



BEETHOVEN-HAUS BONN

Beethoven on his travels

Travelling in the Beethoven era

Travelling was and is of great importance for every high calibre musician. As a traveller one could become acquainted with foreign music and at the same time become known as a performer or composer or both. Beethoven travelled little in comparison with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Mozart lived only 35 years but nonetheless spent about ten of those years travelling. Thanks to his competent father, the extroverted Wolfgang Amadeus began his life as a child prodigy. This was not included in the destiny of the introverted Beethoven, although he surely did not need to regret having missed such a career. In those days travelling was already quite sophisticated and could be well organised but it was nonetheless full of the unexpected and could be dangerous, not least because of the on-going wars. The most usual ways to travel were on foot or with the post coach. Only the rich could afford the special post or even their own coach; with these one could not only reach the destination sooner but also without the restrictions of a fixed timetable. On a normal day one could cover about 20 miles (about 30 km) on foot and with the coach between 40 and 65 miles (about 60 to 100 km). The post was taken care of at the relay post houses on the way; these post houses were also where the horses were changed. In or near the post houses there were overnight lodgings for the travellers.





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Showcase 1:

Travelling was made easier by a large number of mileage charts. They show the distances on the way between important European cities. Other useful items for the traveller were maps (see on the wall), city plans and guidebooks. The guidebooks contained detailed information about post roads, inns, tourist attractions, costs, exchange rates, the different regional units of weights and measures and more. Beethoven owned such travel books. Nevertheless, particularly in his later years in Vienna, when he was famous and when travelling would in fact have been especially rewarding for him, he hardly left the city. This had mostly to do with his hearing; his deafness would have made travelling a problem for him from when he was 40 years old onwards. He needed to have a companion with him, although this too was difficult, not so much because of paying such a person, but because Beethoven wanted someone from his circle of friends who could provide a familiar environment. Such a person was not always easy to find. For these reason, some lucrative journeys had to be foregone.

Probably after performances in private circles in Bonn, Beethoven gave his first public concert in the academy building in the Sternengasse in Cologne on March 26, 1778 (see too the city plan on the wall) when he was seven years old. Beethoven's father presented his son together with a singing pupil.

Family trip with a concert: Rotterdam and The Hague 1783

Showcase 2:

In the summer of 1783 the Beethoven family was visited by a relative who was employed by a distinguished woman in Rotterdam. The relative had persuaded the woman to make the trip to Bonn. As they were leaving, the relative invited the Beethovens back to Rotterdam. Beethoven and his mother spontaneously accepted. They probably took a 'Marktschiff' that transported goods and also carried passengers down the Rhine from Bonn to Rotterdam. It was not the fastest way of making the journey but certainly the most comfortable. From there they made a detour to The Hague where Beethoven, then 12 years old, played for Stadtholder Willem V, Prince of Orange, in the Buitenhof, today the parliament building of the Netherlands (see too the beautiful city map on the wall). For his performance, Beethoven was given the sum of 63 guilders by the prince.



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Educational journey: Vienna 1787

Showcase 3:

When he was 16 years old and already a young composer, Beethoven made a trip to Vienna

that took him through Coblenz, Limburg, Frankfurt am Main, Würzburg, Nuremberg, Regensburg, Passau, and Linz, in other words one of the routes still used today. His idea was to become a pupil of Mozart although this did not work out; it is not known whether the two men even met each other. Nonetheless, Beethoven made a report of Mozart's piano playing so he must have heard him. Hardly anything is known about this first visit to Vienna. Perhaps Beethoven went to the farewell concert of the English singer Nancy Storace on February 23, 1787 in the Kärntnertor Theater. At the concert, the Scene with Rondo 'Ch'io mi scordi di te?' – 'Non temer, amato bene' for soprano, concertante piano and orchestra, KV 505 was performed. Mozart had composed the work two months earlier for her and played the concertante piano part in the concert. Perhaps it had something to do with Beethoven that his colleague Nikolaus Simrock had this work in his stock in his music shop in Bonn.

