

# Sundays at Three welcomes Gemini trio

## Classical music

By Mike Giuliano

The Howard County-based Gemini Piano Trio is no stranger to local concert halls, but its last appearance at the Sundays at Three classical music series was in 2002. That is all the more reason to look forward to its Jan. 8 return to the series at Christ Episcopal Church in Columbia.

"They're very popular in the area," said Harry Glass, vice president of the board for Sundays at Three. "A lot of musicians want to play in our series, so we try to rotate and not have the same ones back each year. We also try to get a mix of different kinds of ensembles. The idea is to provide variety."

"The piano trio is a very popular form for chamber music, and so we try to spread the wealth" in presenting such groups, adds Ronald Mutchnik, artistic director for Sundays at Three. "We strive to have people in our series who have a local connection. The Gemini members are all excellent musicians."

Many of the musicians booked by Sundays at Three live and teach in Howard County. Others hail from nearby Maryland counties, and some are affiliated with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

In the case of the Gemini Piano Trio, the local connections are very much at the family level. Violinist Sheng-Tsung Wang, pianist Hsiu-Hui Wang and cellist Benjamin Myers know each other very well. That's because the violinist and pianist are brother and sister, and the cellist and pianist are husband and wife. All teach at Howard Community College, where they perform at least once a year.

Their upcoming Sundays at Three program typifies their approach to the chamber music repertoire.

"We usually think it's like a buffet style with something for everyone there," Myers says. He notes that there will be "classical, romantic and 20th-century music, with something from each era. It's like a chef preparing a meal."

For a taste of mid-19th-century classical music, there is Robert Schumann's "*Fantasiestücke*," Op. 88.

A lesser-known composer from the late-19th and early-20th century possessing a more overtly romantic sound, Anton Arensky, will be represented by his Piano Trio No. 3 in D Minor, Op. 32. Mutchnik says of Arensky: "He was a protege of Tchaikovsky. He is not a



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The members of Gemini Piano Trio are, from left, cellist Benjamin Myers, pianist Hsiu-Hui Wang and violinist Sheng-Tsung Wang. The violinist and pianist are brother and sister, and the cellist and pianist are husband and wife.

grand innovator, but he's a solid composer who deserves to be heard."

Also being heard is a modernist-minded classical composer from the mid-20th century, Dmitri Shostakovich, represented by his Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 8.

In addition to these substantial servings, the icing on the cake, if you will, is Astor Piazzolla's "*Libertango*." As Myers observes of this master of the tango: "Everyone likes Piazzolla — like everyone likes chocolate ice cream."

Myers hastens to add that there are "a lot of really ingenious contrapuntal devices in there, which makes it very sophisticated."

Seconding the notion that this is not just an easy-listening tango, Mutchnik says: "Just because it's easy on the ears doesn't mean it doesn't deserve to be heard."

As for the stylistic switching of gears required when a chamber music ensemble moves from one piece to the next on a diverse program, Myers says "that stuff becomes instinctive."

If it's second nature to the Gemini Piano Trio members, it's because they've been playing together for a long time. Myers, his

then-girlfriend and her brother formed the group at the Yellow Barn summer music festival in Vermont in 1994. It seemed like a natural fit to perform with his future wife and her brother.

"We did not have pre-marital counseling," Myers jokes. "You know the people better than you would a stranger. There are a lot of shortcuts in terms of knowing each other."

All it takes is a quick glance across the stage, for instance, for one member to know that another member is about to play the next note. The many notes played over the years include numerous local concerts, as well as tours to such distant places as Germany and Taiwan. Last year, the group performed at Weill Recital Hall, which is administratively part of New York's Carnegie Hall.

If you want to hear their next concert, it's as close as a church in Columbia.

*The Gemini Piano Trio performs Sunday, Jan. 8, at 3 p.m., at Christ Episcopal Church, 6800 Oakland Mills Road, in Columbia. Tickets are \$15; those under 18 are free when accompanied by an adult. Call 443-288-3179 or go to [www.SundaysAtThree.org](http://www.SundaysAtThree.org).*