

# Zuill Bailey

an unlikely ambassador

by Cheri Pearson • photography by Richard Baron

**He was a lone figure dressed in black in a darkened room sitting upright in a chair, his thick black hair falling forward as his hands deftly and precisely applied the magic of a bow to a blonde, pear-shaped cello. The earthy sound that came forth was deep, resonant and haunting. The mood music emitted was a reflection of the sinister HBO drama series OZ, and the focused, intense man responsible for setting the treacherous ambiance was Zuill Bailey.**

And if you happen to hear that same cello's voice wafting through the air on a sunny El Paso day, you could follow it to UTEP and find its owner. It may be a melancholy Bach if the day turns gloomy and rainy, or it may be lively and upbeat if morning coffee has been consumed. If you do not hear the rich music resounding from the university, it may be because the 313-year-old cello is abroad with its proprietor, Bailey, to play numerous chamber recitals and orchestral concerts across the United States, including Carnegie Hall, Montreal, Mexico, Israel, Jordan, Cuba, Russia, France and St. Nazaire, to name a few.

This extensive travel is precisely why the talented cellist was a perfect fit as artistic director of the El Paso Pro-Musica, which is kicking off its month-long 17th Annual Chamber Music Festival beginning Jan. 4. The annual concert series works to "emotionally move, delight and educate audiences," Kathrin Berg Pettit, executive director of the 30-year-old El Paso Pro-Musica, says "This has been a great tool in promoting our region for tourism."

So how did El Paso acquire a musician who has been hailed as "an engaging, multi-faceted American artist, a powerful performer who dazzles audiences with his technical and artistic command of the cello?" (Or so says Tim Janoff of ICS). A musician who has been broadcast on Saint Paul Sunday, XM Satellite, SIRIUS Satellite, RTHK Radio Hong Kong and the BBC?

It is the reason most people come home again to El Paso: family. After living in New York for seven years, Bailey and his wife, Margarita Cabrera, a sculptor, moved to El Paso when she received an art residency here, where her family resides. What was intended to be a three-month stay has morphed into five years, thanks to the family tie that binds and El Paso Pro-Musica.

"I am proud of El Paso," Bailey says with sincerity. "It is in everything I do. El Paso is where my heart is and where I started my family. I want to make a difference." Being artistic director of El Paso Pro-Musica has been "a way for me to use everything I had been developing as a musician, as a person, to channel into a city and have a lasting effect that touches a generation that will carry on the torch."

Zuill Bailey's life-long relationship with the cello began at the age of 4. He ran "furiously" down a back hallway after a concert and literally crashed into a cello. His parents, both musicians, enabled his study, and he found teachers who gave him tools and molded him. Oftentimes, he would practice into the night. "It opened up a world of what I didn't understand but wanted to understand," says Bailey.

At 12, he realized that he did not want to live without music and wanted to find a way to do it for life. He continued his studies at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Maryland and completed them at The Juilliard School in New York City.

He has had various teachers, including Loran Stephenson, Stephen Kates and Joel Krosnick. The lessons his instructors instilled in him are important in his philosophy today as he now educates at UTEP and elsewhere. "I think of a teacher, that point in my life, and ask myself what they would say, sitting on my shoulder, whispering in my ear, giving me little bits of advice," Bailey explains. He insists that students should not look for a name in the university but rather a teacher who inspires them to play because that teacher will ultimately sculpt them as a musician.

But mentors and lesson plans aside, a musician is not complete without his instrument, and Bailey is eternally grateful for the acquisition of his cello, a 1693 Matteo Goffriller that never leaves his side. He borrowed it for the weekend, admiring the fact that it had the "dream sound" he had in his head, and played it at an intimate dinner of friends. Afterwards, a generous benefactor walked up to him and told him not to take it back. This particular cello was "born" when Sebastian Bach was only 8 years old, and the patron understood that it did not belong in a glass case "next to a Picasso," says Bailey. It would be considered a shame to waste the full-bodied, warm, measured tones it releases and lock up its wealthy history. "When I no longer am able to show it in the way it needs to be shown, I need to pass it on to the next person," said Bailey in an interview with Jill Pasternok, Temple University Public Radio in Philadelphia.

Shortly after setting up house in El Paso, Bailey and his wife had a son they named Mateo. Bailey felt his musician-bred blinders come off and gained a new perspective. "In one instance, it reclassified what was important in life," Bailey recalls. "Up until the week he was born, the thing that made me the happiest was sitting there and connecting with the cello."

Bailey works to balance his passion for music and his love for his family while sharing, educating and promoting the arts in El Paso.

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Nationally, he has received enthusiastic reviews and has had his CD sell out on Amazon. In addition, he declares himself an "ambassador for El Paso" and speaks positively of our region in his various interviews.

It is true when they say it is "all sky and you can see for 80 miles," he said during a live broadcast with Jill Pasternok. He painted her a picture of little humidity and glorious sunsets, exclaiming that the colors are high definition and magical, as vivid as applying a "sharpie on white paper."

As a guest for St. Paul Sunday with Bill McGlaughlin, a show that is broadcast across the United States, New Zealand and is picked up by XM Satellite, Bailey declared his love for El Paso again. "I fell

### **He believes in this city and sings its praises all over the country whenever he can. He is a true ambassador of El Paso.**

in love with the people, the culture of the Border and the Mexican food," and professes that "it is a wonderful place to be."

In an interview with Tim Janof on the ICS website, Bailey informed him that "in this area, people are not only hungry for culture but heavily support the endeavors to promote it." Bailey went on to explain the winter festival in El Paso and the warmth of the weather in January.

When speaking to Bailey now, he declares that "the festival is a celebration of music." "Chamber music is like an intimate dinner party, with two to eight personalities interchanging views, having incredible exchanges and building on equality as a group." It is a journey of "music that is intertwined with life, around emotion and communication, revealing its life lessons."

"He is a walking billboard," says KTSM News Channel 9's Felipa Solis of Zuill Bailey. "Great artists are becoming familiar with us and welcomed with open arms."

After countless hours in airports, he brings his experiences back, playing for 30 minutes to an hour for students in El Paso area schools. "I love outreach. I want to share the enthusiasm. I think it's infectious between a listener and performer," says Bailey. "The outreach program is the backbone of our organization," says Kathrin Berg Pettit. "Our mission statement focuses on education of the chamber music to the public and especially children, who are the future audience of all the arts."

On one such visit to St. Joseph's School, his charisma pierces through the audience. He makes the students feel comfortable and infuses his performance with stories of his observations of other

cultures. "Tell me how [the music] makes you feel. It doesn't have to be intellectual, and you don't have to impress me," he asks. One young man stands and says that the music puts him in "a movie action sequence, like battle." "Yes!" Bailey replies. "It is an adventure, a journey, meant to take you to different places." At the end of the program, he receives a rousing, hearty, standing ovation. As Bailey leaves St. Joseph's, he is immediately inundated with a large group of students asking for his autograph. He kneels down with his cello, surrounded by admiring youth, and signs away.

"I found what I truly love to do," Bailey says. "I have not worked a day in my life." He considers it an honor and a privilege to spend his days sharing music and spreading its word. 