

## Humanities West kicks off season with info-concert

By Janos Gereben

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Saint Michael Trio appears in Humanities West's "Rockin' the Sonata" program Friday at the Marines' Memorial Theatre.

For the first time in its 31-year history, the rich and varied lecture-performance series Humanities West opens its season with a concert. The rarity is further compounded by the nature of the event, called an "informance."

That's how Russell Hancock of the Saint Michael Trio describes the ensemble's specialty: exploring classical composers in depth with informative talk and performances.

Since 2007, "Saint Mike" has been entertaining and delighting audiences at its Stanford home and on tour with its mix of classical, jazz and even rock. Another unusual characteristic of the trio: its members are both professional musicians and successful in fields unrelated to music.

Hancock, pianist and lecturer, is on the Stanford University faculty and CEO of Joint Venture Silicon Valley. Violinist Daniel Cher is a medical doctor. Cellist Michel Flexer is a software engineer

and "serial entrepreneur," who works with several companies at the same time.

The Humanities West concert on Friday at the Marines Memorial Theatre, called "Rockin' the Sonata," is, as Humanities West Executive Director Patricia Lundberg says, "part of our occasional series on 'Living in the Material Age' in which we are exploring how the cultural pressure to succeed materially is overshadowing the connection with more subtler forms of happiness."

She adds, "We are especially excited to have the Saint Michael Trio for this program because all three of the members have professional careers unrelated to their music. Balancing their two lives doesn't come easy for the members of the trio but they do it, and do it well."

On the program are sonatas by Franz Joseph Haydn (1723-1809) and Paul Schoenfield (b. 1947) along with a lecture by Hancock on the enduring relevance of the sonata form.

The format, invented in the 1700s, remains highly useful in the 21st century.

"We think old Haydn was really onto something when he pioneered it, and we think that 'something' is nothing more than storytelling," says Hancock, who adds, "Haydn was really doing the same thing that later become so familiar and popular in Walt Disney films or corny situation comedies. You always know what's going to happen, you always know its formulaic, and yet you like it anyway. The formula really works! And it's still working in the hands of a very modernist and contemporary composer like Paul Schoenfield, who we think is telling the story of the 21st century metropolis."

IF YOU GO

Rockin' the Sonata

Presented by Humanities West

**Where:** Marines' Memorial Theatre, 609 Sutter St., S.F.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday

**Tickets:** \$25 to \$55

Contact: (415) 392-4400, [www.cityboxoffice.com](http://www.cityboxoffice.com)

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Janos Gereben is a writer and columnist for SF Classical Voice; he has worked as writer and editor with the NY Herald-Tribune, TIME Inc., UPI, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, San Jose Mercury News, Post Newspaper Group, and wrote documentation for various technology companies.

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