Showcase 4:

On the way back from Vienna, Beethoven visited Munich where he stayed at the inn called 'Zum schwarzen Adler' (The black eagle). From there he went again to Regensburg and then to Augsburg where a travel acquaintance, Joseph von Schaden, together with his wife Anna, a fine pianist, had recently gone to live. Von Schaden lent money to Beethoven. The latter, in his first surviving letter, written when he was back in Bonn, asked von Schaden to have patience with the repayment. In Augsburg Beethoven, already known as an exceptionally gifted pianist, visited Johann Andreas Stein, a most famous piano builder of his time. Stein's daughter Nannette moved to Vienna with her husband Andreas Streicher and was to become Beethoven's advisor for household affairs many years later in Vienna. In Augsburg, Stein lived and worked on the Ulrichsplatz (in the *Vue d'optique* the second house on the left).



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Business trip: Aschaffenburg and Mergentheim 1791

Showcase 5:

The only official journey Beethoven made as deputy court organist and viola player in the court orchestra in Bonn took place in 1791. His employer Maximilian Franz, Elector of Cologne (residing in Bonn) and Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, took his orchestra, including Beethoven, to the General Chapter of the order at their residence in Mergentheim. They took a number of boats slowly up the Rhine and then the Main as far as Miltenberg and then continued by coach. In room 2 a report may be read in the most important music periodical of the time commenting on the fact that Beethoven did not play in public in Mergentheim because there was no instrument by Stein there. Beethoven was used to playing Stein's instruments in semi-public performances in Bonn. The report also comments on the exceptional nature of Beethoven's piano playing.

The big concert journey: Prague – Dresden – Leipzig – Berlin 1796

Beethoven made his first and most important extended concert tour in February 1796, travelling over Prague, Dresden and Leipzig to Berlin. He was able to make the journey with his patron, Prince Karl Lichnowsky. The prince had made a similar tour with Mozart seven years earlier. By travelling with the prince, Beethoven saved time and money. The prince also enabled Beethoven to have guaranteed access to the aristocracy of Prague. One of those for whom Beethoven played was the music loving Christian Philipp, Count Clam-Gallas. For the count's future



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wife, Countess Josephine von Clary-Aldringen, who played the mandolin, Beethoven wrote pieces for piano and mandolin; for the count's former mistress, the famous singer Josepha Duschek, he wrote the *Scene and Aria 'Ah! Perfido'*, op. 65, for soprano and orchestra. Beethoven then continued from Prague to Dresden where he had the honour to play alone for the Elector of Saxony, Frederick Augustus III. Little is known about Beethoven's activities at his next stop, Leipzig, later to become a stronghold of appreciation of Beethoven's work. The music publishers and instrument dealers Breitkopf & Härtel of Leipzig were his main publishers from 1809 to 1812. The tall showcase contains city views of Berlin and of Leipzig, the latter including one of the Thomaskirche (Church of St. Thomas) where Johann Sebastian Bach, much revered by Beethoven, was appointed as cantor.



Showcase 6:

The climax of Beethoven's stay in Berlin was a performance for King Frederick Wilhelm II of Prussia. Especially for this occasion Beethoven composed two sonatas for piano and 'cello, his opus 5, whereby he drew on all his powers as a pianist and as a composer. He dedicated the first edition to the king, who was a cellist. The king died that same year.

Showcase 7:

In Berlin, Beethoven stayed at the city's best hotel that had its own concert hall to which the king occasionally paid a visit. The first performance of the Sonatas for Piano and 'Cello, op. 5 either took place in the castle or in the palace of the crown prince, where the sculptor Johann Gottfried Schadow had recently worked. In the academy building the *Singakademie* (Singing Academy) practised and performed. Beethoven visited there twice and created a sensation with his improvisations.



