



In search of the Art of Fugue – Beethoven's training in composition

Counterpoint studies with Albrechtsberger

Showcase 1

In November 1792 Ludwig van Beethoven travelled from Bonn to Vienna in order to complete his compositional technique under Joseph Haydn. Virtually no source material for Haydn's instruction has survived, probably primarily due to the fact that Haydn hardly made any written entries in his pupils' notes. Another reason may be that Beethoven appears to have reworked pieces he had written in Bonn rather than engaging in new exercises with Haydn. Haydn may however have enlarged Beethoven's knowledge of repertoire through the study of examples of composition and may have introduced him to such areas as free composition and the art of making compositional sketches. Haydn also appears to have encouraged his pupil to engage in a thorough-going study of theory. At the end of a year Haydn made a progress report for Beethoven's superiors in Bonn and praised his pupil with words on a par with those of a diploma of success.

When Haydn left for his second journey to England in January 1794, the lessons came to an end. Beethoven then turned to Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, at the time the best known teacher for counterpoint in Vienna. With Albrechtsberger, Beethoven mastered a systematic approach to the art of composition as well as the necessary routine in his work.

To the curriculum belonged not only counterpoint but also extensive instruction in the art of fugue. Beethoven was obliged to write exercises which were then exhaustively corrected and annotated by Albrechtsberger. Albrechtsberger not only corrected faults in the musical score but explained his corrections in the margins of the paper together with diagrams and tables to illustrate particular procedures. Albrechtsberger's method may be particularly well observed on the page with exercises in three-part counterpoint [2]; a clear list of suitable interval sequences is given in the tables and at the foot of the page, rules of counterpoint are again summarized. The sheet with exercises in double counterpoint at the tenth [3] also demonstrates Albrechtsberger's way of endorsing his corrections with practical tips – 'if you do this, the following happens; you can avoid the pitfall if you change the following'. These notes were probably the reason why Beethoven carefully kept the material from his lessons with Albrechtsberger all his life; it was a treasure trove of advice, not only to be put to use by Beethoven when he taught his own pupils, but also to be consulted for his own ends again and again.

Albrechtsberger, appointed as Director of Music at St. Stephan's Cathedral, was famous as an organist – especially for his improvisations – in Vienna. Contemporary reports speak of the packed churches in which he played. His speciality was the fugue – of every type and complexity [1]; Johann von Schönfeld wrote in his *Jahrbuch der Tonkunst von Wien und Prag* of 1796 that "Albrechtsberger's fugues hardly have equals". Perhaps the highest praise was given twelve years later by Ignaz Mosel in his *Uebersicht des gegenwärtigen Zustandes der Tonkunst in Wien*: "Herrn Albrechtsberger, director of music at this city's cathedral, perhaps the greatest organist of the world, and certainly one of the most knowledgeable of composers, may be considered as Vienna's Johann Sebastian Bach and honoured as such".



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Showcase 2

Beethoven's lessons with Albrechtsberger were systematically set up. First, the pupil was obliged to learn rules and put them into practice in related exercises. As a conclusion to each section of subject matter Beethoven had to work up what he had learnt in a larger piece for string quartet. The present fragment [3] apparently comes from an advanced moment in this learning process and could be a prelude for a such a fugue, here a double fugue, for string quartet.

Beethoven's transcript of one of Joseph Haydn's string quartets [1], one of the so-called Sun Quartets (op. 20), derives from Beethoven's year with Albrechtsberger, 1794. For a considerable time this transcript has been thought to relate to Beethoven's own string quartets, op. 18, with the idea that Beethoven studied Haydn's work as a preparation for his own. Rather, the transcript of this quartet by Haydn probably served Beethoven as a preparation for some of the quartet movements written under Albrechtsberger's tutelage. Three of the six quartets, op. 20 by Haydn are distinguished by fugues in the last movement – probably no coincidence considering the moment in time in which Beethoven's transcript was made. It is true that the quartet in E flat major that Beethoven transcribed contains no fugue, but Beethoven could certainly have studied the whole series. No other transcripts from the series are preserved, however.



