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HEADLINE: CONCERT: 'TIME CYCLE' STARTS FOSS SERIES AT Y

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BODY:

THE 92d Street Y has not been very hospitable to contemporary music in recent years. But Tuesday night, Lukas Foss, the **Dorian Wind Quintet** and friends began a three-concert series - the other dates are Nov. 11 and Dec. 2 - that will feature a Foss composition on each program. The Foss is sandwiched between works by Beethoven, Mozart and Bach, respectively. Whether attracted by the bread-slices or the modernist filling, a decent-sized audience turned out on Tuesday. Mr. Foss's "Time Cycle," sung gorgeously by Phyllis Bryn-Julson, stands up very well indeed. Mr. Foss has had a curious career as a composer. He is so diversely gifted that he is continually distracted from his composing by conducting and piano-playing. And over the last 20 years he has so restlessly explored the various idioms open to the contemporary composer that no one of them seems his own.

"Time Cycle" dates from 1960, when it appeared as a four-song cycle for soprano and orchestra. The next year, Mr. Foss transcribed it for chamber ensemble, and that version was heard on Tuesday. The four texts, all relating to time, mortality and a sense of loss in the face of nature's inexorability, are by Auden, Housman, Kafka and Nietzsche. The first two are set in a skittering idiom that recalls late Stravinsky, the third suggests Schoenberg and the fourth reaches back to Berg and Mahler.

Mr. Foss makes ample use of sophisticated serial techniques. Yet they are deployed with such cleverness and skill, they seem so appropriate to the texts chosen, and a force of personality is so apparent, that the work proves involving throughout.

"Time Cycle" was preceded by Beethoven's bright, fluid Serenade in D (Op. 25) for flute, violin and viola, and followed by his grander Quintet in E flat (Op. 16) for piano, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn. The high point was the slow movement of the Quintet, firmly and lovingly articulated. In the final movement of the same piece, it seemed odd that the venturesome Mr. Foss didn't avail himself of the improvisational opportunities so stressed in the program notes. But both performances were full of a spirit that proved preferable to the more bloodless niceties sometimes encountered elsewhere.
