COMPELLING ARTISTRY ON DISPLAY AT BEETHOVEN FESTIVAL CONCERT

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BEETHOVEN FESTIVAL PARK CITY, Park City Community Church, July 18; through Aug. 12, tickets at the door or at www.beethovenfestivalparkcity.org

Jeffrey Solow

Jeffrey Solow has been focused on J.S. Bach’s six suites for solo cello for some time now. He recently performed all of them at New York City’s Bargemusic, and he brought two of them with him to Park City.

At Saturday’s Beethoven Festival Park City concert, Solow mesmerized the audience with his account of the Suite No. 4 in E flat major. His was a wonderfully musical performance that was lyrical and rhythmically vibrant. His playing was textured and rich in timbral coloration. Solow delved into the contrapuntal complexities of the work while bringing a wealth of expressions into his reading. This was music making of the highest order.

While there have been scores of works written for the cello, the viola hasn’t fared as well. There are a few outstanding works for the instrument, such as the Bartók and Walton concertos, but the repertoire is definitely small.
One of the most compelling works for the instrument is Shostakovich’s Sonata for Viola and Piano, op. 147. The last work the composer wrote before his death in 1975, the sonata is an evocative exploration of dark emotions.

The rich expansiveness of the harmonic language of the sonata allows for greater depth of expression, and violist Leslie Harlow and pianist Doris Stevenson explored the scope of emotions present in the work with their thoughtful and sensitive reading. Their playing was nuanced and captured the subtleties of the music fabulously.

These two works were bookended by Beethoven’s Trio in B flat major for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, and Leonard Bernstein’s Sonata for Clarinet and Piano.

Clarinetist Russell Harlow, together with Solow and Stevenson, opened the program with the Beethoven. An early work, the piece is filled with infectious charm. The three gave a polished account that captured the lyricism of the music.

Russell Harlow and Stevenson closed out the concert with the Bernstein. Written when the composer/conductor was 23, the sonata is a capricious piece that is delightfully lighthearted. And the two brought out the lightness and vibrancy of the music with their energetic and exuberant playing.