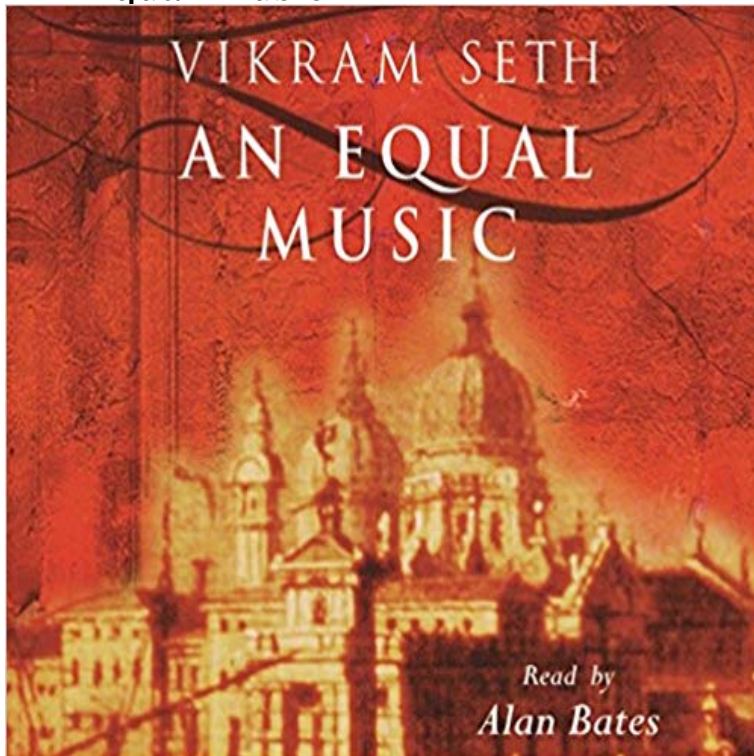


An Equal Music



Set in the present, with flashbacks, *An Equal Music* (the title is a phrase from a John Donne sermon) is a story of obsessive love narrated by Michael, a violinist from Rochdale in the north of England. He plays in a trio in Vienna in which Julia, half Scottish, half Austrian, is the pianist. He is much taken with her and she with him. But the trio splits up and the participants go their separate ways. Michael goes to London, where he joins a string quartet as second violinist. He feels the absence of Julia from his life keenly. One day, from the top of a double-decker bus, he catches a glimpse of her on the top of another double-decker bus. He tries to find her through her agent but fails. Michael's quartet gives a recital at the Wigmore Hall.

Afterwards, Julia comes backstage. She tells him that she is contentedly married to an American banker and they have a five-year-old child. Michael persuades Julia to return with him to Vienna where the quartet is to play. The pianist who is to accompany the quartet falls ill and drops out. Michael persuades Julia to fill in and also to visit Venice with him after that: he had once promised to take her there. He discovers that Julia has become deaf, though her deafness comes and goes. This discovery explains much to Michael about the way she seems to have been distancing herself from him. He cannot resist reading a letter Julia has written to her husband, from which it becomes clear that Julia is never going to give herself, or more of herself, to Michael. This is a dark, obsessive love story about deafness, the perils of excessive love, the curious matter of nationality and how it affects lives and relationships.

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