

Beethoven rules in Berlin

by Hartmut Cramer

“Seldom have we ever seen so many happy and joyful faces,” was the comment most frequently heard by participants at a landmark Beethoven concert held on Dec. 17 in Berlin to celebrate the prospect of German unity based on the world’s greatest classical culture. Violinist Norbert Brainin, formerly first violinist of the world-renowned Amadeus Quartet, and pianist Günter Ludwig played violin sonatas by Beethoven to an audience made primarily of people who had traveled from all parts of East Germany.

“I have felt the need to greet and congratulate people in the G.D.R. by this means—with the music of Beethoven—because they have risen up peacefully and non-violently against a dictatorship, and are continuing to stand up for freedom. This historic event is serving as an inspiration for the entire civilized world. Its ramifications are still incalculable, but they are cause for rejoicing nonetheless. Long live Western culture, and with it, the entire German People!”

With these words, Norbert Brainin explained why, despite an already overloaded calendar, he had spontaneously decided to come with Günter Ludwig to Berlin. Admission to the concert was, of course, free to all citizens from the G.D.R. In spite of the extremely short notice for the concert, its sponsor, the Private Academy for Humanist Studies in Wiesbaden, West Germany, had mounted an intensive publicity campaign, which included recruiting volunteers who stood at the old and new “holes” in the Berlin Wall, as well as at the major border-crossings near Helmstedt, Duderstadt, Herleshausen, and Hof, and distributed a total of 80,000 invitations.

The result was a flood of East Germans, many of whom sent in their coupons in advance, often bearing such touching notes as:

anted ticket, because I have to get my Trabbi in shape”—a reference to the two-cylinder vehicles which up to now have passed for automobiles “over there.” Other notes: now we haven’t missed a single Amadeus mission; very happy about this concert,” and, “My son (11 years) has played violin since he was 5; it will be a great experience for him to see the famous master himself on the stage.” Many simply wrote “*Dankeschön*.”

It was therefore not entirely surprising when about 1,000 people, 800 of them from East Germany, crowded into the concert hall of the Berliner Hochschule on a Sunday morning. The concert had received the public endorsement of such

well-known Berlin artists as Boleslaw Barlog, for many years the head of the Schiller Theater, as well as Werner Thärichen, formerly the chief timpanist with the Berlin Philharmonic. Their greetings appeared in the printed program, alongside greetings from Elisabeth Furtwängler, the widow of the great German conductor who, along with his orchestra, had become something of an institution in Berlin.

Further greetings came from the French violoncellist Eliane Magnan, the American political leader Lyndon LaRouche, and from his wife Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the international Schiller Institutes, all of whom stressed the idea that “there is no better way to celebrate the struggle of the people of the G.D.R. for freedom, than through performing the works of Beethoven.”

Demanding program for demanding listeners

“In keeping with the occasion,” Brainin and Ludwig had selected a demanding program, beginning with Beethoven’s Sonata No. 3 (Op. 12, No. 3)—an early, but musically and technically extremely difficult work.

The extraordinary intensity which these two artists are able to put into their playing, and their obvious enjoyment in conveying it, continued into the Op. 96 in G Major, Beethoven’s final and probably his greatest violin sonata. The final work, following the intermission, was the grandiose “Kreutzer Sonata” in A Major, which was met with a storm of enthusiasm from the audience, which would not relent until the duo played the Adagio from Beethoven’s Op. 24 “Spring” sonata as an encore.

The quality of the audience equaled that of the program. “Why did I get up at 5:30 Berlin? Very simple: because to buy elegant nylon stockings or good coffee, but rather to hear a concert such as this. Right now, that’s much more important,” was the answer given by a young piano teacher from Frankfurt/Oder.

Similarly, an elderly gentleman, despite a hip ailment, had undertaken the difficult trip from a village in the north of the G.D.R., near the Polish border, to Berlin because “you simply can’t pass up something like this.”

And this enthusiasm was shared by those who came from the West. Thomas Brandis, the former concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic, told an interviewer:

this concert is magnificent, but I am especially glad that Norbert Brainin, who has been my musical mentor from my earliest years, did not put his fiddle down following the death of his violist Peter Schidlöf, and continues to play so wonderfully, as we have heard here.”

Another remarkable aspect of the concert was seen during the intermission, when booktables set up by the Academy were mobbed by East Germans hungry for new and useful ideas about how to run their country. One of the most popular books:

LaRouche.