

# Isbin provides sanctuary

By SETH BRODSKY  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

Classical guitarist and Secrest artist Sharon Isbin, in a joint concert with Brazilian percussionist Thiago de Mello, played beautifully last Saturday night in Brendle Recital Hall. The evening, however, was not an opportunity for virtuosity, nor even for "great" music. It was an opportunity for sanctuary.

I have written upon these pages before about the cacophony which I feel pervades contemporary life so thoroughly. Nearing this century's end, it seems the world has gained such an unprecedented inertia of accessibility, of quantity, of volume, of sheer population, that all we may receive from the cultural rumble is a mind-numbing roar.

Life at present is extremely amplified, and any hollering from us will simply generate more distortion within what is rapidly becoming a Totalitarian Dictatorship of Noise.

What we need now is certainly not more noise. We need silence — an active silence, some black-watered lake of Druidian stillness which by its profound quietude gives meaning to the smallest pebbles thrown upon it.

Classical guitar concerts at their best have a powerful ability to instill this kind of active silence, perhaps because the classical guitar, among all other contemporary instruments, is simply the quietest. Thus, in the hands of a true musical artist, can the guitar invoke an unparalleled intimacy, a musical privacy of great weight which cannot be found elsewhere.

When Sharon Isbin played through Francisco Tárrega's famous *Capricho árabe* early in her concert, she was providing an invaluable beautiful moment of refuge from all that noise outside.

The concert hall, entirely dark save a lone spotlight upon the musician, became Isbin's own black-watered lake, off which

rippled Tárrega's infinitely delicate melody, intoxicatively sad in its Moorish pathos, sentimental but convincing.

The whole piece touched on the tip of the inaudible, yet it possessed such an aural magnetism that the entire audience seemed



Courtesy of Columbia Artists Management Inc.

**Isbin's technical ability and delicate style soothed audiences. Percussionist Thiago de Mello accompanied Isbin in the 2nd Half of her concert.**

connected to Isbin's spun melismas by some invisible filament. Each inflection of the musical line, every crescendo, every sighing pause, gave a collective tug to the motionless crowd.

While other such moments came close to this effect of artistic hypnotism, Isbin's performance of the *Capricho* was undeniably

the crystalline heart of the whole concert.

Issac Albeniz' *Asturias*, also performed during the first set, was given a fierce edge and an almost obsessional drive, and Enrique Granados' *Spanish Dance No. 5*, while lacking a characteristic dirtiness, provided another opportunity for Isbin's inimitable lyricism.

Isbin alternated one solo set on each half of the program with another devoted to duos with Thiago de Mello. De Mello lent a wonderful warmth to the evening, possessing an earnest informality and benevolence that almost made one forget how fine a percussionist he truly is.

De Mello's accompaniments were never intrusive; rather, they murmured along seamlessly, like rhythmic lullabies. He had a delightfully exotic array of instruments to choose from, which he often did in an improvisational fashion.

De Mello would agilely shift from authentic Amazonian whistles to a gourd made by his mother, from a berimbau (similar to an archer's bow with a small resonance bowl), to a tortoise shell (whose original owner, de Mello sadly confessed, was eaten), to the extraordinarily evocative rain stick.

The percussionist's chief instrument, the "jungle's mouth," consisted of nothing more than a large box he had constructed himself; this tribute to economy gave rise to a wondrously varied array of sounds.

De Mello's own composition for guitar and percussion, *Four Chants for the Chief*, maintained an unmistakably Brazilian tone, and provided a soft, lulling tone, though occasionally the music extended beyond facile comfort into banality.

The performance level remained high, but chemistry between the performers, though not without moments of great poetry, highlighted a disparity between the two musicians. **See Isbin, Page B6**

# SECCA combines art and community

By THOMAS YOUNG  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

As the fifth installment in the series by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts, *Artists in the Community* presented renowned southern artist Willie Birch. Native to New Orleans, Birch came to Winston-Salem to help fourth, fifth and sixth graders in Forsyth County public schools create works of art which will be exhibited throughout the city in upcoming months.

