

# NEW YORK MUSIC DAILY

## The Knights Make History With Beethoven and Janacek at the Naumburg Bandshell

*by delarue*

Last night at the Naumburg Bandshell in Central Park was a welcome return for one of New York's most enduring cosmopolitan traditions. This was a particularly clever installment. It's been done before: pairing Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata with Janacek's String Quartet No. 1, "Kreutzer Sonata." A Naumburg Concert favorite, chamber orchestra the [Knights](#) worked several levels of meta with new symphonic arrangements of both: the former a chart by violinist [Colin Jacobsen](#), the latter a collaboration between his brother Eric and Knights horn player Mike Atkinson.

Orchestral scores for both works go back as far as Tchaikovsky, who did it with Beethoven. Likewise, there have been plenty of programs pairing both of the original pieces. But yesterday evening's concert might have been the first time two orchestral versions of both have been played on the same bill. It turned out to be as colorful as expected, considering the ensemble's penchant for surprise.

They opened with a Colin Jacobsen piece, playfully titled *Kreutzings*, rising from dizzyingly dissociative layers through jaunty microtonal glissandos from around the ensemble, to a coyly contrapuntal waltz. Flickers of each of the night's main composers bubbled to the surface occasionally as the strings joined in precise, steady eighth notes while winding their way out.

Jacobsen, celebrating his birthday, served as soloist in the Beethoven. Crisp, elegant cheer interchanged with a little suspense and a bustling freshness that veered toward the raw side in the opening movement, confirming how well this material lends itself to orchestral sweep and majesty. Jacobsen quickly went for silkiness and ran with it amid anxious Vivaldiesque counterpoint. The restless thicket of low strings toward the end was a particularly juicy moment for the orchestra to sink their teeth into.

As if by design, a passing airplane introduced the andante second movement, bubbly woodwinds picking up the pace considerably before Jacobsen took over with a fine-toothed staccato. The bristling energy never dissipated, through lushness and a coyly pulsing bounce beneath the violinist's spirals, flurries and animated pizzicato. Interestingly, the finale was on the spare and restrained side, despite the velocity: an urbane party that earned a contrastingly raucous standing ovation.

After the intermission, the ensemble tackled [Anna Clyne's](#) Stride. Echoing the concert's opening number, fleeting hints of Beethoven percolated amid tense close harmonies and microtones over a striding tempo flecked with rather suspenseful lulls and a long trajectory up to an anthemic, Dvorakian coda. Clyne doesn't usually go for fullscale High Romantic: turns out she excels at it. This was a revelation.

Janacek's first quartet follows the drama and familial mischegas of the Tolstoy tale, giving us an extra level of meta. Furtive Balkan chromatics quickly receded for an aching lushness and unexpected pageantry in the opening movement, only to reappear in a tensely gripping, Bernard Herrmann vein. Giving the anxious conversation in the third movement to the woodwinds paid magnificently poignant dividends on the way to an equally memorable stampede out. The ensemble encored with flutist Alex Sopp leading the group through a lickety-split, buoyant arrangement of a [Taraf de Haidoucks](#) Romany dance tune.

For those who missed the concert, the Knights managed to record the Beethoven and Janacek in February 2020, just under the wire before the fateful events that would crush the world a few weeks later. The next [Naumburg Bandshell concert](#) is on June 28 at 7:30 PM with the [Handel and Haydn Society](#), led by violinist Aisslinn Nosky, playing works by Corelli, Vivaldi, Geminiani, Handel and Charles Avison.

See: <https://naumburgconcerts.org/press-blog/new-york-music-daily-the-knights-make-history-with-beethoven-and-janacek-at-the-naumburg-bandshell>