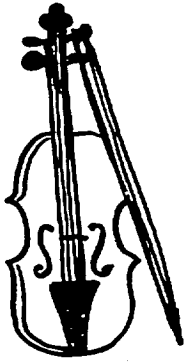


## VIENNA OFF THE RECORD

By Peter Pigott (article originally published in Travel and Leisure)



**E**very city has its share of birthplaces of the famous - and more so in Europe where the tourist value of such houses have long been recognized.

But how much more impressive it would be to tour the very locations where the great masterpieces were actually written, painted or composed; to view the piano where Beethoven worked on the Fifth Symphony or the room where an impoverished Mozart scribbled down his operas. That is Vienna.

The city had always been the place where a young musician came to 'make it.' For three centuries it was a combination of Broadway and Hollywood. The reason would be understood too clearly by modern aspiring artists and dancers. Vienna was where the money was - or more precisely, where the patrons of music lived.

By the 17th century, many of Europe's noble families had built themselves miniature palaces within the city's walls. Their orbit of the Hapsburg Court demanded extravagant spectacles with the latest discovery from the music world. To these families, who bankrolled Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert, we owe a great debt. Their town houses around the Hofburg are still the scene of concerts where visitors can visualize an unkempt Beethoven or a bewigged Mozart taking the musicians through his latest work.

The movie *Amadeus* has popularized the life and times of Mozart to the extent that no one can fail to enjoy a tour of his many residences in the core of Vienna. But Beethoven was another matter. During the years he lived in the city and its suburbs, he moved 35 times - sometimes keeping three apartments simultaneously.

The bane of landlords, he was a dirty, rude, and above all noisy tenant. The Austrian Tourist Board has not only listed most of his apartments but renovated them with as many of the composer's possessions as possible. The two rooms where he composed the opera *Fidelio* are at the top of a very long flight of narrow stairs of the Molker Bastei. The shaggy, greatcoated figure was often seen pacing the street in front of his house, humming snatches of the opera to himself. Finally to the relief of the decent citizens in his building, he moved to the suburb of Heligenstadt.

His increasing deafness, brought on by the French bombardment of the city, caused him to play loudly and at all hours. A visit to his apartments in the vineyards of Heligenstadt is an emotional experience. Each has the added attraction of being above or around from an excellent tavern. Beethoven escaped his cramped rooms by frequenting a cafe called Blumenstock - reading the newspapers and dawdling over coffee in the time-honored tradition of the Viennese. The cafe still flourishes, but one wonders what he would have made of the Coca-Cola sign outside.

In the midst of the slaughter and tyranny of the Napoleonic Wars, he would celebrate the hope of the common man of Schiller's poem. The trumpeting *Eroica* was created in the well preserved lodging here, his neighbors making allowances for the noise. Indeed, when Beethoven found out that his neighbours were actually enjoying the music, he packed up once more and fled down the street, further out in the country.

One can still see the bubbling brook that inspired him to write the Pastoral. Little has changed. A few yards from the terminus of the city tram are the paths that the genius strode while working on the evocative *Moonlight Sonata*. Local tradition has it that the farmers had to put up with this wild old man tramping through his fields, shaking his stick at their cows. The fleets of tour buses disgorge their passengers in the vicinity of his houses, but they can be avoided.