By bringing together artists and the people of Winston-Salem, SECCA created the *Artists in the Community* project to draw focus to all aspects of life in the city.

Birch's trip to Winston has resulted in a series of placards created by the elementary students that will be placed on Winston-Salem buses for a period of three months beginning in December.

In addition, Birch has put together an exhibit of his work which is currently on display at SECCA. This compilation of recent compositions gives unique and valuable insights into the experiences of the artist, as well as illustrating his hopes and fears for the rest of the world.

On display at SECCA are both acrylic paintings by Birch as well as mixed media sculpture. They are unified through one common theme: identity.

Much of the work is autobiographical, telling the story of his childhood in New Orleans. He focuses on the great influences of his life: family, religion and jazz, and how they are interrelated.

The creations are very telling. One repetitive theme is the decoration of clothing with words and items.

This represents the people who would have possessed them. The normally superficial shrouds become, in themselves, guides to the people who wore them.

These autobiographical pieces carry other weight as well. They seem to represent a

world as it was, yet is no more.

Whether they have changed for better or for worse, Birch points to things which no longer exist. Some of these things should not have died while others may not be far enough in our past.

The theme of racism in America is evident throughout all of the work, and is the main focus of his contemporary pieces. The concept of African-Americans' seeking out an identity, as people in the face of a society produced through hundreds of years of ignorance and hatred, comes full to the front in his works.

Within this concept Birch deals with society, lost heritage, ignorant hatred and ignored heroes. The final sense of the exhibit is a questioning of origins, destinies, and, above all, hope.

It is appropriate that an artist who has spent so much time focus on the world around him should be brought into a project which seeks to bring art out into the open. The free expression of the project is perhaps the great hope. If people still dream the dreams, and have not lost their vision to pain, then maybe there is hope.

For the audience viewing his works there may be many interpretations. There is no one who can share Birch's unique vision of life. But when an individual is opened to the life of another, understanding is the inevitable result.

The current exhibit succeeds greatly in its ability to face the questions of everyday existence from which most people hide. The issues of family, religion, crime and racism are perennial.

What truly sets the exhibit apart is that, even though all of this is being said, the message is not set in stone. It is for the individual to discover within themselves. Nothing tells you what the artist is thinking, and nothing tells you what he hopes. The art makes you answer those questions for yourself.

# Uninspired R.E.M. disappoints, fails to impress fans

By DAVID GREENAWALT  
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

Although lead singer Michael Stipe claimed "to remember the days when R.E.M. was playing in the pizza parlors as a small band," the coliseum concert style just does not seem to fit the group.

R.E.M. has been hyped and blown up to such an extreme by MTV and corporate radio that one would naturally expect them to be a great, once-in-a-lifetime show. I could not have been more let down. The concert, at Greensboro Coliseum was, to say the least, mediocre.

Luscious Jackson got the evening off to a roaring start with a thirty-minute set of songs from their *Natural Ingredients* album. The all-female quartet from New York stirred up the audience with grooving dance tunes.

Unfortunately, by the time the crowd was getting into them, they left the stage.

R.E.M. then came on and opened with the poppy radio hit, "What's the Frequency, Kenneth?" The crowd erupted into a frenzy as Stipe solemnly stood before his microphone, wearing sunglasses and a dark blazer.

As the song wrapped up, Stipe sat down on the stage and it seemed that he was contemptuously observing the throngs of fans that were desperately reaching out to touch him.

After the initial euphoria wore off, the Athens, Ga.-based group embarked upon a 25 song set, which included "Crush With Eyeliner," "Drive," and "Pop Song 89." Although they played songs primarily from the last three albums which have been released since their last U.S. tour in 1989, they did not limit themselves just to those.

