

ZUILL BAILEY

CELLO

EL PASO TIMES

Concert Reviews: Pro-Musica, Border Legends

By Doug Pullen, El Paso Times, Texas

Oct. 17--EL PASO -- One night, two very different events, two opposite sides of town, one big example of what's right with El Paso.

The night was Friday night, which ended about 59 minutes ago (and, by the way, have I ever said how enjoyable it is for this former Michigianian to drive at 12:40 in the morning in shirt sleeves with the windows down in mid-October and not feel cold!).

The occasions were the El Paso Pro-Musica season opener at Coronado High School's gleaming new Capshaw Auditorium on the West Side and the second annual Border Legends reunion concert at the two-year-old Lancers Club East, which is a lot bigger than I thought it was. The Pro-Musica concert, which drew nearly 700 people to the 1,000-seat performing arts center, featured El Paso's own Zuill Bailey, he of the long matinee idol hair and serious cello chops, and his longtime friend and pianist Awadagin Pratt in a program of Brahms sonatas and songs.

I've seen Bailey perform once before, but it was last January's "Mozart to Metallica" concert at a local motorcycle dealership, part of the annual Chamber Music Festival, and he was the guest of featured violinist Rachel Barton Pine. Playing accompaniment to AC/DC and Sabbath songs, Bailey was clearly out of his element. On Friday, he was completely in it, plucking and bowing with such intensity during the Allegro in Sonata No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 38 that he broke the C-string on his cello. "This is the first time you've seen a cellist break

a C string," he said to the crowd, or something close to it, before he, Pratt and Pratt's music page turner left the stage so Bailey could restring his instrument. They returned soon after and finished the piece.

Bailey's a rock star. He's got the long hair, which flies when he's bowing a particularly furious passage. He's a ruggedly good-looking man. And the guy's a real technician who knows his way around every inch of that cello and uses all the resources he can summon -- delicacy, fury, frivolity, pathos -- to bring to life all that music on the printed page in front of him.

Friday's concert, and one Thursday in Las Cruces, marked the first time the two old friends had performed together here in seven years. They have a very natural rapport. Pianist Pratt is the more reserved of the two, and he has the lighter touch.

But they complement one another. You could hear it in the light dance that was Sonata No. 1 and in the delicate way they circled one another on some of the shorter pieces that were transcribed for cello and piano, like "In Summer Fields."

It was even more evident on Sonata No. 2 in F Major, Op. 99, much more diverse and emotive than the first sonata, one that allowed both players to display a range of emotion and technique -- Bailey bowing, plucking and caressing fire and sweetness from his cello, Pratt alternately finessing and not quite pounding the keyboard.

The program, which also included Siegenlied: Guten Abend, better known as Brahms' Lullaby, is both a prequel to a program of music by Brahms' friend and mentor, Robert Schumann, that will be part of next year's Chamber Music Festival, and a rehearsal for a new Brahms CD the pair plans to record in December.

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