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Pizarro: Silicon Valley music trio gets classical in their off-hours

By Sal Pizarro
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Silicon Valley's business parks are filled with musicians who get their after-hours kicks playing rock and jazz — music that seems to fit the valley's innovative, rebel image.

St. Michael's Trio breaks that mold; you're more likely to hear Debussy than The Doors from them. That might be surprising coming from a CEO, a medical devices guy and a software geek. But they're all classically trained, and they love what they're doing so much they make it work.

"We don't play music because we have to," said Russell Hancock, who plays piano and has performed with the Redwood Symphony, Saratoga Symphony and Ohlone Chamber Orchestra. "We do it because we can't help it."

Hancock is also president and chief executive of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network when he's not tickling the ivories. The group's cellist, Michel Flexer, is a veteran software engineer-turned-entrepreneur; and violinist Daniel Cher is a doctor who works for Menlo Park-based Chestnut Medical Technologies.

St. Michael's Trio is only in its second year and has played most of its concerts for friends at Hancock's home. But they've just released their first CD (full disclosure: I wrote some copy for the liner notes), performed last weekend at San Jose's Le Petit Trianon

and have been appointed Artists in Residence for Menlo College.

It's not surprising that one of their goals at Menlo is to launch a festival for performance artists who already have careers in nonmusical fields.

PLAYWRIGHT ON STAGE: Theater fans will have a couple of chances today to see Terrence McNally, the four-time Tony award winning playwright, at San Jose State University.

The university's Center for Literary Arts is hosting McNally, a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 1994 for "A Perfect Ganesh," at a conversation and book signing at 1:30 p.m. He'll also have a lecture, question-and-answer session and book signing at 7:30 p.m. Both events are free and take place at the University Theater.

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