The typical R.E.M. sound of peppy guitar

riffs and the unique vocals of Stipe pervaded the evening. Some of the songs seemed to flow naturally. Others, however, appeared to

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Stipe unenthusiastically introduced the songs by nonchalantly stating, "here's an-

other song." The lack of ardor in the concert was one of its major detractions.

Later in the show, they played "Strange Currencies," a slow, mellow song about being individualistic. Ironically, half of the audience whipped out their cigarette lighters and were waving them about. It was reminiscent of a mid-80s Eagle's concert.

The song itself was not bad, but the presentation of both this particular song and of the concert as a whole was over-dramatized and it skewed my entire perception of R.E.M.

R.E.M. is no longer the college music band it once was, and it shows. There is a noticeable difference between its newer albums such as *Monster* and *Automatic for the People* compared to its older stuff.

The more recent releases seem to be geared to appeal to the general public. The political messages behind their songs are not nearly as

abrasive but are more user friendly.

R.E.M. has gone mainstream and the atmosphere of the concert proved it. The coliseum setting was extremely impersonal. It did not allow for the freedom to feel the music, unless you were one of the lucky few sitting in the first few rows.

Generally, I thought that most of the show was okay, but they did not do their music justice. As a fan of R.E.M. since middle school, I was awaiting this show with great anticipation. They did not live up to my idea of what R.E.M. would be like.

I was looking forward to an evening that would increase my admiration of the music that they have released, but the effect was entirely the opposite. Perhaps the show would have been better if it had been in a smaller location, but as it was, I was left wanting something more.

# Summer mountain excursion allows for reflection

By BRIAN SMITH  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

The following is a peek into Smith's diary from this past summer. Smith spent time in the desert mountains of Utah and Colorado and wrote reflections of his daily activities.

**July 28 — Day Four**

Ben (one of my companions) and I picked up Big L (Lowry, my other companion) at the bus station. We left Silverthorne, Colo. en route to Utah. We stopped at a rest area west of Vaal and found a dirt road that clambered up toward a ridge still spotted with snow patches.

The trail was good and wound through some low altitude (relatively speaking) meadows covered with yellow, blue and red flowers whose

names I do not know.

We scrambled up over the ridge to find good views. Scrub grass and some scraggy shrubs adorned the ridge line. We relaxed in the grass among small piles of dung.

We ate at a small cafe built in 1947. Did Ed Abbey (the author of *Desert Solitaire*) dine there? It's pretty cool being in the same proximity as Ed — this land is the running illustration to *Desert*. It seems like he's enjoying a sort of "Death of an Unpopular Poet" sort of fame. In the United States Forestry Service and

the Bureau of Land Management office, they were showing a biographical video about him and had lots of copies of *Desert*.

Maybe I'm wrong, but Abbey harshly criticized these government agencies for their management of wilderness and national parks. It seems sort of ironic that since he has passed on they have embraced his literary views.

We are camping on BLM land, right beside the Colorado River. Even though it's 9 p.m. and quite dark, light lingers on among the high canyon walls, illuminating the red rock and sandstone. However, the privy was hot as fire. Beautiful land, even though the ants are carnivorous little devils.

**July 29 — Day Five**

Did Arches National Park. Lots of rock. Real pretty. Lots of heat. The place was extremely crowded. Paid \$4 to drive around Arches behind an R.V.

Got to one trail head and promptly left the trail in order to conduct a proper exploration.

Lowry and Ben scramble up a rock but discover that the difficult first pitch becomes too narrow and steep to continue. So they come back down. I help Lowry down and then he and I help Ben. Unfortunately the sandstone ledge that Ben has been holding on to breaks. Fortunately he slides a short ways and lands on Lowry's shoulders.

Damage report: Lowry's head, my left knee, Ben's abdomen and one sandstone ledge.

We find a very decent primitive trail — real sand and cacti with no gravel. It winds up through Fin Can-

yon and gives great views of Double-O Arch and Landscape Arch. There are very few people. This part of the day is becoming way hot and drinking hot, stale water doesn't really help.