Transcript (1794) of a string quartet
by Joseph Haydn
HCB Mh 42

In contrast to his study year with Haydn, in which Beethoven hardly composed any new work, he gained new courage and trust in himself in his year with Albrechtsberger, 1794. That year saw a whole row of important compositions including for example the piano trios, op. 1 and the aria *Adelaide*, op. 46. His friend Nikolaus Simrock, from the Bonn Court Orchestra (meanwhile dissolved), had started a music publishing business. Beethoven sold him the piano variations for four hands WoO 67 and was unable to find time to involve himself with the corrections, even proudly reporting of his progress in a letter written in the summer of 1794 [3]: "I would certainly not be lying if I tell you that I was prevented on account of overwhelming activity." Also in the same letter Beethoven expressed moreover his disdain for the political situation in Austria: "I believe that as long as the Austrians have their Braun's beer and sausage, they will not revolt."



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Showcase 3

Johann Georg Albrechtsberger's Tutor, *Gründliche Anweisung zur Composition* (Thorough instruction in composition) [2] appeared in 1790 and went through numerous reprints. The *Gründliche Anweisung* was one of the most successful counterpoint tutors of all time. Beethoven valued the book highly, as confirmed in a Conversation Book of June 1825 in which the music teacher and composer Carl August Reichardt asked Beethoven: "Which book on counterpoint do you recommend me most?" The answer came: "Albrechtsberger". Beethoven also gave the book to a pupil – with a dedication – in 1817.

Although Beethoven had studied with Albrechtsberger for a year and possessed his book, he took it out time and time again to copy out passages. Transcribing was Beethoven's preferred method of learning. If he wanted to absorb something, he copied it out – often more than once. The chapter concerning the rules of fugue appear to have interested him especially. Already in 1794, during his time with Albrechtsberger, Beethoven excerpted passages about the various possibilities for treating the fugue subject: augmentation (*Augmentatio*); diminution (*Diminutio*); abbreviation (*Abbrevatio*); fragmentation (*Syncope*) and stretto (*Restrictio*) [1]. He must have studied this transcript again at a later time; pencilled notes are written in the handwriting of his more mature years.

Especially with regard to the extended fugues of his late work (for instances in the piano sonatas op. 101, 106, 110 and in the *Missa solemnis*) Beethoven applied himself to Albrechtsberger's theory of fugue with renewed vigour and wrote out the same passage again [3].



Excerpt (1819) from Albrechtsberger's *Gründliche Anweisung*
HCB Mh 46d



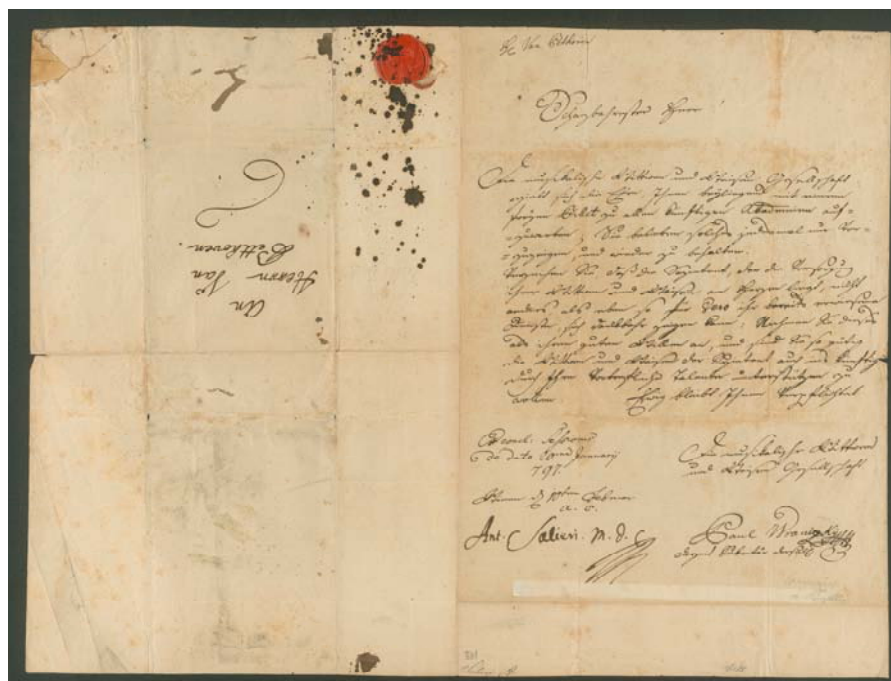
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Setting words to music – studies with Salieri

Showcase 4

In 1801 Beethoven asked the court music director Antonio Salieri to teach him the art of setting words to music. Salieri was then considered to be the most important opera composer in Vienna and was also one of the most famous music teachers in the city. Franz Schubert was also a pupil of his in 1812.

