

Poisoning in composers

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Summary – Exploring several hundred composer's patographies, we found poisoning as a cause of death in 11 composers. Generally, those were murders by poisoning. We also found some accidental food poisonings. All those cases of poisoning caused a sudden ending of their creativity, and were the most common cause of death of composers in early age of life.

Keywords: poisoning, composers

INTRODUCTION

After exploring several hundred composer's patographies, we sorted out those who committed suicide by poisoning and those who were poisoned.^{1–6} Generally,

those were murders by poisoning. We elaborated the existing facts and presented the composers by short patographies arranged chronologically by the year of birth.^{7–10}

CHASTELAIN DE COUCI (1165–1203)

Was a French composer. It is possible that he died of a natural cause while on his way to the Fourth crusade war and was buried at sea. However, a legend describes his love affair with Madam Fayel. Allegedly after her jealous husband found out about the affair and sent an assassin to poison him.

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GIOVANNI GIOVENALE ANCINA
(1545–1604)

Was an Italian composer. He was a very versatile, respectable, and wise person. He opposed to several social circles and was poisoned at the age of 59.

**MARCO ANTONIO PIETRO
CESTI (1623–1669)**

Was also an Italian composer and conductor. He was very stubborn, litigious by his temper, tended to conflicts and had problems with alcohol abuse. He got into conflicts more often and died at the age of 46 in Firenze after a fight, allegedly poisoned by his competitors, fellow musicians.

LEONARDO VINCI
(1690–1730)

He was an Italian composer. He died in a mysterious way at the age of 40, and there were rumors that he was poisoned because of a forbidden love affair. Just before his death he experienced severe abdominal cramps, but the same symptoms may have been caused by cholera.

JOHANN SCHOBERT
(1735–1767)

Was a French composer. While he was on an excursion in the forest he came across some mushrooms which he later prepared. Everyone who ate the mush-

rooms in that meal, including Schobert, died of acute mushroom poisoning.

DOMENICO CIMAROSA
(1749–1801)

Was an Italian composer. At the age of 50 he was involved in Naples reverberations of the French revolution and was convicted to death. Because of his notability he was spared and sent to Venice. There his medical condition abruptly worsened and he died shortly after. Because of his almost sudden death, the rumors spread that he was poisoned, which could suite with his tempestuous life. However, after turning 45, he was already sick with bilious cholics and lived in swamp areas where his medical condition over the last years was very aggravated.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
(1756–1791)

Was an Austrian composer, pianist and conductor. There are four possible theories of Mozart's death. The most probable is an epidemic streptococcal fever, followed by subacute bacterial endocarditis which led to cerebral artery embolism, then kidney diseases such as post streptococcal glomerulonephritis, Henoch-Schönlein purpura, polycystic kidney disease or nephrosis. The least possible theory is poisoning. The first among possible suspects is Antonio Salieri, for whom the public believed to have poi-

soned Mozart out of jealousy, followed by a secret mason fraternity whose secrets Mozart partially revealed in his opera »The magic flute«. A possible perpetrator is also Süßmeyer for whom it was rumoured to be a possible lover of Mozart's wife. Also we can include Mozart's ex- mistresses or their angry husbands as possible perpetrators. Possible poisoning materials are mercury within treatment of possible syphilis, antimony, arsenic, and »*aqua tofana*«, but they are presented with different clinical symptoms from the ones present in Mozart's final disease. Emetics and purgatives which doctors used to eject the poison from his body and vein punctures shortly before his death could have worsened his condition.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Was a German composer, pianist and conductor. He developed a liver disease in 1821 which was probably caused by a hepatitis virus, and along with alcohol abuse, it progressed to liver cirrhosis. This broke out in a form of an acute disease in 1825 along with progression of his medical condition and resulting in his death. The analysis of Beethoven's hair showed he was exposed to lead poisoning at the time of death, but the analysis of his skull showed that he was exposed to it previously for some time. Lead poisoning can cause headaches, fatigue, con-

centrating problems and other skin related problems, or the ones including diarrhea. That could explain Beethoven's bad behavior, anger and being willing to cooperate with others. There are several possible ways of how lead could have gotten into his body. As he loved to drink, especially wine, it is possible that the lead under the influence of the wine acid was released from the lead glazing of clay pots, and entered his body through his digestive system. The second option is that Beethoven was poisoned with lead from the lead salts which were used for cleaning up wounds, in his case wounds that were made by tapping his abdomen because of ascites. One of the possible ways of poisoning could have been bathing and drinking mineral water during his stay in spa. Treatment could have also led to the poisoning, because all of the medications were kept in bottles made out of lead glass, but that probably couldn't have led to his death.

DOMENICO PUCCINI (1772–1815)

Was an Italian composer. He died of a mysterious and sudden death at the age of 43, allegedly because of political reasons. It is considered he was poisoned.

NIKOLAY GRIGORYEVICH RUBINSTEIN (1835–1881)

Was a Russian composer, pianist and conductor. He was of a hedonistic tem-

per, especially immoderate in eating, and in time developed some more severe digestive problems. Instead of carefully monitoring his diet, when he was a guest in Paris, he ate a meal of poisoned oysters, which worsened his condition severely and he was brought to hospital with an acute abdomen diagnosis. Section discovered an enteric type of tuberculosis which was the cause of his long-term health problems and eventual death.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893)

Was a Russian composer, pianist, conductor, musical writer, and critic. When he was ten years old, he left for military school where he encountered a homosexual environment. There he was very lonely, always surrounded with other boys and teachers (one of his professors, Zveryev was apparently seducing some of his students). To oppose the rumors about his affinities towards the same sex, he married his student, Antonina Milyukova. The marriage was quickly dissolved. His homosexual appeal towards his brother, nephew, servant and younger people didn't stop. To hide his appeal, he developed excessive symptomatic neurotic alcoholism with pre-delirious conditions. He also tended towards taking bromine, the only real sedative in those times, and took it more often when he wasn't drinking. He often had stomach problems, especially in stressful situations, which

were associated with diarrhea. In 1893, on a steamship to Odesa, he allegedly seduced a 14-year old boy, barons Steinbock's nephew, who informed the emperor about the situation. The Russian emperor was rather stern about the matter, so major problems emerged. On a business lunch, he poured into his glass, on purpose, the water from river Neva, which would have been very unadvised, because of the epidemic of cholera which was still in progress in Sanct Peterburg. He allegedly drank that glass of water and received criticism from surrounding people. He got ill soon afterwards, lied down and fell asleep. He developed puking and diarrhea. He allegedly got severe stomach cramps, had unquenchable thirst, massive muscle cramps and developed anuria with uremia. One day he got better, only to get worse beyond return and died. The newest theory is that his death wasn't a case of spontaneous suicide by *V.cholerae*, but self-poisoning with arsenic on purpose, while being oppressed by the government because of his homosexual behavior and frequent seductions. Most of his dysenteric symptoms related with a high dose of acute arsenic poisoning, so that is also obviously possible.

TROVANJA U SKLADATELJA

Sažetak – Proučavajući više stotina skladateljskih patografija, u njih 11 kao uzrok smrti

nađeno je otrovanje. Uglavnom su to bila ubojstva trovanjem. Također smo našli nešto slučajnih smrti zbog otrovanja hranom. Svi

su ovi slučajevi otrovanja u skladatelja uzrokovali nagli prekid u njihovom stvaralaštvu.

Ključne riječi: trovanje, kompozitori

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