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History of Western Thought and Culture: An Archetypal Perspective

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Due: January 3, 2011

## HEARING BEETHOVEN'S SATURN RETURN

Ludwig van Beethoven has been considered one of the most popular composers of our time and his name evokes a veil of mystery and darkness wrapping several years of his life - particularly during the time of his Saturn Return. His work at this phase of his life was very revealing of his emotional states and perhaps mostly influenced by his planetary transits. Proclaimed as "Le grand sourd [The great deaf one]," by fellow composer Hector Berlioz; Beethoven has been regarded as great, deaf, grumpy, dear, and everything in between. The relentless pursuit of his art seemed to serve a healing function for his difficulties. His tribulations defined his music and the intensity that gives it such universal appeal still heard today in films, celebrations, and concert halls around the world. The accessibility of Beethoven's music was distinguished by quixotic movements and passionate sonatas. Needless to say, Romanticism was ready and waiting for him when he arrived.

## ROMANTICISM

After the Renaissance, two major streams of thought emerged as Enlightenment and Romanticism. While considered somewhat opposites, they both emphasized the "humanist" qualities of life and were rebellious in their quest for human freedom.<sup>1</sup> Romanticism developed as a response to the mechanistic aspect of the Enlightenment and instead accentuated the

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<sup>1</sup> Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 366

numinous and imaginative qualities of living. The Romanticism movement took place approximately mid-18<sup>th</sup> century through the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and could be considered a revolt, as well as a complement, to the Enlightenment period. However, the spiritual and non-science essence of Romanticism wasn't found in God, and instead through art's myriad forms of music, drama, literature, and painting.<sup>2</sup> It became a time when the inner world was reclaimed and reconnected to the soul.

Soul unions and explorations claim the archetypal energy of Neptune, which was joined with Uranus in a conjunction during the height of Romanticism between 1814 and 1829. Uranus carries the force of change, breakthroughs, and the creative genius. The illumination of the Neptune archetype provides illumination, imagination, and intuition. Together Neptune and Uranus alignments are characterized by rebirths of idealism, shifts in a culture's artistic imagination, and the emergence of new philosophical perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Romanticism epitomized these distinguishing qualities and gave birth to some of the great artists in history, among them Beethoven.

## BEETHOVEN'S NATAL CHART

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized December 17, 1770 (most likely born on December 16). Although his birthday is decades before Romanticism, his natal chart alignments personify its influence with Neptune and Uranus in grand trine with Pluto.<sup>4</sup> Pluto brings into the mix an intensity of emotion and the possibility for profound transformation. Beethoven has been

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<sup>2</sup> Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 373

<sup>3</sup> Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche*, 356

<sup>4</sup> See Figure 1 of this document

credited by many as transforming music from the Classical era into Romanticism. The new sounds created by Beethoven's vision of Romanticism formed asymmetry and seemed to have a flirtation with the supernatural.<sup>5</sup> Not everyone was happy with the change in melodic style and his music pushed the edge of many people's ears creating some of Beethoven's harshest critics. He was also somewhat vilified throughout his career and often portrayed as an angry, temperamental man with many issues in his personal life.<sup>6</sup> His Sun-Mars opposition would be a contributing factor to this personality type - the masculine identity of the Sun enhanced by the competitive and warrior mentality of Mars.

The three outer most planets found in Beethoven's chart combine to form a single larger archetypal complex<sup>7</sup> also found in the charts of fellow "Romantics" Hegel and Napoleon who were also born between 1769 and 1770. Beethoven, Hegel, and Napoleon each have a remarkable conjunction within their grand trines denoting their specific influences in history. These inner planets act as carriers for the significance and depth that the outer planets bring forth. Napoleon had Mars conjunct Neptune establishing the aggression and deception of his reign. On the other hand, Hegel's chart integrated Mercury as the dynamism behind his intellect. The Venus-Pluto conjunction represented in Beethoven's chart channeled the intensity of aesthetics and desire so evident in his chords composed especially during his Saturn Return.