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Preßburg and Pest 1796 and 1800

Showcase 8:

The journey to the north was a great success. For this reason, a few months after his return Beethoven decided to set out again, this time to Hungary – to Preßburg (today's Bratislava, capital of Slovakia) and Pest, then the Hungarian capital (in those days Budapest comprised two cities, Buda and Pest, one on each side of the river Danube). In Pest Beethoven performed his Concerto no. 1, op. 15, for piano and orchestra, made possible by his friend the Hungarian aristocrat Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovecz or by Prince Lichnowsky. For the occasion, still in 1796, the piano maker Nannette Streicher and her husband Andreas lent him a piano. The value of the instrument is said to have increased because Beethoven used it for his performance and therefore should be sold in Preßburg for a good price. The performance in Pest was so successful that Beethoven returned there four years later with the horn player Johann Wenzel Stich, alias Punto. Stich was one of the greatest musicians of his time. Beethoven composed the Sonata for Piano and Horn, op. 17, especially for him. In those days the horn had no valves.

The notes unavailable in the natural harmonic series were obtained by 'stopping' the horn with one hand in the bell, creating very different effects and timbres from those produced by a horn with valves.

Eisenstadt 1807

As a pupil of Joseph Haydn, Beethoven spent a considerable time in the summer of 1793 in Eisenstadt. In 1807 he returned there. Haydn's former employer Nicholas II, Prince Esterházy had previously commissioned Beethoven to write a mass for his wife's name day and it was now to be performed. Haydn's late masses were also written for the princess's name day. The prince was not happy with Beethoven's mass. Beethoven, on the contrary, was convinced that he had written a piece of which he could be proud and left in a bad humour. One year earlier Beethoven had spent the summer at *Schloss* Grätz in Silesia, a residence of Prince Lichnowsky. There, a serious disagreement took place between Beethoven and his long-standing patron. Beethoven proudly refused to show his talents as a pianist to visiting French officers. As the war between Austria and France was continuing not far away, Beethoven's conduct was both remarkable and problematic for the prince. Beethoven left, this time in a rage.



Continuation of the exhibition in room 12 at the end of the circuit on the ground floor



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The cures: Teplitz – Karlsbad – Franzensbrunn 1811 and 1812

Showcase 1:

In the years 1811 and 1812 Beethoven spent about a total of four months taking cures in three different spas: Teplitz, Karlsbad and Franzensbrunn. Although these cures had been prescribed for medical reasons they also brought with them stimulating social contacts. Beethoven met like-minded persons on the cures, for instance the poet and military man Karl August Varnhagen von Ense and his fiancée Rahel Levin, one of the leading intellectuals of her time. On 6 and 7 July, 1812, in glamorous Teplitz, where he arrived after an extremely complicated journey, Beethoven wrote the letter to the 'Immortal Beloved'. Who this was and whether the letter was ever sent is not known. Two weeks later he met Goethe, who he revered as an artist, but who put him off as a person because of his social conformism as a member of the court in Weimar; Beethoven saw this as conceit. His harsh judgement is to be found in a letter to Breitkopf & Härtel: 'Goethe enjoys life at court more than is becoming to a poet. There is not much more to be said about the ridiculousness of virtuosos when poets, who should be seen as the leading teachers of the nation, are able to forget everything else beyond this glitter.' In addition to the treatments (the bathers could also take a bath in a tub in their own rooms) Beethoven worked on his compositions. In 1811, on the short term, he had to compose music for two plays by August von Kotzebue, the Festival play 'Hungary's first benefactor' or 'King Stephan' and 'The ruins of Athens'. Beethoven's overture to the first, op. 117, and the incidental music to the second, op. 113, were given at the first performances of the two theatre plays at the festive opening of the Deutsche Theater (German theatre) in Pest. On a sketch sheet Beethoven noted at the sixth staff line: 'small piano for composing'. He must have wanted a square piano, like the one in the next room at the front on the right, to help with his writing.

Showcase 2:

Because of the imagined complementary effects of the various medicinal waters, Beethoven was advised to combine going to the three different spas. For this reason he continued on to Karlsbad. There he learned that in Baden, the spa to the south of Vienna that he particularly preferred, a big fire had broken out and had caused great damage. This inspired his sympathy and his composition and on August 6, 1812, he and the Italian violinist Giovanni Baptist Polledro gave a benefit concert for the victims of the fire. Beethoven was not satisfied with the income from the very hastily organised concert. Later, he was to go to Baden more often. The town was extensively described by Carl Schenk in his travel guide. A copy of this book, which included descriptions of cultural life in the town, was owned by Beethoven. For the short journey from Vienna to Baden, carriages were used like the one illustrated here.



