“Again. Again!” Ludwig’s father watched sternly as the boy returned to the piano bench. Ludwig thought he had practiced enough for the day. He was looking forward to running in the sunshine, but his father had other ideas.

At an early age, Ludwig van Beethoven had shown surprising talent for the piano. His father kept him practicing for long hours, hoping that Ludwig would become a famous young musician and begin earning money for the family, just like another talented child musician named Wolfgang Amadé Mozart.

Born probably on December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany, Beethoven was 17 when he finally escaped the watchful eye of his father and traveled to Vienna. He wanted to study with Mozart because he loved Mozart's music. However, soon after arriving in Vienna and having a few lessons with Mozart, Beethoven learned his mother was dying and returned home to care for her. By the time he returned to Vienna, Mozart had also died. Beethoven studied with Franz Joseph Haydn, another famous composer, instead.

Buzz. Buzzzzzzz. Beethoven put down his pen in frustration. It's a few months before his 30th birthday, and the constant buzzing in his ears is getting louder. It makes it difficult to hear, and the composer is growing more and more concerned. “How can I compose music if I can't hear over this buzzing?” he asks himself. Over the next few years, Beethoven searches for doctors who say they can cure him. One pours milk and ground nuts into his ears. Another rubs ointment on his arms that causes them to blister, hoping to drain the infection from his ears. Nothing works.

Beethoven wouldn't give up. He adapted to his worsening disability by using “ear trumpets,” cone-shaped tubes that he held to his ears to amplify sounds. He was so focused on finding a way to keep composing that some people gossiped that he had the legs of his piano sawed off so he could sit on the floor and play, feeling the sound vibrations of the music in his body.

It was as he began to lose his hearing that Beethoven started composing symphonies. He liked the idea that music without lyrics, or words, could communicate moods and paint pictures in the audience’s mind. By his late 40s, Beethoven was completely deaf, but until his death in Vienna on March 26, 1827, he composed some of the most joyful and famous music for orchestras ever written. Beethoven is still considered a revolutionary figure in the history of music.

Story by Janice Hughes