

Pianist Anton Kuerti

"...[a] deeply satisfying all-Beethoven recital"

Anton Kuerti manages the drama found in Beethoven

By Peter Dobrin Inquirer Classical Music Critic

By the time you reach the minuet near the end of Beethoven's *33 Variations in C major on a Waltz of Anton Diabelli (Op. 120)*, you feel as if you've met a series of knotty, enigmatic challenges. Beethoven has morphed the theme into Bachian fugues, pressed it into a series of pearly arpeggios, elongated it into the language of the minimalists, shredded it up into slithering harmonic fragments, marched, dithered, and generally expanded your consciousness.

He's also managed to convince you that music might have had no more prescient seer. The piece points the way forward, incredibly, to Schumann, Brahms and Chopin.

And when Anton Kuerti reached that minuet Friday night in his deeply satisfying all-Beethoven recital at the Independence Seaport Museum, it arrived with a nobility made all the greater for its sparing affectation. He kept the volume down, making you lean forward the way a quiet talker does when finally revealing the answer to a series of difficult questions.

An hour long, the piece tries some listeners' patience. But before Kuerti sent away the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society audience for intermission, he played through and explained some parts of the piece, which helped. Ultimately, though, it was the pianist's stylish playing that provided the compelling narrative. He knows how to manage drama. Taking chances in some wild spots, hewing to a more controlled approach in others, he simultaneously tended to small issues while creating a larger arc.

The technique is marvelously fluid. The 70-year-old Canadian, who studied in Cleveland with Arthur Loesser and at the Curtis Institute of Music with Rudolf Serkin and Mieczyslaw Horszowski, is capable of some quicksilver moves, though always in the service of some expressive point.

In fact, everything Kuerti does is interpretively expansive in some way. Before intermission, he played two Beethoven sonatas. In the *F minor (Op. 2, No. 1)* he used articulation (connecting some notes, detaching others) to make statements as clear as speech. And by taking the opening moments of the *G major (Op. 31, No. 1)* with a great gust, he argued elegantly that some complex sentences really can be uttered in a single breath.

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