

Classical Music: Chopin and Schumann, for starters

Columbia pianist Eun Joo Chung joins with Ronald Mutchnik and Gretchen Gettes in the Sundays At Three concert series, opening its 13th season this Sunday, Oct. 4

By Anthony Sclafani
10/01/09



Columbia pianist Eun Joo Chung (Photo by Larry Gill)

Who says classical musicians don't have a sense of humor?

When organizers of the Sundays at Three concert series open their 13th season Oct. 4, they'll be staging a concert to celebrate the bicentennials of two of the world's most beloved classical composers, Robert Schumann and Frédéric Chopin, but they'll be celebrating the occasion a year early.

Ronald Mutchnik, the series' artistic director and co-founder, explains why: "We wanted to beat everybody to the punch. So we're celebrating the 199th anniversary of these composers in 2009."

Levity aside, the Columbia-based concert series Sundays at Three was founded to showcase the talent of area performers, and that's one duty Mutchnik takes seriously. For the upcoming concert, Mutchnik will again spotlight the popular Columbia pianist **Eun Joo Chung**, who was very well-received when she made her debut in the series a few years back.

As publications noted at the time, Chung was discovered when one of the series' board members happened to mention he had heard his neighbor practicing piano and was duly impressed.

The board member's ears weren't deceiving him. His neighbor, it turned out, was Chung, who had studied with Leon Fleisher and won both the Viotti International Competition and the Schubert International Piano Competition. Chung also has a long list of other accomplishments, like winning both the Chopin Kosciuszko Competition and the World Piano

Competition and performing with the Moscow Radio Symphony, the Dortmund Philharmonic and the Turin Philharmonic.

Although Mutchnik noted that Chung wasn't keen on promoting herself, she has since become a regular part of the series' concerts and is "very popular with audiences," he adds.

For Sunday's concert, Chung will be playing with Mutchnik himself (who plays violin), as well as Baltimore-based cellist **Gretchen Gettes**. Hosting Chung as part of a group constitutes a first, Mutchnik says.

"She's only done solo piano works for us previously," Mutchnik explains. "But this time, she's going to join us for chamber music as well. Having already had a first rehearsal with her, I can tell you she is a very sensitive, wonderful chamber music partner, and we're very glad that she's on board for this."

The trio will perform Schumann's "Piano Trio No. 2 in F Major" and Chopin's "Piano Trio in G Minor."

The Schumann work has an interesting history, Mutchnik notes. It was written just before the composer lost virtually all of his mental faculties.

"Schumann had increasing problems with mental illness as he aged. So his first piano trio is considered his strongest, since it was written when he was at the full capacity of his mental powers.

"The third one is not considered a great piece of music because he was already sort of going insane at that point," Mutchnik continues. "But the second one is very interesting because he comes up with some really unusual rhythms and harmonies that make the work very revolutionary and innovative."

Believe it or not, the Chopin work was written when the composer was around the age Miley Cyrus is now.

"He wrote it when he was still a teenager," explains Mutchnik. "But it has all the characteristic elements of Chopin's style. It's filled with beautiful melodies and wonderful changes of keys and harmonies - exactly what you'd expect from the much older Chopin"

Concert-goers who want to hear pure, unadulterated Chung should also note the pianist will be performing two solo works by Chopin. She'll play his "Fantasie in F Minor, Op. 49" and "Polonaise in A Flat, Op. 53," which is subtitled "Heroic."

"We look forward to having her perform again," Mutchnik says of the native of South Korea. "I'm sure audiences will as well."

Sundays At Three opens its 13th season with a "Tribute to Robert Schumann and Frederic Chopin" Sunday, Oct. 4, 3 p.m., in the Christ Episcopal Church in Columbia, located at 6800 Oakland Mills Rd, opposite Dobbin Rd. Admission is \$15 general; under age 18 are free when accompanied by an adult. For information, go to www.SundaysAtThree.org, or call 410-992-0145