

Ko-Kela set for Little Apple

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Music Critic

One of the things that criticism is about, it seems to me, is the examination of the relationship between a creative work of art on the one hand and the life surrounding its creation and re-creation on the other. One of the things that a creative work of art is about is a similar examination of the relationship between itself, its creator and the society, environment and life that surrounds it. Sometimes these concerns are overt, as in the case of the *String Quartets Nos. 4, 5, and 6* of George Rochberg which constitute a deliberate examination of the relationship of new artistic works to their history, that is of contemporary music to past music. Sometimes, as with the *Piano Quartet in E-flat major* by Mozart, which the Ko-Kela Piano Quartet will be performing in All Faiths Auditorium on Tuesday evening, the relationship of the music to the life that created it is inherent within it.

So how was the son of Johann Georg Leopold Mozart doing during the early summer months of 1786?

Not too well, actually.

Hold on, you could say, he wasn't doing too badly either, was he? After all, he was living in Vienna and his one-act opera, *Der Schauspeildirector* had just been produced in February at the Palace of Schoenbrunn and the production was then moved over to the Kaerntnertor Theater. In March, a performance of *Idomeneo* took place at the Prince of Augsburg's palace, and this latter performance attracted the attention of the well-known dramatist Lorenzo da Ponte, who proposed adopting Beaumarchais's play, *Mariage de*

Figaro for the composer to set to music.

This couldn't be all bad; wasn't the mercurial composer hitting the big time at last?

Well, it's true that as spring turned to summer that year in Vienna, *The Marriage of Figaro* was produced at the Burgtheater on May 1. But Mozart had a tough time of it. To begin with, he only had six weeks in which to write the music, and then there was a good deal of political hassle because of the nature of the plot (it was thought to be seditious and anti-aristocracy and all that), and there was considerable difficulty with a recalcitrant cast who were being prompted, by Mozart's ill-meaning rival, Salieri, to complain about the difficulty of the music. The composer hardly had an easy time of it.

It is true that the premiere was a triumph, and as the singer Michael Kelly, who sang the part of Don Basilio, wrote that Mozart was happy, and that he would "never forget his little animated countenance when lighted up with the glowing rays of genius — it is impossible to describe it, as it would be to paint sunbeams".

But Mozart's happiness was short-lived. Despite the initial success of *The Marriage of Figaro*, the ever jealous Salieri persuaded the theater to replace that opera with a production of Dittersdorf's *Singspiel* followed by Martin's *Una Cosa Rara*, and Mozart's masterpiece was soon forgotten and, indeed, the production was closed down after only nine performances.

Mozart was bitter and felt himself ignored, and the enterprise had hardly been a financial success for him. His total income from the opera had barely met the demands of his debts,

and he was left just as penniless as ever, dependent upon his friends for support and desperate to find a way to get out of Vienna, and having to churn out compositions in an attempt to make ends meet.

One of those compositions was the *Piano Quartet in E-flat major, K.493* which Mozart completed on June 3, 1786.

The *Quartet* contains a gentle, song-like second movement and the concluding *Rondo* is infectiously gay and playful. Yet, this is the work of a man who felt himself betrayed, unrewarded and unrecognized for his abilities and complained bitterly at the time of the fact that he had to give lessons in order "to earn a trifle".

Does art, then, transcend life, or is it an escape from it? Or is composing a piano quartet just another job to help pay the rent?

Perhaps the performance by the Ko-Kela will help each of us to find an answer for ourselves.

The Ko-Kela will also play Dohnanyi's *Serenade for String Trio* and the *Piano Quartet in E-flat, Op.87* by Dvorak.

These works will be presented by an ensemble that is a relatively new one. The Ko-Kela was formed in 1977 and made its debut at the Music Center in Los Angeles, since when the group has garnered glowing reports from Pocatello, Idaho, to The Big Apple itself. Now it is time for Ko-Kela's debut in the Little Apple, when on Tuesday at 8 p.m. their performance also becomes, for a moment, a part of our lives.