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<sup>5</sup> Siepmann, *Beethoven: His Life & Music*, viiii

<sup>6</sup> Suchet, *The Friendly Guide to Beethoven*, 158

<sup>7</sup> Tarnas, *Comos and Psyche*, 389

## BEETHOVEN'S SATURN RETURN

The Saturn Return marks a three-year period around the ages of 28 through 30 when the planet Saturn returns to same place as it was during someone's birth. This completion of a cycle marks the end of an era as the years of youth give way to maturity and the coming of age.<sup>8</sup> Saturn brings wisdom to experiences and highlights areas of the past needing closure and completion. At the same time it creates the "challenging realities of life and death, time and aging, loss and adversity"<sup>9</sup> Loss and adversity were especially true for Beethoven during his Saturn Return, which took place approximately 1798-1802. At the age of 27 just before his Saturn Return alignment, Beethoven began to notice he was slowly losing his hearing and at the same time encountered deteriorating physical condition.

In a letter written to his oldest childhood friend he says, "That jealous demon, my wretched health, has put a nasty spoke in my wheel."<sup>10</sup> At the same time as he began losing his hearing, he was also experiencing major digestive health issues and receiving unpleasant treatments that included cold baths and medicines that made him even sicker. The cause of Beethoven's deafness and sudden illness still remains unknown. Several studies have linked the problems to a combination of lead poisoning and even syphilis.<sup>11</sup> Without answers and too embarrassed to admit he was deaf, Beethoven dove into his art. It may have given him a socially acceptable way to express his anger and spend more time away from people to compose.

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<sup>8</sup> Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche*, 119

<sup>9</sup> Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche*, 119

<sup>10</sup> Siepmann, *Beethoven: His Life & Music*, 102

<sup>11</sup> Hayden, *Pox: Genius, Madness, and the Mysteries of Syphilis*, 73

Whatever the reasons for his temperament, his talents flourished and throughout the three years of his Saturn Return<sup>12</sup> he had many major accomplishments, despite his increasing deafness. On April 2, 1800 at the age of 30 he performed his first concert with his own music at the Hoftheater in Vienna.<sup>13</sup> It was there he premiered his *Septet* and *Symphony 1*. The few years prior he completed his first *String Quartet* and his first large *Piano Sonatas* the *Pathetique*. All of these pieces of music speaking strongly to a softer, transcendent Neptunian feel of his music. While composing these pieces natal Saturn and its conjunction were both squaring Neptune in the grand trine bringing more oceanic sounding compositions to his creativity. In his later works as he transitioned into the more chaotic Romantic style of passion and compulsion characteristic of Pluto square Saturn continuing throughout his Saturn Return.

The next year Beethoven was relieved of financial anxieties by an annuity from Prince Lichnowsky of Austria.<sup>14</sup> He still taught during this time and shortly after began composing two of his most famous works – *Piano Sonata Op. 27* (later named *Moonlight Sonata*) and the ballet *Creatures of Prometheus*. Both these masterpieces greatly reflect brilliantly the planetary relationships of the grand trine in his natal chart. The *Moonlight Sonata* was written as a love song to an unattainable woman.<sup>15</sup> His pangs of romantic heartbreak were greatly intensified by the Venus-Pluto conjunction opposite his natal Neptune. Venus and Pluto brought a sensitivity and darkness to his emotions and inspired the pure Romanticism sounds evoked from *Moonlight Sonata*. The Uranus of his chart, the archetype of Prometheus, is in trine with Venus at this time.

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<sup>12</sup> See Figure 2 of this document

<sup>13</sup> Suchet, *The Friendly Guide to Beethoven*, 13

<sup>14</sup> Siepmann, *Beethoven: His Life & Music*, 34

<sup>15</sup> Suchet, *The Friendly Guide to Beethoven*, 14

This could explain his desire to create a ballet as a softer form of creativity and also honor the awakening of Uranus.

However, after the all the good fortune in 1800 and 1801, things began to go downhill. The real pangs of his unattainable love began to haunt him and he wrote in a letter to a friend, “I must somehow keep going as best I can.”<sup>16</sup> In October of 1802 he went through a dark spell, with Plutonic intensity (again Pluto squaring Saturn), and wrote the now infamous Heiligenstadt Testament. Beethoven wrote the letter to his brothers after a secluded stay of six months in the town of Heiligenstadt.<sup>17</sup> In it he confesses his deafness made him withdraw from mankind and felt hopeless realizing its permanence. The letter was a turning point for Beethoven, acknowledging his struggle and vowing to overcome his unfortunate circumstances. Saturn’s energy seems very poignant throughout the letter. It allows us to take accountability for our actions and strengthens our commitments. In this case, Beethoven takes his solitude and endures his trials forging ahead into bigger and better things.