After a full day of desert hiking we come back to the same campground where I promptly eat and then throw up a can of fruit cocktail. Heat exhaustion? Dehydration? We did go swimming in the river. We floated out some small rapids in the cool river. It's beautiful out here but those damn carnivorous ants are trying my patience. I wonder how they would like white gas.

**July 30 — Day Six**

On the road to Canyonlands National Park. Today was a low stress, day. We did some low mileage loops and vista trails. Saw some cliff dwellings. Amazing how hardy the Indians (Anasazi, I think) had to be to survive these summers and winters. Us "modern" folks have a hard time without air conditioning.

Anyway, saw Upheaval Dome — very strange and alien-looking and it didn't really fit in with the surroundings. You could think of it as geological white trash. Went to Grand View Point at Island-in-the-Sky District. Could not help but think of Abbey's account of it in *Desert*. "Dead Man at Grand View Point" was the chapter. It seems an old man wandered off around the edge and died under a juniper with his camera. Too much sun, not enough water. That is reality out here.

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Brian Smith

**Magnificent views of Canyon Lands National Park such as this one drew Smith's thoughts towards Ed Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, a book which was written in this same region of the country.**

I didn't take a picture because I knew it would not do the landscape justice. Some things are just better remembered.

It is pretty hot and all three of us are enduring our own little battles with lethargy. After doing all the seeing that our over-stimulated optic nerves would let us, we returned to the campsite (no fee) and had some good delirious talk of steaks and baked potatoes, of lemonade and sweet tea and sweet southern women, of mountains and cool running water.

Lowry, the desert rat of the three of us, is doing a good job of repressing his urge to explore every wall and canyon. He almost hiked down to the Green River (12 mi., 110 degrees) but at that time it was 3 p.m. Had we put our butts in gear a little earlier I think

he just might have gone.

Right now they are on the top of a rock at the edge of the campground. I did not go because of my climbing skills, or lack thereof. Instead, I sit and write this. This is really pretty country, but as Ben and I theorized in the mid-day heat, it would probably be a lot better in March. Tomorrow: Needles District.

**July 31 — Day Seven**

Today has been a very good day. Drove from Island to Needles. Stopped and took a \$4 shower in Moab. However, it was very much worth it. Compared to Kentucky, these showers were the epitome of luxury. From Moab, we drove about an hour to Needles. This place is out in the boonies, which explains why we all **See Outdoors, Page B6**



Brian Smith

**"After doing all the seeing that our over-stimulated optic nerves would let us, we returned to the campsite (no fee) and had some good delirious talk."**

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## Isbin

From Page B5

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cians, rather than an intimate dialogue.

This occasional awkwardness may have resulted simply because two

musical worlds were colliding: Isbin adhered quite stiffly to the rigors of a fully notated score, while de Mello, maintained the comfortable sovereignty of a born improviser.

Despite these sporadic moments of discomfort, Isbin and de Mello were able to maintain a surreal unity of atmosphere throughout the evening, providing many a moment of lyrical momentum and harmonic suavity.

Still, I found myself yearning for the concert's beginning, when Isbin sat alone, solitarily rippling the gentlest of lines off the dark resonant hall, achieving a paradoxical intensity of volume through her concentration. Those moments, brief but boundless, offer an indescribable solace for those willing to bring themselves in from the noise outside, and simply *listen*.

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## Outdoors

From Page B5

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seem to be in a better state of mental health than at Arches.

After the morning chores of driving and personal hygiene, we finally got to do some exploring. I did a 7.8 mile loop through Squaw Canyon and Big Spring Canyon. Lowry and Ben did a longer option — another six miles compared with the 2.8 I had left on Squaw. I did the last leg by myself and wound through some surprisingly grassy washes at the bottom of the canyon. There were lots of juniper and several ponderosa pine.

