

"New" Beethoven piece premieres in the Netherlands

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Picture: South African conductor Conrad van Alphen

Part of a piano concerto by Beethoven, outlined when he was a young man, premiered in Rotterdam Tuesday night, reconstructed by experts after three centuries.

The **Rotterdam Chamber Orchestra** performed the 10-minute adagio, or slow movement, as the centerpiece of a night of classics, drawing respectful applause and some standing ovations from an audience of around 1,000.

The honor of the first performance:

"To be able to perform a Beethoven piece that's never been performed, that's amazing," said South African conductor **Conrad van Alphen**. "It's absolutely an honor."

Ludwig van Beethoven wrote the main themes of the piece in 1789, when he was just 19-years-old. He titled the draft "Concerto in A for Piano" and gave instructions for other instruments, but left unfinished phrases, writing only "etc., etc."

Heavy Mozart influence:

Dutch musicologist Cees Nieuwenhuizen orchestrated the movement using Beethoven's notes and adhering to the master's early style, which was heavily influenced by Mozart.

Beethoven "was young when he wrote it, but he was naturally a man of genius," Nieuwenhuizen said. "It has moments of the impulsiveness, the contrasts and tension that made his later work so great."

The adagio was found among bundles of Beethoven's sketches and drafts in the British Library, first published in 1970. Beethoven is not believed to have written the opening or closing movements.

Beethoven was living in Bonn, Germany, when the piece was constructed, and shortly after moved to Vienna to study with fellow composer Joseph Haydn. It would be several more years before he published his Opus No. 1, announcing himself as a composer.

Conductor Van Alphen said the piece bores similar ties to Beethoven's 3rd concerto, written a decade later. "The opening mood, the same emotional calm" as the later work, he has exactly the same said.

Concertgoer Dina Kaalman-Schippers said the piece was "a little weak, a little timid, but I'm not an expert."

She said it "lacked the oomph that you would usually think of when you think of Beethoven."

Musical fingerprints:

Piano soloist Ronald Brautigam, a Beethoven specialist, said the piece was not as challenging technically as some of Beethoven's later work, but it "has his musical fingerprints."

For instance, "in the opening two bars you hear a harmonic that he uses a lot later."

He said the work would never compare with Beethoven's mature concertos or great symphonies, but it was interesting and beautiful anyway.

"Every bit of information about the great composer is important, especially Beethoven," he said.

Beethoven, who in 1789 would have considered himself more a virtuoso pianist than a composer, made occasional notes in the margins.

"This is the only fortissimo in the whole thing, at all," he wrote at one point when the orchestra was alone. "No others should be heard as to come in after a solo."

Nieuwenhuizen, a contributor to the Beethoven Journal published in San Jose, California, worked for more than a year on the reconstruction.

Finishing Beethoven's sentences:

"You could say we had to finish Beethoven's sentences," he said, drawing harmonies from other works from the same period.

Nieuwenhuizen and the Rotterdam orchestra premiered Beethoven's concert for oboe last year. **Nieuwenhuizen** said they plan several more premieres in the coming year, including an 1817 prelude and fugue for violin.

"That's a fantastic piece, impulsive and bizarre," he said.