The next major composition to come out of his Saturn Return was the *Symphony No. 3 Eroica*, dedicated to Napoleon (and later undedicated when he proclaimed himself Emperor in 1804) with Mars in his conjunction. Throughout his Saturn Return Uranus squared Mars and resulted in spurts of anger and aggression as well as identification with his creative genius becoming more confident in his abilities as a composer. *Eroica*, which means “heroism” in Italian, exudes Mars undertones of heroism, courage, and aggression. The song could also be

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<sup>16</sup> Siepmann, *Beethoven: His Life & Music*, 39

<sup>17</sup> Lockwood, *The Music and the Life: Beethoven*

Beethoven's own answer to the Heiligenstadt Testament.<sup>18</sup> It took Beethoven several years to complete *Eroica* and in seems to reflect himself as the hero of this story. Never before had music become rooted in the individual experience of its composer, a key archetypal foundation of Uranus. Its length alone demonstrates the triumph of human will over adversity, in this case the Saturn Return and Plutonic depths of Beethoven's past few years.

Beethoven wrote the majority of *Eroica* during the Jupiter-Uranus conjunction of 1803.<sup>19</sup> He must have been feeling the expansion and freedom brought on by this alignment to complete what some would consider his magnum opus. This song liberates its listeners and takes them on a journey flinging open emotional doors and searching for what it means to be human. Each movement of *Eroica* tells of an archetype experienced in Beethoven's natal chart and throughout the past several years of his life. The first movement is light-hearted, joyous, celebratory, and hopeful demonstrating its connection to Neptune full of unity and love. Then the Plutonic force of the second movement takes over and listeners sense gravitas and feel something has died. Once it seems difficult to go on the third movement brings us into a new breakthrough and an awakening again of our soul with Uranus. Finally, the fourth movement of *Eroica* contains almost an air of boasting and ends with a grand climax – possibly a celebration of the ending of this Saturn Return.

Beethoven's works fall roughly into three periods considered to be early (1790-1803), middle (1803-1815), and late (1815-1826).<sup>20</sup> His early period ends shortly after Saturn leaves the

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<sup>18</sup> Siepmann, *Beethoven: His Life & Music*, 55

<sup>19</sup> Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche*, 318

<sup>20</sup> Siepmann, *Beethoven: His Life & Music*, 23

conjunction with his natal Saturn. During this time, his works predominantly fall within the Classical tradition and after his Saturn Return his music expands into his more famous (and sometimes infamous) Romantic style. Many credit Beethoven with this movement of sound and believe music became more transcendental and less structured throughout his evolution. Without following the path of predecessors continuing in the Classical tradition he came into his own style and paved the way for many others to express their creativity more freely. We can literally hear Saturn forging his transition into adulthood through his music.

#### SATURN RETURNS AGAIN

The life and great works of artists' cannot be separated, as the case with Beethoven. His personal struggles defined and inspired his work. Through Beethoven's music we are able to experience his pain, joy, and of his existence. It is the tragedy of his being that makes his music so appealing and beautiful - speaking to the deep emotions accompanying Saturn's return. A few years before his death, Beethoven described his music in a very Venusian and Plutonic way saying, "From the heart may it return to the heart."<sup>21</sup> The great irony being that the worse his hearing became, the more grandness associated with his compositions.

On March 26, 1827 at the age of 56, Beethoven died during a thunderstorm in Vienna.<sup>22</sup> There are several strange accounts of his death asserting he said, "I have hearing in heaven." Some claim he fell into a coma and remarked, "Pity, pity. Too late" in reference to a shipment of

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<sup>21</sup> Suchet, *The Friendly Guide to Beethoven*, v

<sup>22</sup> Suchet, *The Friendly Guide to Beethoven*, 24

wine that arrived on March 24. Then in the course of a loud thunder clap, at approximately 5:45 p.m. on the day of his death, raised his arm with a clenched fist and sank back.<sup>23</sup>

