

Quintets bring out best in Sucre's friends

By D.S. CRAFTS
For the Journal

Guillermo Figueroa is clearly one of the most hardworking musicians in New Mexico. Not only did he conduct the inaugural concert of his Figueroa Project on Nov. 6, a week later he performed in the Brahms Piano Quintet with the Albuquerque Chamber Soloists and pianist Jon Nakamatsu, which I'm told was "magical." And yet a week later we find him at work in that same piece with his sister Ivonne Figueroa at the keyboard for the Placitas Arts Series.

"Packed to the gills" accurately describes the audience at the Las

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Placitas Presbyterian Church on Sunday. A most appropriate opening for this excellent regional venue now celebrating its 25th anniversary. This concert of classic piano quintets was part of the ever-going Willy Sucre and Friends series.

Three-fifths of the ensemble was the Figueroa family, Ivonne, Guillermo and his wife, Valerie Turner, piano and violins respectively, along with Joan Zucker (cello) and of course the irrepressible Willy himself (viola).

Guillermo gave informative spoken introductions to the two pieces, the Piano Quintets

by Schumann and Brahms, detailing the history and even tossing out a few comical tidbits. As first violinist, he acted as de facto conductor, imbuing both works the same sense of exuberant energy his conducting brought to the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra.

The Schumann, as he noted, was the genesis of the genre, and remains one of the greatest and most beloved of the repertoire. The opening Allegro brillante bustled with energy in its opening theme.

The minor key section was given loudly, forcing the recapitulation of the theme into an even greater sense of urgency. The second theme provided a lovely exchange

as cello and viola split the lyrical melody in two.

The slow movement, with its soft, portentous opening, soon became dynamic and dramatic as the music progressed. The charging scales of the Scherzo created a whirlwind color of sound, and the final Allegro ma non troppo, replete with bold bow strokes subsiding into the more quiet songlike lyricism, provided a satisfying conclusion. The fugal sections here have always struck me as unnecessary. Schumann at his best was the quintessence of the Romantic spirit. He had no need to imitate Bach.

The second half was given to Brahms Piano Quintet in F minor. As Brahms was a close associate and friend of

the older Schumann, there is a certain continuity of style. The latter quintet, however, has an opulence of sound almost orchestral in character. The group produced a full, red-blooded sonority throughout most of the work, manufacturing as much volume as the instruments can produce.

The precocious outbursts of the opening theme immediately set the overall character. The trepidatiously pensive opening of the Scherzo alternates with Brahms at his most outgoing, here building to a near mania in the middle.

The Finale glowed with a profound sense of mystery with hidden depths forever to be discovered.

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