

MUSICAL INTERLUDES
**WOMEN IN BOSTON TRIO ARTFULLY BALANCE
CAREERS, PERSONAL LIVES**

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When Heng-Jin Park's young son interrupted her during a phone conversation last week, she politely asked to be excused for a moment to address his question. In hushed tones, she spoke tenderly to her son. Park, a pianist, was working at the moment, she told him. But she took the time to answer his question.

With that, she returned to talk about the contemporary composer Bright Sheng, as well as Ravel and Mendelssohn, whose works will be on the program when Park, violinist Irina Muresanu and cellist Allison Eldredge, also known as the Boston Trio, perform Sunday at Minsky Recital Hall in Orono. The concert is the first in the lineup for the Chamber Music Society, a group that helps raise awareness about chamber music at Maine Center for the Arts.

"Three women on a stage has a certain appeal," said Park, the only original member of the trio, which was formed in 1997 with two women and a man. "We've been described by critics as playing on a big scale, as passionate and extroverted. But we've also worked very hard at refining our sound and playing on an intimate scale."

The critics have, in fact, lauded the musicians for pulling big sounds out of their instruments. "The group plays with verve and style," wrote the Boston Herald after the group performed in 2000 at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival in Massachusetts.

But Park had her own descriptions of the trio. She described Muresanu as "fiery" with "gypsy spirit," and Eldredge as having "a gentle" who turns "expressionist" in performance. The three clearly complement each other.

They also understand the variety of obligations that come with each of their lives. In addition to the trio, the players also have solo careers, orchestral commitments, teaching jobs and families. They perform only 15 to 20 concerts a year as the Boston Trio.

"That's the great thing," said Park, who also teaches at New England Conservatory Preparatory School in Boston. "We take concerts we want to do, and play music we want to play. And we have very, very musical lives."

That has always been true of Park. Born in Korea, she began studying piano at age 5. She was 10 when her father died, and her mother decided to move the family to the United States, where she and her three siblings all pursued music. "When it was clear I had a passion and was talented, my mother started everyone in the family," said Park.

Soon they formed the Park Family Trio to play music together.

These days, Park is the only one still playing music professionally. But the next generation is stepping up to the music stand: Her sons play violin and cello. Sometimes Park practices with them. Sometimes she bites her tongue when she has the impulse to give too much advice because, now that the boys are older, they have started playing pieces in her own repertory.

Park isn't sure her boys will go into music, but she wants them to have that option.

"I'm certainly not a soccer mom, even though the boys follow sports and are athletic," said Park. "But there are only so many hours in a day, and we try to find the right balance."

In her own life, she said, a lack of strict prioritizing allows her to find her own balance.

"I try not to make one thing more important than the other," she said. "Making a good meal or doing something fun with my children is as important as a movement from a Brahms sonata. It's a full, rich life, and it's all important."

Women juggling family life and careers sometimes point to the impact of feminism in helping to create the choices in their lives. Park looks at her balancing act in another way.

"In my family culture, feminism was not labeled or talked about," she explained. "Because my mother was a single mom, she was a huge force and was very, very strong. It was purely by example that we got the idea of what a strong woman can accomplish. She gave us a strong feeling of resilience."

But music has always been a comfort to Park, too. She called it a solace and a haven in her life, something that can serve as a propelling force as well as a distraction. When she needs a touchstone, she turns to Brahms, whose work she has recorded.

While music came to her early, it was not until her teens that Park made the kind of commitment a serious musician must make to excel in the field. She reflected on the summer she turned 15 and was at a chamber music camp where the other attendees were college students.

"I came back from that consumed," she said. "I had been playing for 10 years, sometimes with a feeling of duty. It wasn't self-propelling. But after that, I knew what I wanted to do, and I was sure I couldn't do anything else." The Maine Center for the Arts will present the Boston Trio at 3 p.m. Sept. 12 in Minsky Recital Hall at the University of Maine in Orono. For tickets, call 581-1755.

