

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

## DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



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### Depictions of Beethoven in Japanese Anime: Japanese Visual Arts Transforming Western Iconography

Beethoven's legacy is still alive and well in present-day Japan, where his life and works continue to play a major part in Japan's modern cultural landscape. The Western vision of the wild-haired, scowling genius is commonly recognized in Japan today, and it comes as no surprise that many agencies have tried to harness the power of his unmistakable image to attract Japanese consumers. As such, Beethoven's distinctive features have been the subject of playful reimagining in many artistic and commercial products, some stretching his persona to the extreme.

The composer has also been depicted as a character in Japanese anime, where common historical tropes about his appearance merge with the fantastic ideas of professional character designers. In these examples, we see how contemporary Japanese visual arts can imbue conventional Western iconography with uniquely Japanese aesthetics. Scholar John Tibbetts's monograph on composer biopics describes how filmmakers forge a tenuous balance between historical record and filmic dramatization in their works, a juxtaposition certainly felt in Japan's animated depictions of Beethoven.

This presentation examines two examples of Beethoven as an anime character. The first is from the 2001 OVA *Read or Die*, in which Beethoven is a cyborg fated to destroy mankind with his "Suicide Symphony." The second is "Beethes" from NHK's 2016 comedy anime *ClassicaLoid*, a stylishly leather-clad android obsessed with cooking the perfect gyoza dumpling. In addition, we will hear how Beethoven's symphonic masterpieces are transformed in the anime underscores to support the distinctly Japanese characterization of Beethoven found in these popular shows.

**Heike Hoffer** earned a Master's of Music in Oboe Performance from the University of Minnesota before accepting a full-time position as a music professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, which she held for five years. After her time in Texas, Heike completed a second master's degree in Musicology at the University of Arizona and is now pursuing a Ph.D. in Musicology at The Ohio State University. She is currently living in Tokyo and conducting research for her dissertation, which is on the subject of Western classical music in Japanese animation.

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum open to scholars working on Japan in any field of the humanities. It is organized by Barbara Geilhorn and Isaac Gagné. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration online or via email ([geilhorn@diجتokyo.org](mailto:geilhorn@diجتokyo.org)) is greatly appreciated.

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