



Full steam ahead

Chatter and the Barelvas community launch effort to revive the Albuquerque Rail Yards as a cultural hotspot

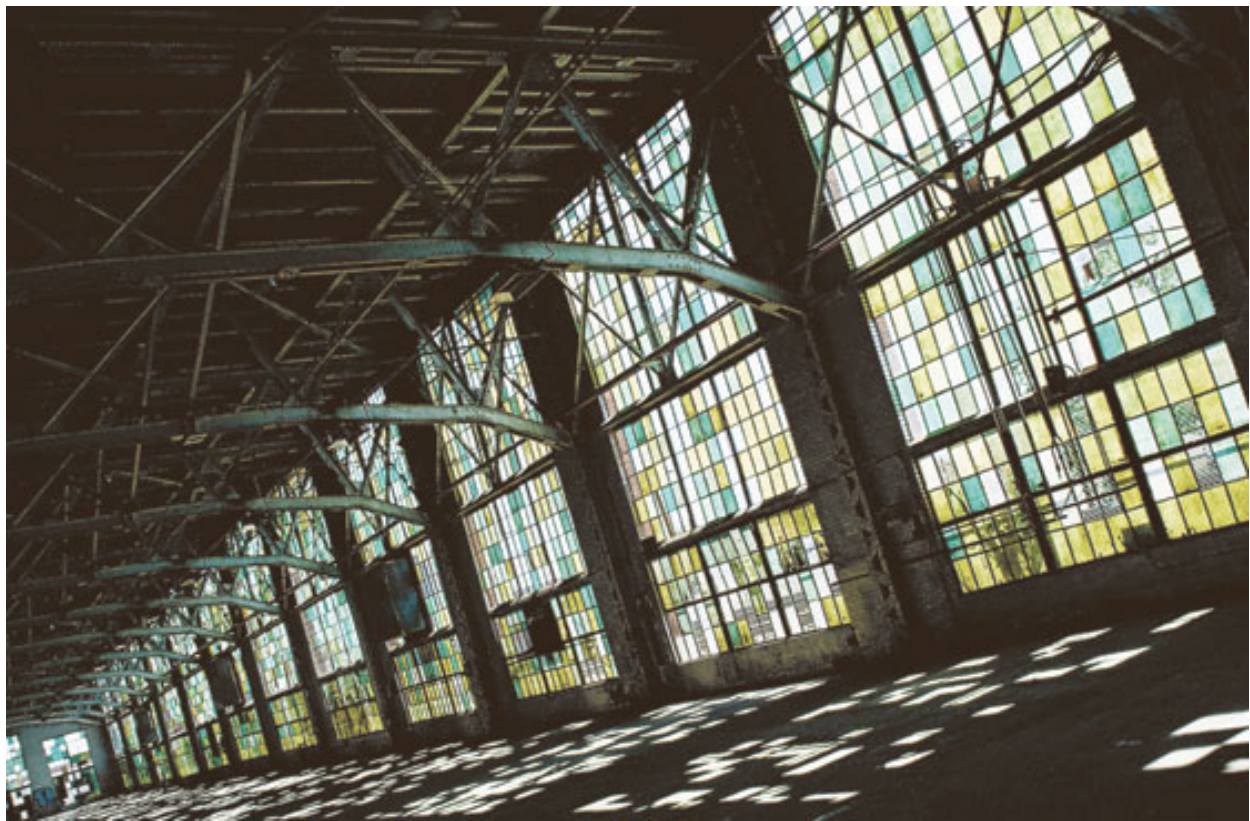


Photo by John Mulhouse

By Bill Nevins

The decade-long running, not-for-profit classical and contemporary “serious” music series **Chatter** will take an adventurous trip from its usual Sunday mornings performance space at The Kosmos on 5th NW to the newly-rejuvenated **Albuquerque Rail Yards** at 1100 2nd SW — specifically inside the Blacksmith Shop Building. Actually, this one-time-only gala performance is a sort of homecoming for Chatter, which began years ago under the name **Church of Beethoven** in

a more humble setting, also in the Barelás neighborhood where The Rail Yards are located. All Chatter shows are famously entrancing and uplifting to the senses and spirit, but this evening performance promises to be Chatter's best offering yet — a stellar lineup of musicians and intriguing compositions. Remarkably, the show is already sold at 650 seats — normal Chatter shows at the Kosmos seat 140.

Chatter Board President **Pamela Michaelis** conveyed delight to *Local iQ* when describing the event “menu”: “We will have Chatter's artistic director David Felberg and Ruxandra Marquardt playing violins and Conor Hanick on prepared pianos and harpsichord — all wonderful, beloved performers.

“Plus they will be accompanied by 22 additional string musicians. They will give us the ‘Concerto Grosso’ by Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke, the Double ‘Violin Concerto’ by J.S. Bach and ‘Tabula Rasa’ by Estonian composer Arvo Part — just an amazing choice of pieces, ranging over centuries and styles.”

Besides the music, Michaelis explained, there will be an exhibit of model trains and railroad memorabilia assembled by area rail enthusiasts, including The Wheels Museum/ASHOME, the NM Steam and Railroad Historical Society, and The Friends of the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railway.

Additionally, the Chatter audience will be treated to a special hanging exhibition of etched-onto-metal photos of the Rail Yards by Albuquerque-born artist **Eric Thelander**.

Michaelis, who serves in her fundraising and supervisory role with Chatter as an unpaid volunteer, both knows and loves her music. She's also in love with Albuquerque, the city that she and her husband, Don, publisher of the *Collector's Guide*, have called home for many years since moving from Minnesota. Michaelis worked with Minnesota Public Radio as a colleague and friend of *Prairie Home Companion's* Garrison Keillor and his Lake Wobegon cronies.

Michaelis explained that in conversations with Albuquerque city officials, including Cultural Affairs Director **Betty Rivera**, she explored how the once-prosperous but too-long-neglected Rail Yards might be renovated and revived as a cultural center. The Chatter show is just the first step.

“Several generous donors stepped up to make this happen for Chatter. Our

board member-architect Wayne Milcosz drew up a blueprint for us, and we are building a stage in the Blacksmith Shop the day before our show,” she said. “Chatter at the Rail Yards will mark a powerful step in bringing new cultural life to one of Albuquerque’s great architectural and iconic treasures.”

Indeed, Michaelis’ wish for the Rail Yards revival seems already to be coming true, as a community committee will initiate the first installment of a weekly Sunday Public Markets in the Blacksmith Shop at the Rail Yards on Sun., May 4 (*see Shavone Otero’s “9 Muses” column on page 27*), according to attorney and committee member Chad Gruber.

“We want the market to be a community gathering space where you can get some great local art and participate in activities for children and families,” Gruber told *Local iQ*. With funding provided largely by donations and the funding website indiegogo.com, the market kicks off the day after the Chatter performance, thus linking the high-art enthusiasm of Chatter to grass-roots community efforts in an encouraging, even inspirational coincidence of timing and determination. Music, poetry, films, dancing and many other exciting activities are expected to be hosted by the Sunday Public Market.