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Mozart's Wickedly Symmetrical Sexagon

Classical Music

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What if [Beethoven](#) had died young like his contemporaries Mozart and Schubert? Would he be remembered today as anything more than a footnote? The faculty concert of the Beethoven Institute held at Mannes College of Music took a look at three of his earliest published works to help establish his place in music history.

It seems clear from the evidence presented that Beethoven would have been praised mightily for these youthful pieces even had he not gone on to immortality. The three works offered at Mannes exhibited a freshness and a boldness, a clarity and a balance hitherto unheard in Western music. The performances this evening made a further strong case for their advocacy.

The Violin Sonata No. 1 was the last of the trio of works composed but the first presented. Sylvia Rosenberg studied this piece with Adolf Busch — among many other distinctions, the grandfather of Peter Serkin — at Marlboro in the very early 1950s. The printed edition she employed contained Mr. Busch's handwritten markings.

Ms. Rosenberg's performance was notable for its warmth, richness of tone, and, especially, crystalline clarity. Phrasing decisions were uniformly balanced in their assertiveness and confident in their execution. Institute director Thomas Sauer accompanied at the piano.

Pianist Ignat Solzhenitsyn did an excellent job in the "First" piano sonata, what we know of as the No. 1 although three others had already been composed. Mr. Solzhenitsyn is an elegant artist, establishing from the outset a noble, aristocratic tone and phrasing style that lent an air of authenticity to this rendition. Of particular note was his traversal of the Adagio, a very beautiful gem of a movement. The flavor of the old world was palpable.

What has to be the greatest Opus One in the history of music — the first three piano trios of Beethoven — was represented by the Trio in E Flat Major, Op. 1, No. 1. The three trios were performed for Prince Lichnowsky in 1795 and were heard during this period by Haydn himself, who cautioned that the third was too advanced and difficult for the household musical market.

Mr. Solzhenitsyn was joined by Soovin Kim, violin, and Michael Kannen, cello. The resulting performance was very satisfying, although there was a rather noticeable thinness of tone emanating from both stringed instruments that prevented the striving melodies of the Adagio cantabile from reaching their predestined heights. Otherwise, the reading was clean and crisp, the cello, previously treated by Haydn and Mozart as little more than a reinforcement of the pianist's left hand, allowed to venture off on its own fruitful explorations.

The concert was enjoyable but the real work of the institute is the passing on of essential tribal knowledge of the stylistic requirements for superb Beethovenian performance. With talented faculty like these players, the students in attendance have a real opportunity to receive the passing of the torch.