

Two distinct artists make a stunning duo-piano team

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Christina and Michelle Naughton are identical twins. Standing side by side on stage during a duo-piano recital last Saturday, their resemblance was uncanny--except for Christina's slightly longer hair and ever-so-slightly higher heels. The sisters, who are piano students at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, were in town to perform on the [Steinway Society of the Bay Area's Piano Series](#), held at Le Petite Trianon in San Jose. An identical-twin duo-piano team sounds suspiciously like a gimmick assuring fast fame for the mediocre, but the Naughton sisters proved that they are worthy of every ounce of success which comes their way. Their recital displayed stellar musicianship, technical mastery, and awe-inspiring artistry.

While most of the Naughtons' recital consisted of works from the duo repertoire, the pianists opened the evening with two solo pieces: Christina performing Haydn's Sonata No. 62 in E-flat Major followed by Michelle's rendition of Chopin's *Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise*. The performances brought out such different sides of the pianists that it was difficult not to see them through the lens of their solo playing, even after they joined forces later in the evening. Christina's Haydn sparkled with vitality; she treated the piece in a rhetorical fashion, bringing out conversations between different characters and voices. I was astounded by the vibrance of her performance. Michelle's Chopin was equally compelling, but it abounded with a different musical sensibility entirely. She strove to give the work structure and balance, creating long lines and phrases throughout. The polonaise, which can easily seem about twice the length that it need be, was completely convincing in her hands.

The pianists followed their solo performances with two works for four hands on one piano: Mozart's Sonata K. 521 and a dance by De Falla. After intermission, they performed Brahms's Haydn Variations, a short work by Bay Area composer [Gabriela Lena Frank](#), and Ravel's *La Valse*. They used relatively few visual clues, yet the sisters played together with pristine synchronicity. Traces remained of the unique strengths that their solo playing had revealed, but it was also clear that each pianist shared the assets of the other: together they spun a convincing narrative over the course of Brahms's variations, together they embraced a spirit of conversation in the Mozart. Their performance of *La Valse* was particularly wonderful; it glittered with coloristic variety, transporting the qualities that make the work so enjoyable in an orchestral performance to their two-piano rendition.

The pianists performed a movement from Ravel's Mother Goose Suite as an encore, sending their audience home in high spirits. #