

Oakland native David Reiquero capitalizes on Naumburg prize for cello playing

By Sue Gilmore
Contra Costa Times

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IT'S A DARNED good thing the Reiquero household in Oakland's Rockridge neighborhood already had a pianist and a violinist by the time little David turned 6 and started itching to play something.

When his keyboardist mother gently steered her second son toward the cello, she was sidestepping the possibility of any violin-based sibling rivalry with David's older brother, Aaron. And, if truth be told, that extra gleam in her eye was a vision of a happy family piano trio, perhaps one day giving public concerts for paying customers.

That little group did indeed materialize, our now 23-year-old cellist confirms. "We were called the Ivanhoe Trio, because we live on Ivanhoe Road, and that's the name we came up with," Reiquero says. "I was 12 or so."

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Path to the prize

But his mother, quite unknowingly, also set him straight down the path to snagging every coveted first prize for cello playing in the United States, including the most prestigious, the Naumburg. Last summer, Reiquero emerged covered in laurels from a field of 60 competitors at the Naumburg Foundation's International Violincello Competition in New York, sharing a first-place award with a 26-year-old Swiss woman who was already principal cellist in a professional orchestra. He also has the blue ribbons from the Washington International Competitions for Strings in 2006 and, one month later, back at home, the Irving M. Klein International String Competition in San Francisco. "That was nice because it was in front of friends and family," he notes.

The Naumburg award, in addition to netting him \$6,000, also secures Reiquero about a year's worth of bookings, including his recital Sunday evening at the Herbst Theatre for San Francisco Performances, which makes a tradition of presenting Naumburg winners on the West Coast. His program includes works by Brahms, Debussy, Beethoven, William Bolcom and Gaspar Cassado, many of them pieces he assiduously prepared for the competition.

But the triumphal homecoming is doubly sweet this time, because Reiquero also will be reunited with his old maestro from the 1999-2001 years he spent in

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the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, two of them as principal cellist. Conductor Alasdair Neale, now music director of the Marin Symphony, will feature Requiro as soloist in performance of the Tchaikovsky Rococco Variations for Cello at 7:30 p. m. Jan. 18 and 20 at the Marin Center in San Rafael.

Maestro with the mostest

Requiro, who has performed with the Oakland East Bay Symphony, the Peninsula Symphony and orchestras in Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz and Fremont as well as symphonies in Boston, Cleveland and Arkansas, reserves highest praise for Neale's skills. "He was my first real conductor that I ever worked with, and so far he is the best," Requiro says.

Neale, in a phone interview, says his "vivid memory" of his first encounter with the young cellist predates their S.F. Youth Symphony association. Requiro, probably age 11 and a student at Berkeley's Crowden School, was performing in a program organized by his cello teacher, Millie Rosner, who had invited Neale's entire cello section to attend.

"This little kid got up and played a movement from the Bach Sixth Brandenburg Concerto "... and I turned to one of the cellists sitting next to me in the audience and said, 'I WANT him. I want him NOW,'" Neale recalls. "As luck would have it, he showed up a few months later for auditions."

Neale says he was pleased, but not surprised, to hear of Requiro's long string of competition successes. "He is somebody that is just so intuitively musical — there are no barriers between him and music," he notes.

Requiro, who is slight of figure and barely taller than his upright cello (which he absent-mindedly strums quietly with his fingers throughout his interview in the Times photo studio), says he, for

one, is surprised. He typically refers to each win as "I had some luck there," and says he never even hopes to win. In fact, he was a little bummed out when he made the finals at a competition in Japan during his senior year abroad.

"I was just waiting to get eliminated so I could travel around Japan!" he recalls. "Instead, I was stuck in my practice room for the full two weeks!"

"But you know," he continues thoughtfully, "I can't hide the fact that the way I prepare for these competitions is unlike anything else. With the kind of work one gets done preparing for competitions like this, the outcome really doesn't matter, because the kind of focus I have, the kind of performing experience I get, that's what I'm trying to take away from it."

The young cellist, who has an undergraduate degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music and has just finished his master's degree in music at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, plans to move to New York in about a year, but seems uncertain about the exact shape his career will take. Being a member of a dynamite string quartet sounds wonderful, but so does building a career as a soloist. And he knows he would like to include teaching, but he fusses about his diminutive appearance on that score.

"I've considered applying for certain university jobs already, but I think that with my age and the way I look, it might be a little too soon," he says. "From what I've heard!"

His favorite conductor laughs at that. "I think at this point, the world is his oyster," Neale says. "He is still very young. He looks like this little boy — but he plays like this wise old man!"

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CONCERT PREVIEWS WHO: Cellist David Requiro IN S.F.: In recital with pianist Elizabeth DeMio at 7 p.m. Jan. 11 at the Herbst Theatre; free with reservations for S.F. Performances donors and subscribers; \$25 general public; 415-392-2545 or www.performances.org

IN MARIN: In performance with Alasdair Neale and the Marin Symphony, 7:30 p.m. Jan. 18 and 20 at the Marin Center, San Rafael; \$27-\$65; 415-499-6800 or www.marinsymphony.org online: To hear Requiro's performance of some of his recital pieces from last summer's Naumburg competition, go to ContraCostaTimes.com or InsideBayArea.com

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