

## The Beethoven Museum Heiligenstadt

# WIEN MUSEUM

A towering figure among classical composers, Ludwig van Beethoven spent his entire professional life in Vienna. Yet no high-profile museum commemorating Beethoven's life and work exists in this city renowned for its musical heritage. Until now, the Wien Museum has operated a small memorial site in rooms overlooking the courtyard of the house where Beethoven wrote his famed "Heiligenstadt Testament." We are about to change that.

In an exciting development, the Wien Museum recently brought the entirety of the Beethoven house in Heiligenstadt under its administration. Under the leadership of Director Matti Bunzl and a team of international experts, the Wien Museum will completely renovate and reopen the Beethoven Museum Heiligenstadt as a state-of-the-art exhibition space, research center, and performance venue. With the planned remodeling along with key object acquisitions, the Wien Museum aims to create an engaging, immersive, and complete Beethoven experience.



## Beethoven and Heiligenstadt

Born in Bonn, Beethoven first traveled to Vienna in 1787 to study with Mozart, returning again in 1792 for the long haul. Beethoven expressed a particular fondness for the wooded and mountainous surroundings of the fortified city. Heiligenstadt, a suburb that retains its village-like quaintness to the present day, was a particular favorite.



Deafness indelibly stamped Beethoven's life and work and is a theme that features prominently in the Wien Museum's Heiligenstadt exhibits. Beethoven experienced the first hints of his malady in his mid-twenties. In 1802, his physician recommended a stay in Heiligenstadt, also a thriving spa town, where the thermal waters were reputed to have the power to cure rheumatism and nervous

disorders. The wooded hillsides and vineyards suited Beethoven's disposition, but the baths did not cure him.

The Beethoven Museum Heiligenstadt recalls one of the most crucial turning points in Beethoven's life: his moving "Heiligenstadt Testament." Written in October 1802 in the form of a letter to his brothers. It starts out as a suicide note, with Beethoven expressing despair at his advancing deafness and frustration that no cure has been found. As the text continues, the tenor changes. Realizing that his calling lies in composition rather than performance, the text morphs into an aesthetic manifesto, the triumph of creativity in the face of physical disability. Beethoven sealed but never sent the letter. When it was discovered among his papers, it was quickly recognized as the defining moment of his life. It quite literally turned him into the artistic titan and radical innovator who changed the course of music for good.



## What We Plan to Do

Our current exhibition space does a fine job of documenting the background to the “Heiligenstadt Testament.” But we plan to take our museum to new heights by dramatically enhancing both the content of our displays and the contextualization of Beethoven’s life. Tripling the available exhibition space is just the beginning.

The new Beethoven Museum Heiligenstadt will also offer a concert hall where visitors can hear Beethoven’s music performed in an excellent acoustic environment. Mirroring our successful launch of interactive media at our recently-restored Virgilkapelle, the new exhibition space will feature state-of-the-art audio-visual media (iPads, audioguides, touch-screen stations with layered information). We will open an expanded gift shop where visitors can purchase music, books, and other merchandise relating to classical music. With our library and research space, we plan to turn the Beethoven Museum Heiligenstadt into a study center for Beethoven scholars and general-interest visitors alike.



We have assembled a tremendous team to plan the new exhibition spaces and create an engaging experience for our visitors. We are absolutely thrilled that William Kinderman, Professor of Musicology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will serve as scholarly consultant. Kinderman is among the world’s leading Beethoven experts, having written a definitive artistic biography and edited the composer’s seminal notebooks. Art historian Lisa Noggler-Gürtler has worked with the Wien Museum on exhibitions including the popular “Ich bin ich: Mira Lobe und Susi Weigel,” and brings years of expertise in museum education. Ernst Kobau is a music historian and former oboist with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. Wien Museum curator Alexandra Hönigmann is our in-house music expert. Together, they will create a museum that will not only recall one of the truly greats but a global signpost for the next generation of musicians and music lovers.

### Facts and Figures

- Total project costs: 500,000€
  - 150,000€: Amount already spent on reconstruction
  - 150,000€: Amount required for future renovations
  - 150,000€: Exhibition costs (e.g., object acquisition, installation, multi-media)
  - 50,000€: Music program development
- 2017: Planned opening of the Beethoven Museum Heiligenstadt
- 9 April 2016: Date we will debut our recently-acquired Bösendorfer piano with a performance by Florian Feilmair
- Artwork: The wonderful painting of Beethoven (Josef Willibrord Mähler, ca. 1804/05) and the evocative view of Heiligenstadt (Tobias Dionys Raulino, 1821) pictured on the previous page are but a few of the many stunning objects in the Wien Museum’s Beethoven collection.