Exactly when Beethoven first came into contact with Antonio Salieri is not known. Salieri was the most powerful and influential personality in the musical life of Vienna so it is likely that Beethoven would have sought out his acquaintance soon after arriving in the city. The first documented contact was on the 29th of March 1795. Salieri conducted in a benefit concert given in aid of the widows and orphans of the *Tonkünstler-Societät* (Musicians' Society) in the *Burgtheater* "A new concerto, on the *Piano-Forte*, played by Herrn Ludwig von Beethoven, and of his invention". On the 10th of February 1797 Beethoven received a letter signed by Salieri and Wranitzky [1] guaranteeing him free tickets for all the future concerts of the *Tonkünstler-Societät*, a gesture thanking him for his services to the society (he had played for free in the benefit concerts) on the one hand and on the other perhaps, hoping to guarantee Beethoven's services as soloist in future concerts. Beethoven did indeed perform gratuitously as soloist on behalf of the pension fund and he used his right to receive free tickets until at least 1801.



Letter to Beethoven (1797)
BH 194

In December 1798 or January 1799 Beethoven's three violin sonatas op. 12, dedicated to Antonio Salieri, were published by Artaria in Vienna [2]. What Beethoven hoped to achieve with his dedication is not known; perhaps he wanted to thank Salieri for the support that the performance of his work in public gave. Beethoven may also have already been thinking of approaching Salieri to ask him for lessons.



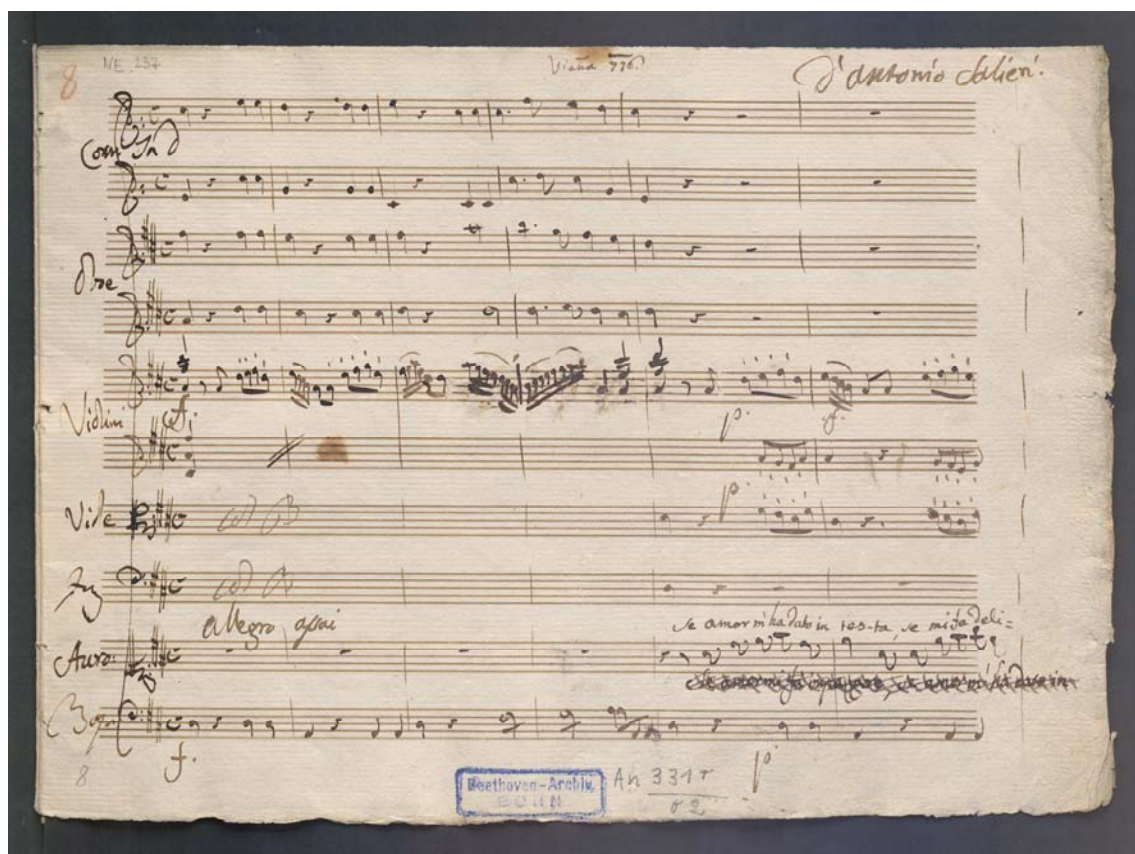
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Showcase 5

