

# MusicNightlife

## Strata Trio sends Strathmore Hall into the Strata-sphere

by Chris Slattery

Staff Writer

Mozart was a funny fellow. Chamber musician James Stern is explaining the story behind the "nickname" of the Austrian composer's "The Kegelstadt Trio," filling in the detail that "kegel" is a German word for a game similar to bowling.

"The story," he says, "which is probably not true, is that Mozart scribbled down this work while he was bowling. There is a lot of good-natured fun in this piece, so in one sense the story serves the piece well.

"It's not saying much to think that he didn't give it his undivided attention, although certainly Mozart can be forgiven that!"

Indeed. As classical musicians, though, Stern and his posse — he along with Nathan Williams and Audrey Andrist comprise the Strata Trio — were not put here on earth to forgive Mozart, just to play his sublime compositions — and those of other composers, some modern, some classical. That's what they'll be doing Friday evening at Strathmore Hall, with Stern on violin and viola, Andrist — who happens to be his wife — on piano, and their friend Williams playing clarinet.

"In addition to being a musician we admire enormously, he's been a friend for a long time," says Stern. "To rehearse together is really a lot of fun."

Williams, teaching now at Michigan's Interlochen Arts Academy, has recorded a CD with Andrist, a collection of American music on the Albany Record label. Andrist has appeared as soloist with the Juilliard Orchestra in New York's Alice Tully Hall and with the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa and the CBC Vancouver Symphony in her native Canada. The three appear as a trio, in varying duos and as solo artists; it's the classical equivalent of mixing things up.

And that kind of flexibility has turned out to be a good thing. Stern and Andrist just moved to Silver Spring this summer, relocating from the West Coast so he could teach at the University of Maryland.

"It's very exciting to be part of the inaugural season of the Clarice Smith Center for the Performing Arts, which is a wonderful facility," he says. "[University of Maryland] has a first-class musical faculty, a first-class string faculty. I'm proud to be a part of it."

Not that it's ever easy to uproot. The couple were living in Stockton, Calif., just a stone's throw from San Francisco and an easy drive to the fabled wine country, Yosemite, Lake Tahoe and Reno, Nev. But Stern left his position as an Associate Professor of Violin at the Uni-



Three of a kind: Nathan Williams, James Stern and Audrey Andrist will perform at Strathmore Hall Arts Center on Friday.

versity of the Pacific to come east, and is full of enthusiasm about the performance opportunities that abound here, and about the beautiful Silver Spring neighborhood he envisions as a wonderful place for Kenneth, their 3-year-old, to grow up.

"It was difficult to leave, but the possibilities here were too exciting to pass up," he explains. "Audrey and I have both found ourselves assimilated into the music community."

He cites Andrist's recent radio broadcast on NPR's "Performance Today" and his own appearance with the 20th Century Consort as evidence that close proximity to D.C. brings its own set of musical benefits.

Like the appearance at Strathmore. It will be a presentation of trios, with the objective of including both modern and traditional music. "The Kegelstadt Trio," certainly, is an example of the latter, as is Opus 83 by Max Bruch — no sports-related nicknames there.

"Each of the pieces is a very evocative character piece," he explains. "There are four of them we'll be playing and they have an interesting style: some swirly and windy, others turned inward."

A suite by Stravinsky rounds out the program — L'histoire de Soldat (the soldier's story), which Stern describes as a theatrical piece that mixes music and narrative, acting and dancing.

"It's based on the Faustian legend," he says, warming to his theme. "A poor soldier inadvertently makes a pact with the devil.

"The music is wonderfully creative and rhythmic."

He goes on to explain that Stravinsky had taken his original composition and arranged it for piano, violin and clarinet. Like the music professor he is, his explanation has not a hint of condescension. There's not a hint of arrogance either, when he says that the last work they'll perform is by Robert Maggio, who wrote the piece especially for the Strata Trio.

"We've had many works written for us," he says simply, "and we're particularly fond of the work Maggio has done."

This particular work is based on the American folktale, "The Riddle," — many know it as "I gave my love a cherry ..." — and written in two movements for clarinet, piano and violin.

"That folktale is woven very ingeniously throughout the fabric of those two movements," he says happily.

Mozart would have thought it was great.

The Strata Trio — Nathan Williams, James Stern and Audrey Andrist — will perform at 8 p.m. Friday at Strathmore Hall, 10701 Rockville Pike, North Bethesda. Tickets are \$22, \$19 for seniors and \$12 for students. Call 301-530-0540 for reservations.