

Summer 2026

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Brandeis Presents:

"Beethoven Unbound: Revolution, Progress, and the Politics of Sound"

Instructor - Gil Harel, PhD

Session 1

Foundations – Classical Order and Early Stirrings (Pre-1800 / Beethoven's Early Period)

We begin by examining Haydn/Mozart's balanced, patron-oriented classical style and contrasting it with Beethoven's arrival in Vienna as a piano virtuoso boundary-pusher. As Europe navigates revolution, musicians evolved through systems of patronage to new molds allowing greater artistic independence.

Listening:

[Beethoven: 1. Sinfonie · hr-Sinfonieorchester · Andrés Orozco-Estrada](#)

[Ludwig Van Beethoven - Cantata On The Death Of The Emperor Joseph II](#)

[Beethoven: 1. Klavierkonzert · hr-Sinfonieorchester · Louis Schwizgebel · Ben Gernon](#)

Reading:

["Soaked in Mozart" \(A Gertus History of Music\)](#)

Session 2

Heroic Breakthrough – Revolution Embodied (c. 1803–1808, the "Middle Period")

In this class, we will analyze Beethoven's "new way" and how this manifested in his works. Some topics we will cover include: expanded forms, motivic development, narrative arcs of struggle/triumph mirroring Napoleonic/French Revolutionary ideals (before and after disillusionment).

Listening:

[Beethoven: 3. Sinfonie \(»Eroica«\) · hr-Sinfonieorchester · Andrés Orozco-Estrada](#)
[Stage@Seven: Beethoven: Fidelio \(Ouverture\)](#)
[Ludwig van Beethoven - Piano Sonata No. 23 "Appassionata", Op. 57](#)

Reading:

["Beethoven and Napoleon"](#)

Session 3

Middle to Late Transition – Pastoral, Politics, and Personal Depth

As the Napoleonic maelstrom continued and caromed to a conclusion, Beethoven composed works reflecting a yearning for pastoral escape, wartime fixation, and growing introspection amid Congress of Vienna-era conservatism.

Listening:

[Beethoven: 6. Sinfonie \(»Pastorale«\) · hr-Sinfonieorchester](#)
[Beethoven - Egmont Overture | WDR Symphony Orchestra](#)
[Beethoven - Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major, Op. 73 \(Daniel Barenboim & Staatskapelle Berlin\)](#)

Reading:

[Eastman School of Music Beethoven Project – Symphony No. 6 “Pastoral”](#)

Session 4

The Sublime and the Universal – Late Beethoven (c. 1818–1827)

In our penultimate session, we will focus on the 'transcendent', fragmented, and often spiritually ambitious works of his final decade. These pieces push beyond classical/heroic forms into something often described as pure abstraction, introspection, and Utopian vision.

Listening:

[Daniil Trifonov - Beethoven - Piano Sonata No. 29, Op. 106 \("Hammerklavier"\)](#)
[Beethoven: String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131 / Quatuor Arod](#)

[Beethoven - Missa solemnis | Gardiner | Bavarian Radio Choir and Symphony Orchestra](#)

Reading: [Classical Notes – Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis](#)

Session 5

Beethoven Unbound – Additional Masterworks

In our culminating session, we will focus on three towering late-period works that embody the course themes of revolution, progress, and the politics of sound. These pieces showcase Beethoven at his most unbound: formal innovation, spiritual universality, extreme expression, and music that transcends personal suffering and societal constraints.

Listening:

[Beethoven Piano Sonata No 32 C minor Op 111 Maurizio Pollini](#)

[Juilliard String Quartet - Beethoven Grosse Fuge in B-flat Major, Opus 133](#)

[Beethoven 9th Symphony Choral 'Ode to Joy' 4th Movement](#)

Reading:

[“The Art of Beethoven: Between Romantic and Classical”](#)