Antonio Salieri (1750–1825) [2] was one of the most influential musicians in Vienna. He was Imperial Court Music Director and famous throughout Europe for his Italian operas. Between 1788 and 1795 Salieri was president and thereafter vice-president of the *Tonkünstler-Societät* (Musicians' Society), whose main aim was to build up a pension fund for the widows and orphans of its deceased members. For this purpose the society gave two benefit concerts a year; these were conducted by Salieri until 1818.

The performance of one of Salieri's most successful operas, *Les Danaïdes*, on his visit to Paris in 1784 was hailed as a triumph. Beethoven made more than one transcript from this opera [1] in preparation for *Fidelio*; the making of such transcriptions helped him in his studies. Beethoven only copied ensembles for voices, without the accompaniment of the orchestra. He knew very well that his own weakness lay in his lack of experience with setting words to music; the orchestra parts were no problem to him.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, operas were often reworked. To add new arias at certain points for instance, was by no means unusual, even when those arias were not by the original composer. Salieri composed several such inserted arias for operas written by other masters, especially in the years from 1775 to 1777 when he was music director of the Italian opera in Vienna. *Se amor m'ha dato in festa* for soprano and orchestra [5] is one of these arias. Regrettably, the opera for which Salieri wrote the aria is not known.



Inserted aria (1776) by Salieri
NE 237



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Archduke Rudolf's lessons from Beethoven

Showcase 6

The personal contact between Beethoven and his only student Archduke Rudolf (1788-1831) came into being in about May or June 1808 and firm evidence for a relationship in which Beethoven taught composition to the archduke dates from June 1810. The archduke, who was very musical, already had lessons as a child from Court Music Director Anton Teyber. Prince Rudolf played the piano excellently and performed in public as soloist. In 1808 Ignaz Mosel described the twenty-year-old Prince Rudolf's talent in his *Uebersicht des gegenwärtigen Zustandes der Tonkunst in Wien*: "Amateurs of the piano may be proud to have at their head Her Majesty the Empress, [...], and His Imperial Highness Archduke Rudolf; a prince, who with the most accomplished performance, is able to play every new piece of music, be it so difficult, without hesitation, and who unites the deepest knowledge of figured bass and of counterpoint."

Beethoven's lessons took place in the apartments of the imperial family in the Hofburg [1]. Beethoven was obliged to be there at certain times; if the archduke was ill, the appointment would be cancelled by letter. Although Beethoven estimated Prince Rudolf highly, he found the lessons heavy and disturbing and often excused himself. Sometimes he said he was not well, or he also distract himself from the lessons with the prince by his own work. He promised to make up for lost lessons – as in the letter exhibited here [2] – although he did not always keep that promise.

With the passage of time, Prince Rudolf wrote a number of large works. Doubtless the most famous composition made under Beethoven's supervision was a compendium of 40 variations on a theme by Beethoven[3].



Exercise (1818)



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Beethoven had given him the “task” in 1818. Prince Rudolf wrote his variations during that year and presented them to Beethoven as a New Year's gift in 1819. Beethoven took it upon himself to have the work published and revised the manuscript carefully. The form of the title was also Beethoven's. The publicity, presented by the publisher at the beginning of 1820, included the words “These variations (which are accompanied by a long prelude and an extensive finale) on Ludwig van Beethoven's task, have as their composer a person of high rank, held in honour by the musical world as a noble patron and inspired promoter of music, for which reason a closer description is just as superfluous as a special recommendation for the worth of this prize-worthy work.”

Study on musical theory

Showcase 7

In the last ten years of his life Beethoven turned again with renewed energy to the study of writings on musical theory. In his earlier years he had studied such writings as a means of preparing the lessons he gave Archduke Rudolf and appears also to have studied them in order to shine in technical conversations with his colleagues. In the 1820s these latter two aspects were no longer to the point: Prince Rudolf became Archbishop of Olmütz and was away from Vienna for most of the time. Beethoven's deafness deterred him from company and social life. Perhaps his deafness, effectively a loss of control of his hearing, led him back to the theory of music. With its structure of written rules structure and their embodiment on the written score attracted him; so that which his ears could not verify could at least be recognized by his eyes.

