

Hello - Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

What a strange year it's been! I'm not going to mumble on and on about the situation - I'm sure we've all had enough of that. Let's look at jollier and nicer things. We should have given Beethoven's music a good outing in 2020. He was born in December 1770 - 250 years ago. Again, I'm not going to mumble on and on about his deafness - we read enough about all that. Instead, here are a few insights into other aspects of his fascinating character - yes, I'm going to mumble about Beethoven's love and sex life!! Ah – now that's grabbed your attention!! Good; read on!!

From the time he arrived in Vienna in his early 20s, Beethoven was almost perpetually in love. Unfortunately, what all the women he fell for had in common was their unattainability. They were either upper class, married or just uninterested in him. There is something almost 'quixotic' in his pursuit of love - it seems he needed the chase far more than a positive outcome.

His first love was Nanette Streicher, who went on to marry a piano-maker in Vienna but continued to offer motherly advice to Beethoven for years. Another teenage love was Eleonore von Breuning whom he allegedly offended by 'making a crude lunge while out on a date'. (That's how one book I read describes what happened. I can think of at least another dozen ways of putting it) Well, such things do happen - so I'm told!

Beethoven contemplated making a marriage proposal in 1810 to Baroness Therese Malfatti. We don't know if he actually popped the question; if he did, she didn't say yes!. The following year he wooed the mezzo-soprano Amalie Sebald. She may have been the person he had in mind when composing songs to a 'Distant Beloved'. Amalie married in 1815, moved to Berlin and vanished from his life and this mumbling.

There's a bit of a pattern developing here.

Josephine Brunsvik and her sister Therese were countesses, way out of young Ludwig's class. Josephine (remember the name) was married to a count who died young and in debt. Beethoven gave her piano lessons for several years and wrote 'amorous' (I'm being so polite!!) letters - the content of which isn't difficult to imagine when you realise that she replied with "*I would have to violate sacred bonds if I yielded to your request - believe me that I, by doing what is my duty, suffer the most*". (Ah, that old chestnut!). Josephine's sister Therese Brunsvik is probably the woman Beethoven had in mind when composing *Für Elise* because he fell in love with her too.

I think it's drop dead romantic to be dedicating beautiful music to lovely ladies - Beethoven obviously thought the same because the next lady he fell in love with was the Countess Giulietta Giucciardi. Beethoven gave her piano lessons and the dedication of the 'Moonlight' Sonata. She married a passing count and is another that hereby exists the tale and this mumbling. Antonie Brentano - to whom Beethoven dedicated the 'Diabelli Variations' was to follow. Not only was she married when Beethoven fell for her, she was pregnant as well and her husband was a good friend of Beethoven's who lent him money when in need and never demanded repayment.

Right - it gets a bit 'saucy' now! What we don't know is whether Beethoven ever made love to a woman. Scholars (who should get a life), spend hours researching and musing on such things and they tell us that there's no evidence to support that there was ever any sexual activity on his part (although I'm not quite sure I know what they'd be looking for 200 odd years later!). Beethoven had been physically desirable in his 20s but in his mid-30s he stopped caring for his appearance and personal hygiene. i.e. he was a bit 'whiffy'!

There is a rumour however, - nothing more - of an illegitimate daughter. Josephine Brunsvik (remember her from above?) had four children with her first husband and three more during a short-lived second marriage which ended in a vicious custody battle. At least three of her children were said to be conceived while her husbands were out of town. The youngest child - Minona - was born in April 1813, nine months after Josephine wrote that letter about "*violating sacred bonds*" to Beethoven!! Minona lived out her life in Vienna and she bore some resemblance to Beethoven. Tongues wagged!! Was she his daughter?? It seems that if he was ever intimate with a woman Josephine was the likeliest.

My final mumble on dear old L van B in this the 250th anniversary of his birth, is to show you just how romantic a guy he was! Forget the dedication of lovely music and check out these few snippets from love letters he wrote in 1812. Nobody knows who they were to. They're a bit 'flowery' but this is steamy stuff (Mills and Boon eat your heart out!!) And don't forget we're talking 200 years ago! Scholars call them 'The Immortal Beloved' letters and think they were to Josephine - but what do they know about it? I think it's much more interesting and intriguing that we'll never know.

..... *"Can our love persist otherwise than through sacrifices, than by not demanding everything? Canst thou change it, that thou are not entirely mine, I not entirely thine? Oh, God, look into beautiful nature and compose your mind to the inevitable. Love demands everything and is quite right, so it is for me with you, for you with me - only you forget so*

easily, that I must live for you and for me - were we quite united, you would notice this painful feeling as little as I should.....

.....We shall probably soon meet, even today I cannot communicate my remarks to you, which during these days I made about my life - were our hearts close together, I should probably not make any such remarks. My bosom is full, to tell you much - there are moments when I find that speech is nothing at all. Brighten up - remain my true and only treasure, my all, as I to you. The rest the gods must send, what must be for us and shall.....

.....Even in bed my ideas yearn towards you, my Immortal Beloved, here and there joyfully, then again sadly, awaiting from Fate, whether it will listen to us. I can only live, either altogether with you or not at all.

What longing in tears for you - You - my Life - my All - farewell. Oh, go on loving me - never doubt the faithful heart

Of your beloved

Ludwig

Ever thine.

Ever mine.

Ever ours."

And finally on this - if you watch *Sex and the City* you'll know that Carrie and Big say these words to each other - but now you know that it was dear old L van B that thought them up. So few things are original - but he was.