

## Journeys - About the Music Notes

Beethoven's most important journey was the one he made in 1792. The twenty one-year old arrived in Vienna in November of that year to study with Joseph Haydn having been given leave with pay by the Elector in Bonn for whom he worked. One of Beethoven's patrons back home in the city in Bonn was Count Waldstein (to whom Beethoven would dedicate one of his greatest piano sonatas), and it was Waldstein who famously predicted that in the Imperial capital, Beethoven would 'receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn'.

A lovely thought, but of course it didn't quite work out that way. Beethoven was moody and, even at that age, inclined to be arrogant (Haydn called him the Grand Mogul, and once, in exasperation, 'an atheist!'). There was also an embarrassing incident where Beethoven needed money; Haydn wrote to the Elector sending him some scores and saying how well he was working and requested an increase to Beethoven's stipend. The Elector was no fool, and wrote a curt response saying that in fact Beethoven had written much of that music already; he suggested with some asperity that Beethoven should probably return to Bonn as he obviously wasn't working very hard!

Haydn was probably preoccupied with his international stardom: some musicologists have found the exercises that Beethoven did for Haydn, and noted that he didn't always correct all the mistakes, although that doesn't mean that he didn't point them out to Beethoven in lessons. But Haydn, to his surprise, had become internationally famous while he was working away at the castle of Eszterhaza in rural Hungary. His employer, Prince Nicholas Eszterhazy was keen hunter, so built a magnificent palace complete with opera theatre and concert rooms so that he could spend up to ten months a year there. Isolation, as Haydn later quipped, forced him to be original; publication throughout Europe ensured his reputation as one of the great composers of the age. In 1790 Prince Nicholas died leaving Haydn with a stipend and a new employer less interested in music. The sixty-something composer was able to make a couple of journeys of his own, to the centre of the European musical universe: London. There he was treated like a pop-star and in return wrote some of his greatest symphonies and chamber music. His Op.76 quartets are emphatically 'public' music, written in the wake of his trip and showing the mixture of popular idiom and refined formal sophistication.

As a musical centre, London has retained its pre-eminence, and generations of Australian musicians have journeyed there to study. Some, like composers David Lumsdaine and Malcolm Williamson stayed on, making the United Kingdom their home. Adelaide-born Miriam Hyde, made the pilgrimage to London's Royal College of Music in the late 1920s, enjoying considerable success there as pianist and composer. Returning to Australia she became one of the best loved figures in music; the date of her return was 1936 – the centenary year of South Australia's foundation and she wrote much of the music for the official celebrations. Just as South Australia was a world leader in women's suffrage, in Miriam Hyde the state produced one of this country's many fine women composers. Like her colleagues Dulcie Holland and Mirrie Hill, Hyde saw the need to write music for educational purposes as well as the concert hall. Her String Quartet of 1947 perhaps evokes some memories of her journey to England: its thematic material, particularly in the outer movements, has a modal flavour and folkish rhythms.

Beethoven's first quartets show him, not always successfully, assimilating the lessons of Haydn and the spirit of Mozart. By the time of his late quartets – three decades after his journey to Vienna – his music is in another world. A Russian nobleman and amateur musician, Prince Nikolai Galitzin, offered to commission up to three new quartets in 1822, and after a long initial delay, Beethoven found himself working almost involuntarily. Having finished the three he felt he still had much to say, and completed five. These have at various times been written off as the result of Beethoven's deafness and increasingly eccentric behaviour; other commentators have sought to present them as refuges of highly personal speculation. They are radical works and never 'easy' listening, as Stravinsky noted when he said that the *Grosse Fuge* would always be contemporary. The radiant C sharp minor work was, Beethoven joked, put together from bits and pieces (his publisher didn't get the joke!); like the Ninth Symphony it generously brings together elements of learned and popular music, sacred and secular. Such pieces represent the work of someone who could finally afford to be deaf to the knocking of fate at his door.