In some spots the red cliffs loomed up before me and I tried my hardest to comprehend the geological and physical enormity of the structures. It's tough to fathom just what the desert means. I won't try it tonight. I'll save it for one of those sleepless nights when I should be studying chemistry.

As I wait for the boys to return I can sit here on the National Park Service picnic table under a shady pine, sipping lemonade and looking out at the spires and plateaus that characterize this park.

Not too shabby. The lemonade we're making has some lip-swallowing kick. Since they come in packets for 2

quarts and all of our containers are 1 quart, you have to guesstimate the amount of powder for 1 quart. It's either weaker than your sister's hand shake or strong enough to turn goat urine into gasoline.

This is our last day in the desert and while I'll miss having my feet blistered through my boots from the weatherworn, sun-blistered sandstone, I won't miss sweating profusely in my nylon refuge each night while ants prepare an invasion to scavenge the last bit of granola off my dirty shorts.

The desert has a unique beauty that is apparent in this seemingly desolate and barren surface. This beauty is simplicity and power and infinity.

Scrub trees grow without water. Colors pervade the sky with no bounds. Red-rimmed canyons, white-topped spires, light brown grass, deep green pinion pine and the dark blue-gray of the advancing thunder heads. And here I sit, in the midst of nature's immortality. These formations have existed a long time and will probably outlive us by several billion years. We are merely visitors and this land belongs to no one.

Since the clouds have been out, the temperature has been thoroughly enjoyable. I didn't face the prospect of becoming plasma today. I realize I'm rambling, but tomorrow's Mesa Verde and then the mountains of Colorado, with cool streams and chilly nights. But now I'm going to have dinner.

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# Bored? Try Stroganoff

By JOE DOBNER  
GRAPHICS EDITOR

Aaaaah, Stroganoff. Just like aunt Olga used to make. Well, maybe not *just* like aunt Olga used to make.

This is a reasonably quick and easy dish to prepare. In the way of cooking instruments, you will need a skillet, pot, knife, can opener, cutting board (a copy of *Link* magazine will serve nicely) and a spatula or wooden spoon.

#### Food you will use:

1 lb. cube steak, flank steak, or ground beef  
10 oz. egg noodles  
4 oz. mushrooms  
1 small onion  
8 oz. sour cream  
1 can of cream of mushroom soup  
1 clove of garlic  
chives  
black pepper

Be sure your meat is defrosted. If you can plan ahead, leave it out in

your room. If you can't plan ahead, nuke it for five minutes on half power and you should be okay.

Boil some water, and then throw the egg noodles. Cook according to the package directions. You do not need to add salt, unlike spaghetti and other bread pasta.

Now, while the noodles are cooking, chop up the onion into itty-bitty pieces.

Slice the mushrooms. Go ahead and open the soup and the sour cream.

The noodles will take a while to cook, so you have a little time. Do something useful, like cleaning the kitchen or reading your philosophy.

Five minutes before the noodles are done, start your meat. Turn a burner on high, and place your skillet on it.

Once it gets hot (No! Bad! Don't

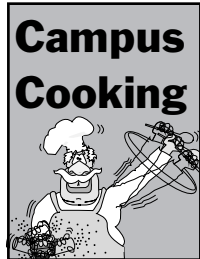
check it with your fingers!), throw on the meat and onions. Stir vigorously until the meat is brown, then remove the skillet from the burner. Turn the burner down to medium. Drain the grease from the skillet by placing a knife or the cutting board over the skillet so that just a sliver of the skillet is open, and tilt over the a can.

Do not drain the grease into the sink, or someone will eventually have to clear the meat from the plumbing with Drano.

Stir in the mushrooms, cream of mushroom soup and the sour cream. If you have trouble getting their gelatinous masses out of their respective containers, break the vacuum holding them in by stabbing the up-ended top of the can or cup.

Replace the skillet to the burner on medium, and add the chives and pepper. Stir until mixture achieves a uniform consistency, and is warm.

Drain the noodles, put 'em on the plate, and spoon the mixture over it. Enjoy.



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