


MUSIC

DOCUMENTARY  
60 MIN.

**VERSIONS**

English, Spanish:  
01 x 60 min.

**RIGHTS**

Not available worldwide.  
Please contact your regional  
distribution partner. 

**ORDER NUMBER**

68 4876



## The Beethoven Hair Mystery

Beethoven wrote the most famous sequence of notes in Western music history: the first four notes of his Fifth Symphony. But, tragically, he could not hear the wonderful music he created because he was deaf.

The work of Ludwig van Beethoven, who was born in Bonn in 1770 and died in Vienna in 1827, brought the Viennese School to its stylistic zenith, and thereby served as a bridge between Classicism and Romanticism.

For much of his life Beethoven suffered from various illnesses and was often in great pain. He died at the age of 56. For decades, researchers have tried to reconstruct the progression of his illnesses and seek clues as to the cause of his death.

Analysis of strands of his hair by scientists in the US suggests Beethoven died from lead poisoning. That might also explain his deafness, mood swings and angry outbursts. But it is not clear why he should have been exposed to a lot of lead.

There are also questions about the history of the lock of hair that was brought to the US for analysis. One day after Beethoven died, his friend the pianist and composer Johann Nepomuk Hummel visited his apartment to bid him farewell. Beethoven's body was laid out in his coffin. Hummel was accompanied by a young student of his named Ferdinand Hiller, who cut off the lock of hair as a memento. It was kept by the Hiller family and passed on as an heirloom through the generations. The lock came into the possession of a doctor in a small town in Nazi-occupied Denmark. Who gave him the hair? Why? Nobody knows. Half a century later, in 1994, his daughter sold it at Sotheby's in London. The two Americans who acquired it commissioned the forensic analysis, which found the level of lead in Beethoven's hair to be 100 times higher than normal.