



## Chatter

St. Francis Auditorium, Nov. 9

### More *Caprichos*, please

The Albuquerque-based musical enterprise Chatter tested the waters of Santa Fe last March by presenting a stimulating evening of chamber music plus film in partnership with the since deceased Santa Fe Complex. On Nov. 9, Chatter was back in town, at the nearly full St. Francis Auditorium and now entirely under its own sponsorship, offering invigorating interpretations of music from the 20th and 21st centuries.

Opening the program was the world premiere of Roberto Sierra's *Caprichos*, commissioned by Chatter to celebrate the centennial of New Mexico's statehood as well as the ensemble's upcoming 10th anniversary. The piece has no particular connection to the Land of Enchantment, although it was enchanting in its own right. One expects rhythmic complexity from Sierra, and his *Caprichos* presented that in abundance — so much so that conductor Guillermo Figueroa was enlisted at the 11th hour to help the six instrumentalists keep on track, which he did expertly. Sierra describes his work as very short pieces of a capricious nature quite aptly, since their five moments occupied only seven minutes and one never knew where they would lead. A lot of notes are packed into these small spaces, tumbling like waterfalls, buzzing like mosquitoes, snaking in sinuous dances, finally creeping in dense microtones that recall the music of Sierra's teacher György Ligeti. Listeners were drenched in sonic brilliance, and Chatter got a piece that deserves to stay in their repertoire. One's only regret was that the set ended so soon. Could Sierra be coaxed into penning a few more *Caprichos* for the same ensemble?

Schoenberg's groundbreaking *Pierrot Lunaire*, for mostly the same instrumental grouping plus vocalist, was premiered precisely a hundred years ago — another centenary connection — and the instrumentalists, playing now without a conductor, again turned in top-drawer work. And yet this towering classic rises or falls on the expertise of the vocalist, and the young soprano Meagan Brus seemed still on the way to cracking its code. She boasts an appealing, well-produced voice, but what Schoenberg had in mind was a cabaret-style performance artist who was both singer and actor, or neither. Brus made moves in the requisite direction, and in a few of the 21 movements she did manage to liberate herself from the vocal studio to striking effect: the bleating laughter of "Gebt an Pierrot," the stunned horror of "Enthauptung." Brus seemed bound to "singer's German," and this did not provide the linguistic freedom that would allow her to depart from standard pronunciation and articulation and rip into the potent German vowels and consonants to a truly expressionistic degree. This was an honorable performance, to be sure, and a necessary step along the long, complicated path of mastering this sublime masterwork.

Following intermission, David Felberg (the group's violinist and co-artistic director) conducted 23 Chatter musicians in a scintillating rendition of John Adams' *Grand Pianola Music*, from 1982. Here we find Adams in his early Minimalist mode — consonant, repetitive, pulsating toward uplifting climaxes. The piece also has a postmodern tint, throwing down the gauntlet to Beethoven's "Emperor" concerto to amusing effect as the two pianos let loose barrages of E-flat-Major arpeggios. One imagined Copland in the wide-interval melody of the slow section, but overall this piece is about exhilaration. The percussionists had a field day, and Felberg provided the necessary control without ever tamping down the enthusiasm.

— James M. Keller