From the point of view of their theoretical technique, the fugues of Beethoven's late works are so differentiated and rich that they – taken for themselves – may be recognized as a new Art of Fugue. Beethoven consulted the relevant writings to search for models and examples that could reveal to him a wide spectrum on which he could found his own compendium of fugues. All his sketches for the fugues of his last great works are interspersed with transcripts from and references to the theories of the famous teachers of fugue. In this, Beethoven repeatedly consulted different teaching books at the same time and combined the most important rules in his transcripts. On the page indicated here [2] he put together different excerpts from Albrechtsberger's *Allgemeine Regeln zum Verfolg einer zwey- drey- oder vierstimmigen einfachen Fuge*.



Excerpts (1819) from teaching books by Albrechtsberger and Marpurg
HCB Mh 46e



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One of the most famous applications of this study is the fugue in the piano sonata op. 110 [1].



Fugue from op. 110 (1821/22)
HCB BMh 2

Showcase 8

Many of Beethoven's transcripts from the great musical theoretical treatises of his time have been preserved. These transcripts start in 1803 and increase in numbers as he became older. Various reasons for this evidence of his intensive study may be suggested:

1. Beethoven, in his preparation for his teaching, made transcripts in order to pass on important theoretical notions to his pupils, especially to Archduke Rudolf.
2. Beethoven studied to improve himself or perhaps also for the sake of enjoyment, like a chess player enjoying particular chess problems.
3. Beethoven was looking for clear, sharp formulations in order to be more brilliant in his conversations with music colleagues.
4. Beethoven's fascination for so-called 'old music', especially that of Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Friedrich Handel, grew continually and stimulated again his interest in theoretical principles.

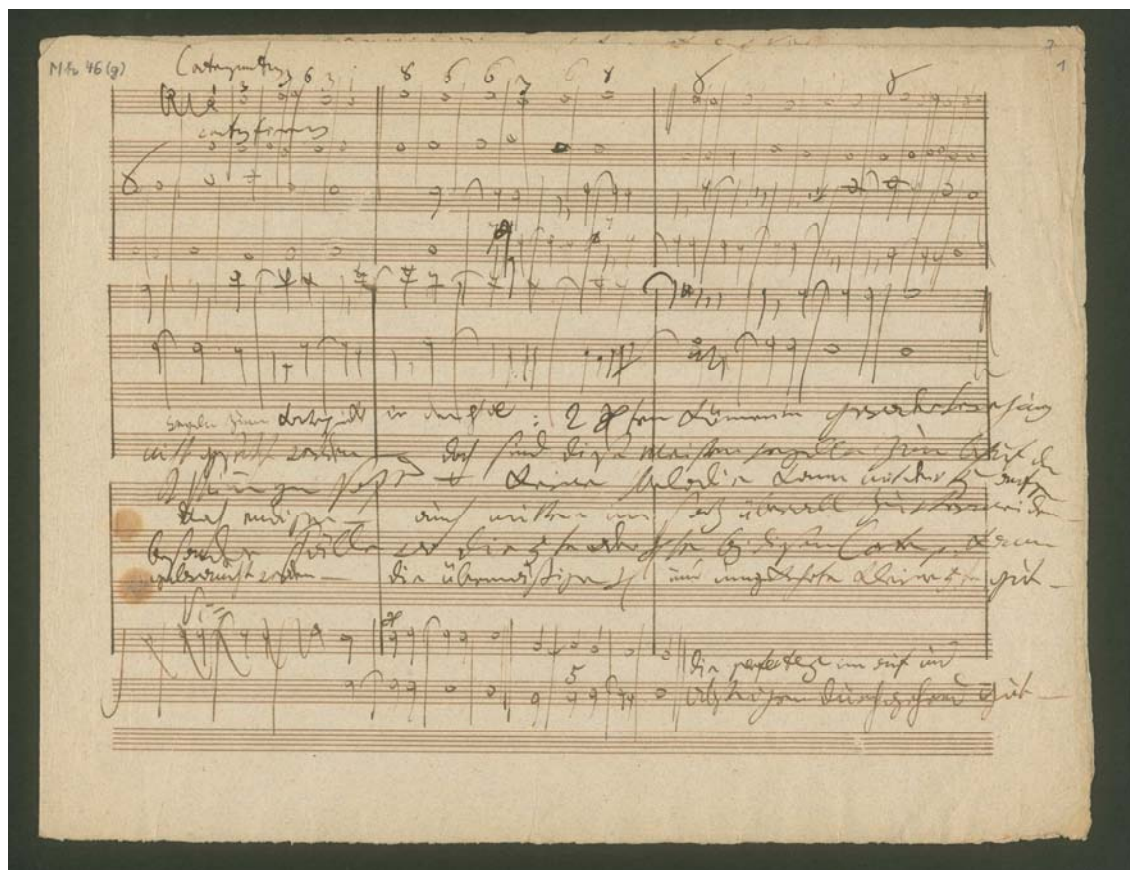
The great majority of Beethoven's transcripts concern the theory of fugue. All the books from which he made his copies he also owned himself.



