

WEISS-KAPLAN-NEWMAN TRIO

Yael Weiss, piano – Mark Kaplan, violin – Clancy Newman, cello

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Trio excels at Beethoven's stream-of-consciousness work

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Late into the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio concert Thursday evening in Auer Hall, while listening to the ensemble perform the first movement of Beethoven's E-Flat Major Trio, Opus 70, No. 2, this reviewer suddenly came to the conclusion that being played was a composer's stream of consciousness at work.

The music jogged along: a decorous melody voiced by each instrument followed by a more urgent one treated in combine, then by a slow theme again given to each player, then — in turns — by a more heated passage, doses of recapitulation in altered guise, and a conclusion that circled back to the start.

There were touches of development along the way, but, for the most part, the movement seemed a reflection of ever-shifting thoughts or feelings that at the moment of creation pushed Beethoven through his act of composition.

At other times, such as in the mood-soaked Largo of the Opus 70, No. 1, a single melodic figure received the full developmental treatment, remaining dominant throughout, thereby earning for the score its subtitle, "Ghost," since the music originated from sketches Beethoven made for a witches scene in a contemplated but never realized opera based on "Macbeth."

Such was the variety of fare faced by the intrepid Weiss (pianist Yael), Kaplan (violinist Mark), and Newman (cellist Clancy), engaged in a three-program cycle devoted to all of Beethoven's piano trio music. Thursday's concert was the second and contained those two Opus 70 Trios,

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along with the Variations on “Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu.” The three works date to the first decade of the 19th century and may be considered middle period Beethoven, as distinguished from the Opus 1 pieces composed around 1792, Beethoven’s so-called early period, which the musicians performed on Tuesday.

The Kakadu Variations are built on a tuneful trifle taken from a now forgotten opera popular in Beethoven’s day, Wenzel Muller’s “The Sisters from Prague.” The variations are, as one would expect, showy and intriguing enough, if not terribly well organized. They’re preceded by a solemn Adagio that appears to have no artistic connection with what follows. Our performing trio offered dignity to the Adagio and sparkle to the Kakadu material.

One has noticed two overriding strengths during the pair of concerts so far given. The musicians, interpretively, have shown an ability to move flexibly and effectively from emotion to emotion, the sort of artistic concentration needed to keep the music’s texture, with its ever-varying sentiments and passions, from shredding.

Technically, they’ve maneuvered themselves adroitly through every faced complication and done so at exceptionally high levels of unity.

Both the “Ghost” Trio and the No. 2 benefited from solid preparation. The “Ghost” also unfolded comfortably, from its vivacious opening Allegro into the mysterious Largo and back to light and lightness in the closing Presto. In the No. 2, amiable throughout, the ensemble achieved and sustained a joyful ambience.

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