



Santa Rosa, California

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**Passionate and Physically Charged Performance**

By Steven Osborn

In the Amelia Piano Trio's riveting performance at Santa Rosa Junior College on April 20, the bookends were trios by Beethoven (the "Ghost") and Mendelssohn (the D minor), but the standout was the work in the middle of the shelf: "Short Stories" (2003) by the contemporary American composer John Harbison.

As engagingly explained by the Amelia's violinist, Anthea Kreston, the group commissioned the work to ensure that Mr. Harbison would write at least one piece for their unjustly neglected combination of instruments during his illustrious career. For whatever reason, few great composers since 1900 have written piano trios. Bartok didn't, Janacek didn't, Berg didn't ... but now Harbison has. The results are spectacular. The Amelia's performance of this remarkable trio of works was both confident and convincing. They are obviously quite familiar with the work, and they played it with only occasional glances at their music. Indeed, the sight they offered on the stage was a welcome relief from score-bound ensembles that only rarely peek at their colleagues, to say nothing of the audience.

This happy combination of sound and sight was evident from the first note of the Beethoven. Ms. Kreston led the charge, Mr. Duckles matched her note for note, and Ms. Aizawa propelled the ensemble with a steady cascade of perfectly executed chords, arpeggios, and trills. The trio's dynamic range in the opening movement was particularly remarkable, from explosive sforzandos in the exposition to a breathtaking subito piano in the recapitulation.

The beautiful cello line at the beginning of the Mendelssohn seemed to flow effortlessly from Mr. Duckles' bow, exuding calm before the storm. As if by magic, the lights flickered in the auditorium, but the trio kept playing. After the elegiac "andante con molto tranquillo" of the second movement, the ensuing scherzo took off like a rocket. By the end of the finale, all three players were in full dance mode, with Ms. Kreston's curly brown hair waving from side to side, Ms. Aizawa's elegant arms billowing up and down like a swan's wings, and Mr. Duckles swaying in steady time.

Following an instant and unanimous standing ovation, the trio capped off the evening with--what else?--a tango by Astor Piazzolla. The encore was perfectly suited to the passionate, physically charged program that preceded it. All told, a wonderful evening of music.