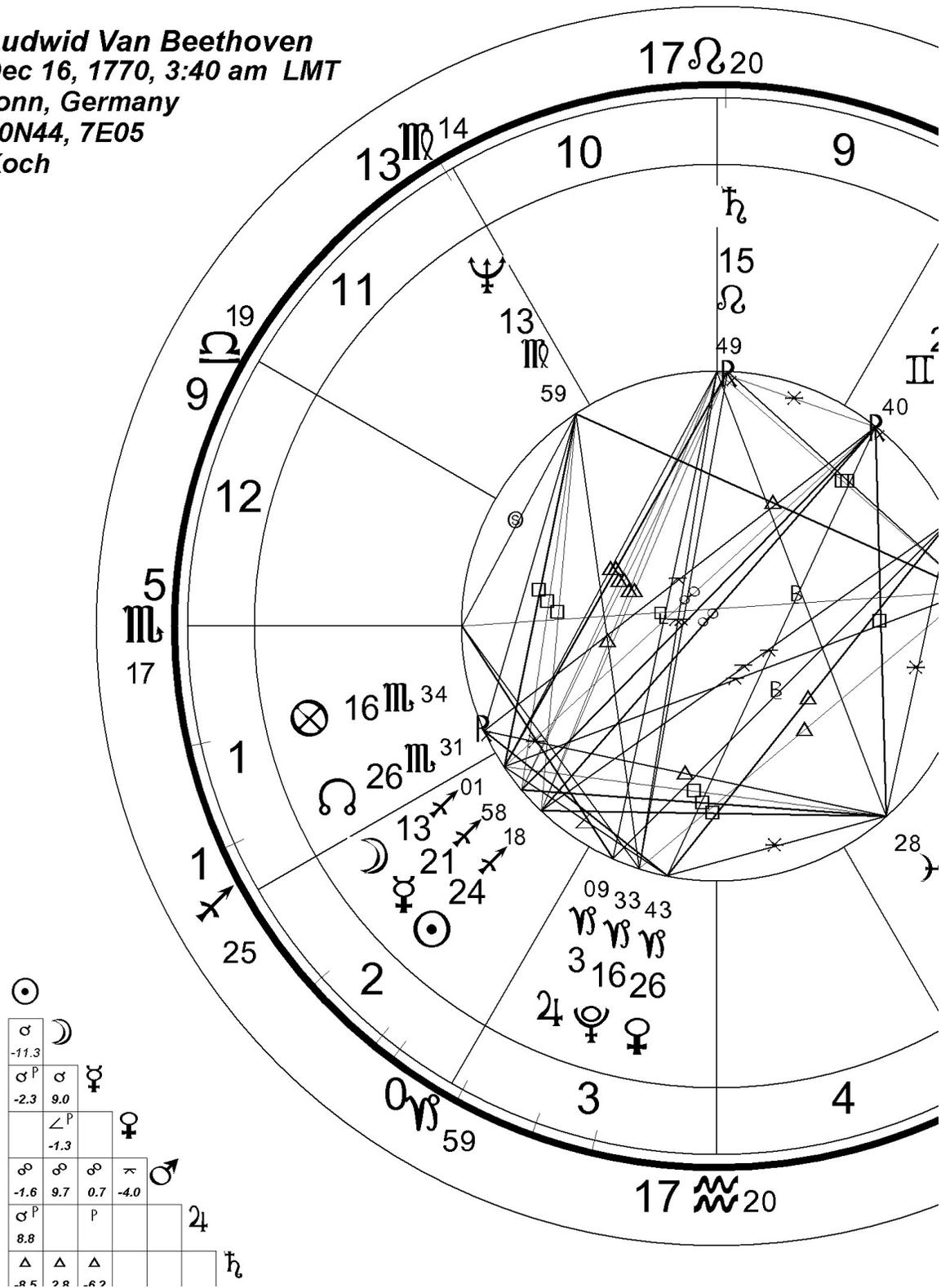
The day of his death natal Saturn was squaring Pluto in the sky and he was in his second Saturn Return. It was 49 years earlier on the same day in 1778 when he performed for the first time on stage. Even now, 200 years later, the cause of his death remains unknown with ideas of lead poisoning, Whipple disease, cirrhosis of the liver, and syphilis. Many other mysteries remain surrounding Beethoven's life including the cause of his deafness and even the romantic relationships he kept very secret. Since his death what has become clear is the importance of his music's evolutionary style – even if he couldn't hear it.

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<sup>23</sup> Suchet, *The Friendly Guide to Beethoven*, 195

FIGURE 1

**Ludwid Van Beethoven**  
 Dec 16, 1770, 3:40 am LMT  
 Bonn, Germany  
 50N44, 7E05  
 Koch







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