Artaria, Bureau d'Arts et d'Industrie, Cappi, Diabelli, and Steiner are a constant presence throughout the volume. Especially beautiful are the presentation copies of *Der glorreiche Augenblick* that were prepared for Emperor Franz I. by Haslinger in 1835. The title page and dedication page are placed within an essay by John D. Wilson (147–55) on Beethoven and the Congress of Vienna, when the cantata and other patriotic works by the composer were first performed; that Haslinger, twenty years later, wanted still to evoke the image of Beethoven as a patriotic Austrian and Habsburg loyalist is something that is rarely encountered in the literature.



Figure 1: Tobias Haslinger; by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

[3] The volume makes similarly attractive use of images of Beethoven's human and physical environment, individuals and buildings, also posthumous representations of the composer. By accident or design, several pairs of essays present this material in complementary ways. For instance, Julia Ronge's essay on Beethoven and Haydn (95-101) is followed by Christine Siegert's essay on Beethoven and Mozart (103-109); across the two essays the reader is presented with a

nineteenth-century group engraving of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, a colored image of the old university, an imaginary scene or *Fantasieszene* that shows Beethoven playing what looks like a domestic organ with Mozart urging a group of onlookers to pay attention to the master, the title page of Abbé Stadler's celebrated defence of the authenticity of Mozart's *Requiem* (an outlook that Beethoven strongly supported), and an engraving of Gottfried van Swieten. Compared with primary sources such as sketchbooks, autograph scores, authentic editions, letters, and conversation books, visual material of this kind has not figured significantly in Beethoven scholarship, partly because the primary documentary base is so comprehensive and informative, partly for the very practical reason that it is more difficult to access and certainly costly to reproduce. In a fundamental sense the Vienna volume is eye opening.



Figure 2: Ludwig van Beethoven chez Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (etching by Prosper-Pail-Ernest Allais after a painting by Gugues Merle); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)

What overall impressions emerge from reading these three volumes? In the past, Beethoven scholarship has often been a largely male preserve. It is refreshing to report that over 40 percent of the contributors to these volumes are women, as are five of the six editors. Set alongside that development is a more traditional outlook when it comes to the works of Beethoven that are privileged: symphonies, quartets, piano music, and the *Missa solemnis* feature consistently, concertos and *Fidelio* less so. However, a few genres are almost entirely absent, including songs, string trios, and canons. The popular—some would say populist—music that Beethoven wrote at the time of the Congress of Vienna has caught the attention of several German- and English-language scholars in the last thirty years or so, as have the folksong settings; a similar sustained focus on other neglected areas of Beethoven output would be welcome. Perhaps to a far greater extent than is evident in scholarship on other composers, including Haydn and Mozart, understanding of Beethoven has been confined to the best of Beethoven. This, in turn, has

allowed discussion of the man to be equally partial.

One aspect of Beethoven scholarship that has been transformed in the last few years is sympathetic understanding of his formative years in Bonn. That is reflected and further promoted in no fewer than six essays in these volumes, four in the Bonn volume (23–54) and two in the Vienna volume (17–39), complementing the ongoing publications and web sources resulting from the large-scale research project “[The Music Library of Elector Maximilian Franz](#)” undertaken by Birgit Lodes and colleagues in the University of Vienna. This revisionist emphasis on understanding the social, intellectual, and musical context in which Beethoven lived and worked could usefully be extended to Vienna, also to a more nuanced and localized understanding of his posthumous fame. One wonders what the content of celebratory exhibitions and associated volumes will be in the next anniversary year, 2027.

Cover picture: Ludwig van Beethoven (lithograph by Josef Kriehuber); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)