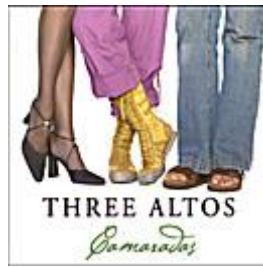


Mp3 Three Altos - Camaradas



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It's no joke: Rabbi, folk singer and sexologist make a unique vocal group 12 MP3 Songs FOLK: Gentle, WORLD: World Traditions Show all album songs: Camaradas Songs Details: Three altos, one voice It's no joke: Rabbi, folk singer and sexologist make a unique vocal group BY SARAH HENNING DULUTH NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER A rabbi, a folk singer and a sexologist walk into a...oh, forget it. It's just too easy. On the surface The Three Altos -- Rabbi Amy Bernstein, folk singer Sara Thomsen and human sexuality professor Paula Pedersen -- may seem like the most awkward gathering since Bruce Willis attended the Moore-Kutcher nuptials. But the local women share more than just a vocal range. They're strong. Opinionated. Funny. Determined. And after volunteering for various social justice causes and nonprofits, they all enjoy relaxing together with food and a glass of wine. OK. More than one glass. "There is a common thread between (Sara's) music and my teaching and Amy's preaching," said Pedersen, an assistant professor of psychology and human sexuality at UMD. "It's that we all help people be more open and accepting." The odd trio releases its debut CD, "Camaradas," with a concert at 7:30 p.m. Saturday in Mitchell Auditorium. The disc's content is as disparate as its contributors, flipping from traditional Jewish liturgical music to African chants to Americana and folk, including one Thomsen original, a sweet hymn called "Holy Angels." "The first title for our CD was 'All the Songs We Know So Far,'" joked Thomsen, a full-time folk musician for the past seven years. "Seriously, music, when sung with joy and good energy, lifts people up, no matter what's actually being sung." DIFFERENT STYLES As an example of how different the women are, Pedersen tells the story of selecting outfits for their first concert. "This is a big issue for Amy. She's a well-dressed woman," Pedersen said. "Amy said we should go shopping and get coordinating pantsuits. And Sara said 'What's a pantsuit?' " The story of how these three women came together is different depending on whom you ask. Each one takes credit for the brilliant maneuver. Not

willing to risk ticking off any of them, let's just say they kept bumping into each other at the same community events. Thomsen, 36, is a folk singer well-known for her political and social activism. Many have also heard Bernstein sing. In addition to being a rabbi, the 40-year-old is also a cantor at Temple Israel, where she's worked for nine years. Pedersen's the real wild card. The 41-year-old has been doing "Kiwanis pancake breakfasty-type" singing since high school, was a member of the Luther College Nordic Choir, and often hired herself out for weddings and funerals. When she moved to the Duluth area in 1986, gigs were tough to come by. "Bill Bastian gets all the weddings," said Pedersen in a mock pout. So, she sang in the rock band By Default for three years. The women have performed as a trio for about a year. All three say the collaboration is about fun and relieving stress. "Amy says we bring down her cortisol levels," Pedersen said. Bernstein said the first time they sang together, she was shocked three dissimilar voices could blend so well. "It feels like a magical combination," Thomsen said. "It's definitely like there's a fourth alto in there, something divine," Pedersen said. "Not to sound all woo-woo or anything." Music wasn't the only thing the trio inspired. After singing together for awhile, Pedersen and Thomsen became partners. Since Thomsen is the professional, the other two rely on her to do most of the arrangements. But sometimes, as on "The Water Is Wide," each woman feels out her own part. In under a year, the trio's audience swelled, bringing in more than 400 people one night. That audience started asking for a CD. And who were the Three Altos to say no? AUDIENCES ASKED FOR CD The trio's first album, "Camaradas," was recorded and mixed over two months at Sacred Heart Music Center. From a cover of Peter Mayer's "Awake" that contains all the joy of a child bouncing on a trampoline, to the haunting a capella of the Jewish liturgical song "Niggun," the disc's selections don't tarry in one genre or tone for long. Not to mention the bouncy African drum beats on "O Mama Bakudala" or the preaching-in-the-round on "Would You Harbor Me." Most of the songs have a serious bent, whether literally via lyrics or suggested via back story. For example, "Eli, Eli" about appreciating life in the face of adversity, was written by a female Jewish paratrooper who saved many Jewish lives before Nazis killed her, Thomsen said. "It's good music with a message," she said. "People are hungry for that." The trio members have a tough time putting their work into one genre because, frankly, it can't be shoehorned into one box. Although they realize tucking African music next to Jewish music isn't a chart-topping move, it was what felt right. "We wanted to celebrate diversity. Not in the cheesy way of tolerance, but really celebrate it," Bernstein said. They did the same with their album cover, using a photograph of unidentified legs in

contrasting footwear to highlight their careers and styles. "We play on our own awareness of how completely different we are," Bernstein said. "And how fun and beautiful that is." SARAH HENNING

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