

All-star Polish band takes San Diego by storm

The five-man Janusz Prusinowski Trio brings its dance-happy blend of age-old and cutting-edge music to town for multiple shows



[\(/staff/george-varga/\)](#)

By [George Varga \(/staff/george-varga/\)](#) | 2:42 p.m. Oct. 9, 2013



The Janusz Prusinowski Trio, left to right, Michat Zak, Janusz Prusinowski, Szczepan Pospieszalski, Piotr Zgorzelski and Piotr Piszcatowski. — *Howard Lipin*

The rain showers and wind gusts expected later today here will probably pale compared to the musical storm now hitting San Diego in the highly animated form of the all-star [Janusz Prusinowski Trio](http://www.januszprusinowskitrio.pl/en/the-band.php?lang=EN). (<http://www.januszprusinowskitrio.pl/en/the-band.php?lang=EN>)

The five-man band -- "Trio" returns to a recurring three-beat rhythmic figure in its music, not the number of musicians in the group -- made its U.S. debut at Carnegie Hall several years ago. On Thursday, the Trio opens the four-day European Jazz @ UCLA Festival. Its ongoing six-week North American tour concludes next week with a concert at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The Trio's San Diego debut took place Saturday at a private house concert in North County. It was the first of six area performances by the band, which performs tonight, Wednesday, Oct. 9, at Southwestern College and Friday at both Canyon Crest Academy and North Park's Folk Dance Center. The Southwestern and Folk Dance Center concerts are both open to the public (more information about both shows appears at below.)

All six of the group's performances here are presented under the auspices of San Diego's Center for World Music, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The concerts are co-presented by the new York-based Polish Cultural Institute.

The Trio's music combines rustic traditional Polish folk music traditions, including the mazurka and polainaise (both of which were favored by Frederick Chopin in some of his classic compositions) with cutting-edge improvisations that should delight jazz fans. The result is rhythmically infectious music that sounds both foreign and familiar, age-old and in-the-moment contemporary.

"That's exactly what we are doing," said Janusz Prusinowski, the band's namesake and virtuoso violinist.

"(Traditional Polish) village music... is still the same language today... the same musical form and improvisation. The way of improvisation has been typical in Polish music the whole time. You could call what we do 'Polish jazz!'."

Not coincidentally, the Trio has shared concert stages with such internationally celebrated Polish jazz artists as Tomasz Stanko and Michal Urbaniak. To date, the Trio has released three critically acclaimed albums: 2008's "Mazurkas," 2010's "Heart" and the brand new "Po Kolana w Niebie" ("Knee Deep in Heaven").

In the liner notes to "Heaven," Prusinowski writes: "And what place does heaven hold in Polish folk music? Setting aside (for the time being) the realm of religious songs (which consist primarily of heaven), we use instrumental music, the scales and tones of different instruments, the lyrics of folk songs. I think the old village masters from whom we received this language, music and poetry know exactly what heaven is."

The trio's lineup for its current tour features Prusinowski, who also sings and plays Polish accordion; Szczepan Pospieszalski on trumpet; Piotr Zgorzelski on bass and dancing; Piotr Piszczatowski on hand percussion instruments and Michal Zak on clarinet, wooden flutes and the oboe-like shawm.

While the Trio's music also draws from contemporary classical music, propulsive dance rhythms provide its heartbeat.

"This is what we love most," Prusinowski affirmed, "when people start dancing and the energy comes back to us (on stage) and feeds the music."

San Diegans can catch the Janusz Prusinowski Trio live at 7 p.m. today, Wednesday, Oct. 9, at Southwestern College's Music Recital Hall, room 801, 900 Otay Lakes Road, Chula Vista. Admission is free and open to the public. Information: (917) 854-6315.

On Friday, after a students-only noon concert at Canyon Crest Academy, the trio performs a 6:30 p.m. dance concert at the Folk Dance Center (<http://www.folkdancecenter.org/calendar.html>), 4569 30th Street. Tickets are \$15 each at the door. Information: (619) 466-4043.

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