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Intended journeys and relocations

Showcase 3:

Beethoven cherished many plans for journeys that were never realised. In 1799 he played with ideas of trips to Poland and Italy and in 1803 and later he thought more than once of going to Paris. In 1808/09 he was offered the lucrative position in Kassel of *Kapellmeister* to Napoleon's brother Jérôme, newly declared King of Westphalia. In Vienna, Beethoven also engaged in negotiations for positions with tenure. Three aristocratic patrons would create a stipend for him on condition that Beethoven on his side was obliged to keep the centre of his life within the royal and imperial monarchy. The large map on the wall is from 1813 and shows the post routes in the German realm and in central Europe, in the west as far as London, in the east to Moscow and in the south to the centre of today's Italy. In order to fold the map for taking it on journeys, it was mounted in 32 segments on linen and these were contained in a slipcase. On the right of the map a view of the Metropolitan Church in Olmütz is to be seen. Beethoven composed his *Missa solennis*, op. 123, for the coronation of his pupil Archduke Rudolph as Archbishop of Olmütz, an event that took place in 1820. Beethoven hoped thereby to obtain a well-paid position as court composer with few obligations. He would probably have fulfilled this position while being able to be based Vienna, making any necessary journeys to Olmütz. The mass was not finished in time, no position was forthcoming.





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Showcase 4:

Beethoven, continually disappointed, considered leaving Vienna in 1803 and moving to Paris to try his luck there. He dedicated his violin sonata, op. 47, to Rodolphe Kreutzer. The sonata is still known as the Kreutzer Sonata today. Kreutzer was not only a great violinist but also one of the central figures of Parisian music life. In relation to new travel plans, Beethoven wrote in 1810: 'Written some considerable work that will make a connection with France and will make a stir in the papers[,] the mass could perhaps still be dedicated to Napoleon'. To dedicate the mass in C major, op. 86, written for Prince Esterházy to Napoleon Bonaparte was certainly a most unusual idea. But the journey to Paris and the ideas that went with it came to nothing. Beethoven allowed himself a joke with his friend the publisher Tobias Haslinger. Beethoven informed Haslinger on September 10, 1821 of a journey he had undertaken in a dream. In the dream a canon came to him 'O Tobias!'; when he awoke he wrote it down and sent it to Haslinger as part of their joking relationship.

Showcase 5:

Joseph Haydn, later to be Beethoven's teacher, made two journeys to London, the largest city of Europe, from 1790 to 1792 and in 1794/95. These had been highly successful, both artistically and materially. As early as 1792 Beethoven, perhaps inspired by Haydn's first visit there, toyed with the idea of a journey to London. Much later, in 1817 Beethoven received a tempting offer from the Philharmonic Society, founded four years before in London, to write two symphonies and to premiere them there in London. He was offered a considerable fee. Beethoven however was tired of journeys and shunned large gatherings of people. Furthermore, he felt embarrassed and perhaps ashamed to show his deafness in public. The Italian Opera House, also known as the King's Theatre on the Haymarket, asked Beethoven to compose an opera, probably in 1820. Nothing came of these ideas and offers in the end. 'Wellingtons Sieg oder Die Schlacht bei Vittoria' (Wellington's victory, or, the battle of Vittoria'), op. 91, was however performed in series at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane (see the depiction on the wall).

Only months before his death, Beethoven made his last journey with his nephew Karl, entrusted to his care. Together they went to visit Beethoven's youngest brother and Karl's uncle Nikolaus Johann in Gneixendorf, about 80 km west of Vienna, above Krems on the Donau. The stay was anything but harmonious. The journey home was made in a hurry in an open carriage in December and Beethoven contracted a heavy cold. This proved to be the beginnings of his last illness, leading up to his death.

A richly illustrated book to accompany the exhibition is available in the museum shop. Many of the illustrations show contemporary views that Beethoven has seen himself.

Michael Ladenburger

Translation: Michael Latcham