

New Name, Same Spirit on Sundays

by Leslie Linthicum / Of the Journal • Jan. 8, 2012

When the Sunday morning celebration of music, espresso, poetry and surprises – a treasured institution formerly known as the Church of Beethoven – reconvenes today, it will be under its new name: **Sunday Chatter**.

The morning will feature a Brahms piece, good, strong coffee in a colorful cup and, another one of its hallmarks, a few minutes of quiet contemplation.

If I could suggest a topic to meditate on in that quiet time, it would be “change.”

It's been a bumpy few months for the people who have put on the Church of Beethoven for four years. Losing a comfortable identity and having to choose a new name can be a difficult emotional journey. It's especially tough when it's something forced on you and it follows the death of a dear friend.

The former Church of Beethoven and current Chatter crowd would rather talk about the future than about how the name change came to be. The Church of Beethoven has been, after all, a labor of love and a place of joy. The events that required the Church of Beethoven to become Sunday Chatter were different altogether.

Briefly, this is how it went down. After the death of cellist Felix Wurman, who founded the Sunday morning classical music series in a former filling station in Barelvas and named it the Church of Beethoven, his sister, Candida Wurman Yoshikai, trademarked “Church of Beethoven” and the accompanying logo with the intention of

preserving her brother's legacy and taking the concept to other cities.

When the Albuquerque Church of Beethoven wouldn't agree to pay a licensing fee, the parties split.

Pamela Michaelis, the president of Ensemble Music New Mexico, the volunteer-driven nonprofit organization that puts on the Church of Beethoven, told me, “We decided this is not worth the fight.”

Wurman Yoshikai retained the Church of Beethoven name as it goes forward. There are now incarnations in Oak Park, Ill., and Durham, N.C.

And the volunteers in Albuquerque who had nurtured the original Church of Beethoven were handed a seemingly impossible task: How to call the beloved Church of Beethoven anything else?

David Felberg, a violinist and the artistic director for Ensemble Music New Mexico, knew what the group was up against when it began batting around ideas and asking for input. “I loved the name,” Felberg said, “and I think it's a name that says it all about what we do over there.”

Many of the suggestions reflected a theme.

“There was Tabernacle of Bach, Temple of Mozart, Cathedral of Brahms – and every other combination you can imagine,” Michaelis said.

But Ensemble Music New Mexico knew it needed a new brand, not a kind-of-like-Church of Beethoven-but-not-really name. Church of Beethoven, convening Sunday mornings in the Kosmos art space north

of Downtown, had been just one of three musical children of Ensemble Music New Mexico. The others were Club Beethoven, a Sunday evening event, and Chatter, a chamber music ensemble.

Finding opportunity in adversity, the organization went for a complete makeover. Under the overall moniker “Chatter – Music worth talking about!” it also rebranded Club Beethoven as Chatter Cabaret and the chamber ensemble as Chatter 20-21.

When the word went out a couple of weeks ago that the Sunday event formerly known as Church of Beethoven would be known as Sunday Chatter, the reviews were ... mixed.

From the “Love it” category of emailed responses to the change: “I can’t tell you how happy I am to read about the new names. I would have never thought of Chatter coming to the fore, but it is so logical – brilliant, actually.”

From the “Hate it” side: “ICK! It’s an ugly, stupid, and trivializing name that has nothing to do with music.”

I’ll admit I was not immediately enamored when I heard the name Sunday Chatter either, but it was mostly because I found the name Church of Beethoven so perfectly endearing. (I’ll further admit that I’ve never managed, despite all good intentions, to actually get dressed by 10 a.m. Sunday and attend the Church of Beethoven.)

But I also knew that no matter how disconcerting a name change, you always get over it.

I used to know a columnist for this newspaper by the name of Jim Arnholz. When he changed his name to Jim Belshaw, I thought, Good luck, Arnholz, that will never stick. Of course, it did.

Add to the list the former Double Rainbow – known to us all as Flying Star for the past decade. And the pueblos of Ohkay Owingeh and Kewa (formerly San Juan and Santo Domingo). And, of course, the late Albuquerque Dukes, now the Albuquerque Isotopes.

In those minutes of silence amid the music and the good vibes this morning, I hope everyone can turn and face these strange changes, pour another espresso and wish Godspeed to Sunday Chatter.

And if you want to continue to fondly think of it as the Church of Beethoven, there’s not an intellectual property lawyer in the country who can stop you.

More about Chatter on the web at www.chatterchamber.org

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