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Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg's *Abhandlung von der Fuge* [1], first published in 1753, served until well into the 19th century as the most important treatise on the fugue. Robert Schumann was among those who studied it. Unlike many other treatises, Marpurg's *Abhandlung* is divided between a purely textual part and a second part comprising numerous copper plate engravings of musical examples. In this way the examples do not interrupt the text. Beethoven's particular interest in the work of all theoreticians was in simple diagrams and tables, as shown here with regard to the organization of the *comes*. *Comes* literally means a companion but with respect to the theory of fugue means the second entry, the first being the *dux* [2].

Johann Philipp Kirnberger's [3] *Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik* was published in 1771 in two parts (four volumes) and was intended as a general treatise on counterpoint and music theory [4]. The work was already challenged as conservative and old fashioned as soon as it was published. The musical examples given in the work provoked great interest at the time; many of them were taken from the work Johann Sebastian Bach and appeared in print for the first time in Kirnberger's *Kunst des reinen Satzes*. Beethoven also made copies from Kirnberger, usually transcribing musical examples, here for double counterpoint [5].



Excerpt (1809 or later) from Kirnberger
HCB Mh 46g



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On the walls

As director of music at the cathedral Albrechtsberger also supervised the choirboys. Until 1803 the latter lodged in the so-called Kantoreihaus (Cantor's House) on the west side of St. Stephan's Cathedral. As director of music Albrechtsberger probably also lived in the Kantoreihaus. In October 1803 it was demolished.

On the city plan of Vienna the houses in which Beethoven lived and those of his teachers are marked:

- 1 The house in which Beethoven lived in the Alsergrund 1793–95
- 2 The house in which Haydn lived in the part of the city called the Obere Windmühl 1793
- 3 The house in which Albrechtsberger lived next to St. Stephan's Cathedral 1794/95
- 4 The house in which Beethoven lived in the inner city 1801
- 5 The house in which Salieri lived in the inner city 1801
- 6 The Hofburg, Archduke Rudolf's residence

Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736–1809) started his musical education as a choirboy at Klosterneuburg Abbey and continued as a choirboy at Melk Abbey. At Melk he became acquainted with Michael Haydn and through him, his brother Joseph Haydn. Albrechtsberger and Joseph Haydn became life-long friends. After some intermediary positions as an organist Albrechtsberger went to Vienna in 1770 and became organist at St. Stephan's Cathedral. Next, the emperor made him court organist; finally, in 1793, he became director of music at the cathedral. Albrechtsberger was not only famous in Vienna as an organist and for his improvisations at the organ but above all counted as the most important music theoretician and counterpoint teacher in the city. Besides Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Conradin Kreutzer, Ignaz Moscheles and Beethoven's friend Nikolaus Zmeskall were all his pupils.

Like all the Habsburgs, Archduke Rudolf (1788–1831) was exceptionally gifted in music. Emperor Leopold II had sixteen children, eight of them boys. Rudolf was the youngest of them all whereby he was less than unlikely to have any dynastic claims, and the chance was further diminished by his medical condition; he suffered from epilepsie. He could entirely devote himself to music. To take care of his material well-being, he was ordained and made assistant to the Bishop of Olmütz. The bishopric of Olmütz, in Moravia, was one of the most important and wealthiest in the Empire. In 1819, on the death of the bishop, Archduke Rudolf succeeded him and was called to be cardinal. Beethoven intended his *Missa solemnis* for the inauguration of Bishop Rudolf but did not manage to finish it in time. Archduke Rudolf was not only Beethoven's only long-term pupil for composition, but also an important patron and promoter of Beethoven's work. The archduke's impressive collection of music included practically every important work by Beethoven, either in an early edition or in transcript, many of them complete with a dedication from Beethoven.

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