



# An Equal Music: A Novel

By Vikram Seth



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The author of the international bestseller **A Suitable Boy** returns with a powerful and deeply romantic tale of two gifted musicians. Michael Holme is a violinist, a member of the successful Maggiore Quartet. He has long been haunted, though, by memories of the pianist he loved and left ten years earlier, Julia McNicholl. Now Julia, married and the mother of a small child, unexpectedly reenters his life and the romance flares up once more.

Against the magical backdrop of Venice and Vienna, the two lovers confront the truth about themselves and their love, about the music that both unites and divides them, and about a devastating secret that Julia must finally reveal. With poetic, evocative writing and a brilliant portrait of the international music scene, **An Equal Music** confirms Vikram Seth as one of the world's finest and most enticing writers.

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## An Equal Music: A Novel By Vikram Seth Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

The violinist hero of Vikram Seth's third novel would very much like to be hearing secret harmonies. Instead, living in London 10 years after a key disaster, Michael Holme is easily irritated by his beautiful young (and even French!) girlfriend and by his colleagues in the Maggiore Quartet. In short, he's fed up with playing second fiddle in life and art. Yet a chance encounter with Julia, the pianist he had loved and lost in Vienna, brings Michael sudden bliss. Her situation, however--and the secret that may end her career--threatens to undo the lovers.

*An Equal Music* is a fraction of the size of Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, but is still deliciously expansive. In under 400 pages, the author offers up exquisite complexities, personal and lyrical, while deftly fielding any fears that he's composed a Harlequin for highbrows. During one emotional crescendo, Michael tells Julia, "I don't know how I've lived without you all these years," only to realize, "how feeble and trite my words sound to me, as if they have been plucked out of some housewife fantasy." In addition to the pitch of its love story, one of the book's joys lies in Seth's creation of musical extremes. As the Maggiore rehearses, moving from sniping and impatience to perfection, the author expertly notates the joys of collaboration, trust, and creation. "It's the weirdest thing, a quartet," one member remarks. "I don't know what to compare it to. A marriage? a firm? a platoon under fire? a self-regarding, self-destructive priesthood? It has so many different tensions mixed in with its pleasures."

*An Equal Music* is a novel in which the length of Schubert's *Trout Quintet* matters deeply, the discovery of a little-known Beethoven opus is a miracle, and each instrument has its own being. Just as Michael can't hope to possess Julia, he cannot even dream of owning his beloved Tonomi, the violin he has long had only on loan. And it goes without saying that Vikram Seth knows how to tell a tale, keeping us guessing about everything from what the Quartet's four-minute encore will be to what really occasioned Julia's departure from Michael's life. (Or was it in fact Michael who abandoned Julia?) As this love story ranges from London to Michael's birthplace in the north of England to Vienna to Venice, few readers will remain deaf to its appeals. --Kerry Fried

### From Publishers Weekly

Seth finds his true voice in this lyrical, ravishing tale of star-crossed lovers. An English violinist and the pianist he desperately pursues. Unlike his previous work, *A Suitable Boy* (a 1349-page family melodrama set in 1950s India and self-consciously modeled on the social novels of Dickens, Trollope and Eliot), this novel is tightly controlled, original in design, awash in the music and spirit of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Haydn, Brahms and Bach. Even readers not familiar with specific pieces of Western classical music will be caught up in the contemporary love story, set mainly in London and Vienna with excursions to Venice and northern England. Michael Holme, brooding member of an English string quartet, endlessly adrift a decade after breaking up with pianist Julia McNicholl, suddenly bumps into her again in London. They resume their affair with guilty reluctance on her part, as she's married to an American banker and has a son, but with reckless abandon by Michael, who betrays and then ditches his girlfriend, a needy French violin student 15 years his junior. Beyond mere erotic duplicities, a far more tragic obstacle emerges. Julia is rapidly going deaf. Music, her lifeblood, is slipping away from her, a secret she keeps from her fellow musicians until Michael clumsily reveals it. Around this simple plot, Seth weaves an exploration of the creative process as he delves into the quartet members' quirks and neuroses, their romances, states of exaltation, their synchronous vision. All the rehearsals, shop talk, fiddling and ruminations blunt the impact of Julia's tragedy and the love story's momentum, but Seth's musical, quicksilver prose keeps the narrative aloft. It's a classy novel, told

with keen intelligence and sensitivity, embodying a brave attempt to fathom the world of deafness as well as the high-strung milieu of performing artists. \$150,000 ad/promo; author tour; simultaneous audio; rights sold in Denmark, France, Germany, India, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the U.K. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

After the best-selling *A Suitable Boy*: violinist Michael Holme loves a pianist who is going deaf.

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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#### **Danny Floyd:**

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#### **Corey Johnson:**

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#### **Michael Gage:**

Information is provisions for people to get better life, information today can get by anyone in everywhere.

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