



The Sixty-third Season of  
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin  
**Concerts**

National Gallery of Art  
2,518th Concert

Mendelssohn Piano Trio

Peter Sirotin, *violin*

Fiona Thompson, *cello*

Ya-Ting Chang, *piano*

9 January 2005

Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm

West Building, West Garden Court

*Admission free*

Music Department  
National Gallery of Art  
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC

*Mailing address*  
2000B South Club Drive  
Landover, MD 20785

[www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)

For the convenience of concertgoers  
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the  
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,  
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

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Tom Benjamin (b. 1940)  
*Apéritif* for Piano Trio (1983)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975)  
*Piano Trio No. 2 in E Minor*, Op. 67 (1944)  
Andante  
Allegro non troppo  
Largo  
Allegretto

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)  
*Piano Trio in B-flat Major*, Op. 97 (“Archduke”) (1810–1811)  
Allegro moderato  
Scherzo; allegro  
Andante cantabile, ma però con moto  
Allegro moderato

## The Musicians

The Mendelssohn Piano Trio was born in 1997, when three of the most talented students in the chamber music class of violinist Earl Carlyss and pianist Ann Schein decided to form a chamber ensemble, naming it after a nineteenth-century composer each of them admired greatly. Since then, the trio has developed a growing and loyal audience and performed repertoire from all periods in which piano trios have been written. The membership of the trio proves the adage that music transcends national boundaries: Peter Sirotin was born in Ukraine, Fiona Thompson is from England, and pianist Ya-Ting Chang is from Taiwan, yet their ensemble playing has repeatedly drawn praise for its homogeneity. Reviews of Mendelssohn Piano Trio concerts in the *Washington Post* and *Fanfare Magazine* describe performances as “unfathomably beautiful,” “transcendent,” and “electrifying.” In 2002 *Post* music critic Cecelia Porter wrote, “[The Mendelssohn Piano Trio is] one of the more recent stars adding radiance to today’s constellation of chamber music ensembles.”

The trio members are artists-in-residence at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, and appear frequently in Washington as the resident ensemble of the Embassy Series. Recently they toured Taiwan, where their performance in the National Concert Hall in Taipei was broadcast on Taiwanese public television. The ensemble has also presented the complete Beethoven trios as a cycle in Portugal. With one CD already completed and released (piano trios by Sergei Tanayev on the Centaur label), the Mendelssohn Piano Trio looks forward to the release of its second CD, which will feature trios by Karl Goldmark.

Each member of the Mendelssohn Piano Trio has enjoyed a diversified career as a soloist in his or her own right. Violinist Peter Sirotin has studied and worked with a veritable who’s who of Russian chamber musicians in the late twentieth century, including Natalia Gutman, Alexander Rudin, Alexei Lubimov, Yuri Bashmet, Igor Zhukov, and the members of the Borodin String

Quartet. Sirotin played his debut with the Kharkov Philharmonic Orchestra at age fourteen while still a student at Moscow’s prestigious Central Music School, from which he graduated with honors in 1991 at age eighteen. He was immediately accepted as a member of the Moscow Soloists Chamber Orchestra, becoming the youngest member of that world-renowned ensemble. Later he continued his studies at the Moscow State Conservatory and the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In addition to his charter membership in the Mendelssohn Piano Trio, Sirotin founded the Razumovsky String Quartet and is associate concertmaster of the Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) Symphony Orchestra.

Cellist Fiona Thompson began studying her instrument in her native England at age seven. Her rigorous music education included studies with Leonid Grokov and the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. She is the principal cellist of the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra and the Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra and has appeared in chamber music concerts at the National Gallery, the Phillips Collection, the Penn Alps Music Festival, and the Spoleto USA Music Festival in Charleston.

Pianist Ya-Ting Chang rose to national prominence in her native Taiwan when she won the 1987 Taiwan National Piano Competition. As a participant in Taiwan’s Gifted Children’s Program, in 1988 she was sent to the United States to study piano with Enrique Graf and flute with Gail Cameron and Bonnie Lake. She received a scholarship for study at the Peabody Institute, where her teacher was Ann Schein. Chang has performed extensively throughout the United States and Germany as well as Asia, where she undertook tours with the Hong Kong Chamber Orchestra, the Tung Hsin Choir Society, and the Mendelssohn Piano Trio. She has taught piano as a member of the faculty of Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland.

## Program Notes

Composer Tom Benjamin, a native of Bennington, Vermont, received degrees in composition from Bard College, Harvard University, Brandeis University, and the Eastman School of Music. His teachers were Leon Kirchner, Carlos Surinach, Ernst Krenek, Arthur Berger, and Bernard Rogers. More than sixty of Benjamin's works have been published; they include concertos for violin, piano, and viola; symphonies; oratorios; cantatas; and six operas. He is the author of two books on counterpoint and the coauthor of three music theory texts. The many awards and commissions he has received include grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Society of Composers and Publishers, Meet-the-Composer, and the Barlow Foundation. Active as a clarinetist and choral conductor, Benjamin has taught at the National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan, the University of Houston, and the Peabody Institute, where he was chair of the music theory department. His light-hearted piano trio, *Apéritif*, was commissioned by the Mirecourt Trio. Intended as a concert opener, it displays both the virtuoso and the expressive possibilities of the three instruments. The structure resembles a rondo and the musical language is frankly tonal.

Dmitry Shostakovich's second piano trio has been alternately described as his most tragic and his wittiest work. But this musical paradox merits both descriptions. Strikingly brilliant passages are suddenly and sarcastically fragmented by the composer, with jarring effect on the listener. Dedicated to Iwan Sollertinski, Shostakovich's close friend who died in a Soviet work camp, the trio is a vehement censure of totalitarianism and violence. An especially poignant symbol is presented in the final movement, when a rustic Jewish tune is almost swept away by a rush of cacophony.

Often acclaimed as the greatest work in its genre, Beethoven's *Piano Trio in B-flat Major*, Op. 97, was dedicated to Archduke Rudolph of Austria (1788–1831), a pianist and composer in his own right and one of Beethoven's pupils. Beethoven held the archduke in high esteem and dedicated eleven works to him, including the monumental *Fifth Piano Concerto* ("Emperor") and the opera *Fidelio*. Eschewing the convention of an introduction, Beethoven plunges directly into the majestic first theme of the work, powered by a pulsating eighth-note accompaniment. The second theme is presented in the key of G major, a very distant relative of the home key of B-flat major, a radical departure for Beethoven, and an indication that he has remarkable things to say in this work. The second movement is a scherzo, recognizable not only in its repetition pattern but also in the skittishness of its themes. The traditional lightheartedness of the scherzo is modified here by the introduction of irregular key changes and heated chromaticism. The third movement represents an apotheosis of music in the theme and variations form. Here the variations do not merely decorate or comment upon the theme; rather, each variation in this movement is part of a single musical thought that gains energy and grandeur as it progresses, culminating in an extended coda that is much more than a final variation. The last movement dances fiendishly to a whirlwind conclusion, marked *presto*.