

New Venue at ABQ Rail Yards

David Steinberg | For the Journal

Standing inside the long-vacant Blacksmith Shop at the Albuquerque Rail Yards, David Felberg liked what he saw and liked what he heard.

“It’s visually stunning. It has an incredibly high ceiling, and it has windows that almost look like stained glass. They reflect light patterns on the ground,” said Felberg, the co-artistic director of the Albuquerque music ensemble Chatter.

He played his violin to test the acoustics. He was thrilled.

“The addition of audience members should not have too big an effect on the acoustics,” Felberg said.

He’ll find out if that’s the case on Saturday, May 3 when he and other members of Chatter give a concert that inaugurates the Blacksmith Shop as a performance space.

The idea of live music at the Rail Yards grew out of a conversation Chatter president Pamela Michaelis had with Betty Rivera, the city’s director of cultural services last January.

“We were talking about how Chatter maybe could do something with the city,” Michaelis recalled. “She finally said, ‘What do you want?’ Out of my mouth came the words ‘I want a concert at the Rail Yards.’ She instantly said, ‘Great. Let’s do it.’”

Rivera said the city unveiled the shop last fall to let the public know about the different kinds of events that could be held there and to show local residents what



Albuquerque was like in the 1920s and '30s.

“We were marveling at the space. It’s cathedral-like. And it’s perfect for the music that Chatter provides,” she said.

If you go

WHAT: Chatter at the Rail Yards

WHEN: 5 p.m. Saturday, May 3

WHERE: The Blacksmith Shop at the Albuquerque Rail Yards, First and Hazeldine SW

HOW MUCH: \$15 general public, \$9 for those under 30 or students, \$5 children. \$100 (\$75 of which is tax deductible) for upfront seating and a 4 p.m. pre-concert reception. Tickets are available in advance at chatterabq.org

Rivera said it was Mayor Richard Berry’s idea to use the shop for cultural events. Chatter’s concert will be the first rental there.

Felberg made another visit with Chatter co-artistic director James Shields and they had the same thoughts about “the contrast of these delicate string instruments against a place where they used to hammer Milton steel. ... The first thing that came to mind was Arvo Pärt’s ‘Tabula Rasa’ for two solo violins and string orchestra,” Felberg said.

Pärt, he said, rejected the atonality of European composers and returned to a simpler way of constructing music.

Just as Pärt created a clean slate for himself and other composers, Chatter’s inaugural concert represents a clean slate for the building, he said.

“Tabula Rasa” closes the concert.

Opening it is Alfred Schnittke’s Concerto Grosso, composed in the 1970s for two violins, harpsichord, prepared piano and a small string orchestra.

“Schnittke wrote in an intense, brooding (way) yet there is a hopefulness in his music,” Felberg said. “It’s a very edgy piece, has great rhythmic drive to it.”

The third piece on the program is Bach’s Double Violin Concerto.

“It has one of the most emotional, beautiful slow movements in the entire repertoire,” Felberg said.

He noted the parallels in contrasting old and new music on the program with the old, abandoned Blacksmith Shop being used for something new.