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Guest Artist

Sharon Isbin

Acclaimed for her extraordinary lyricism, technique and versatility, multiple GRAMMY Award winner Sharon Isbin was named Musical America Worldwide's 2020 Instrumentalist of the Year, the first guitarist in their 59-year award history. She received the 2023 Guitar Foundation of America Hall of Fame and Artistic Achievement Award. Hailed as "the pre-eminent guitarist of our time," she has been soloist with over 200 orchestras, and has performed in celebrated halls across 40 countries.

Winner of the Munich ARD, Madrid and Toronto Competitions, Germany's Echo Klassik and Guitar Player's Best Classical Guitarist awards, she performed in Scorsese's Oscar-winning *The Departed*, at Ground Zero for the first internationally televised 9/11 memorial, the White House by invitation of President Obama, and as the only classical artist in the 2010 Grammy Awards. The documentary *Sharon Isbin: Troubadour*, seen by millions on over 200 PBS stations and abroad, won ASCAP's Television Broadcast Award and is available on DVD/Blu-ray and streaming on Amazon and PBS Passport. Recent highlights include sold-out concerts at the Kennedy Center, Kimmel Center, and Carnegie Hall including a collaboration with Sting.

Isbin's catalogue of over 40 albums has sold more than a million CDs with over 30 million streams. Her *Romántico* (2025) debuted as SiriusXM's Album of the Week and features world premiere recordings of joyous Latin dance-inspired music by Karen LeFrak, including her *Miami Concerto* with the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by Enrico Lopez-Yañez. *Live in Aspen* (2024) was recorded with India's foremost sarod virtuoso Amjad Ali Khan at their sold-out Aspen Music Festival concert and released for the Festival's 75th anniversary. Isbin's recordings named Best of 2020 feature world premieres composed for her: *Affinity* showcasing Chris Brubeck's dazzling guitar concerto and works by Brouwer, Tan Dun, Lauro and Danielpour; and *Strings for Peace* with Maestro Khan. Her *Souvenirs of Spain & Italy* with the Pacifica Quartet debuted at #1 on Amazon, and *Alma Española*, the first Spanish



Photo: J. Henry Fair

art song album with guitar of its kind in 40 years, was honored with a 2018 Grammy Award for Producer of the Year. Her Grammy-winning *Journey to the New World* with guests Joan Baez and Mark O'Connor spent 63 consecutive weeks on top Billboard charts, and her Latin Grammy-nominated *Rodrigo Aranjuez* with the New York Philharmonic is their only recording with guitar. Other highlights include *Bach Complete Lute Suites* in landmark editions created with her mentor Rosalyn Tureck, and *Sharon Isbin & Friends: Guitar Passions* with rock and jazz guests Steve Vai, Heart's Nancy Wilson, Stanley Jordan and Romero Lubambo.

Author of the *Classical Guitar Answer Book*, Isbin has premiered nearly 100 works written for her by some of the world's finest composers, including concerti by Corigliano, Rouse, Tan Dun, Kernis, Schwantner, and Foss. Recent world premieres include a quintet by Schwantner which she toured with the Pacifica Quartet, LeFrak's *Bailamos* with the National Symphony in their 2023 Labor Day concert for over 10,000 on the US Capitol Lawn, and her *Miami Concerto*. Isbin directs guitar departments she created at The Juilliard School and Aspen Music Festival. Visit: www.sharonisbin.com

FRENCH NOTES AND Southern Spirits

Saturday, February 13, 2027
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French-Inspired Cuisine. Texas Wine. Southern Hospitality.

Join the Waco Symphony Council for a multi-course French-inspired dinner paired with Texas wines made from French varietal grapes, a curated whiskey tasting, music, auction offerings and an evening of good company.

More information coming soon.

Opening Notes Pre-Concert Talks

6:40 p.m.–7:10 p.m.

Before each Season Concert, learn about the lives of the composers and explore their music at **Opening Notes**, a free pre-concert talk led by Maestro Loh. Featured soloists often join him in conversation. These are enlightening and educational offerings to enhance your concert experience. **Location is in Recital Hall II within Waco Hall.**

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LeeAnne Chenowith Lawson
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Tonda Sykes
Sydney Ebersohl
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Katie Cox

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Nikita Pogrebnoy, *Principal*
Megan Wright Miller, *Assistant Principal*
Jann Cosart
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Jennifer Martin
Benjamin Cantrell
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Richard Engel
Dwight Anderson
Hope Cotner
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*Bar Natan

BASSOON

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Kody Harrington

HORN

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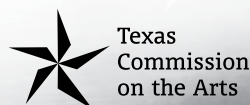
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Program

Sixty-Fourth Season
Second Subscription Concert

Rhythm & Radiance

Thursday, October 15, 2026

Waco Hall, 7:30 p.m.

LAWRENCE LOH, MUSIC DIRECTOR / CONDUCTOR

Capriccio espagnol, op. 34 Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
(1844-1908)

- I. Alborada
- II. Variazioni
- III. Alborada
- IV. Scena e canto gitano
- V. Fandango asturiano

Concierto de Aranjuez Joaquín Rodrigo
(1901-1999)

- I. Allegro con spirito
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro gentile

Sharon Isbin, guitar

INTERMISSION

Sharon Isbin will sell and sign CDs in the lobby.

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op. 88 Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto grazioso
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo

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Program Notes By Peter J. Rabinowitz

The 1939 *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Joaquín Rodrigo (1901–1999) was inspired by the Royal Palace of Aranjuez (outside Madrid)—its landscape and its history. From the freshness with which it evokes Spain in the very first measures, it’s easy to see why it soon became the most popular guitar concerto in the repertoire. And from the immediacy with which it transmits the sights and sounds of the gardens, the naturalness and elegance with which Rodrigo handles the solo instrument, and the comfort with which he seems to have taken on the project, it’s also easy to understand why it was the first work with which tonight’s soloist Sharon Isbin fell in love. “When I was ten, I used to listen to a recording of it every night before I went to sleep, thinking, ‘Some day I want to be able to play that piece.’” She was doubly fortunate: Not only has she been able to perform the *Concierto de Aranjuez* hundreds of times but also, after becoming a winner in the Queen Sofia competition in Madrid in 1979, she was invited by Rodrigo to his home when he heard her broadcast. It was the beginning of a 20-year friendship with the composer and his wife Victoria, during which he coached her on the concerto.

And yet art is rarely the direct result of unmediated impressions, and beneath the concerto’s seeming effortlessness lies a great deal of work. Rodrigo was not enjoying the Spanish sunshine when he composed it, but was sheltering in Paris with Victoria (who was Jewish) to escape the Nazis and avoid the Spanish Civil War. He was not an expert guitarist himself, but was rather a pianist—a blind one, at that, who had to compose painstakingly, either by writing

in braille or by dictation to his wife. And rather than sprouting from an inner urge, the concerto grew out of an encounter with Spanish guitarist Regino Sainz de la Maza who threw down a challenge. As Sharon puts it, “He said, ‘I dare you to write a concerto where I can hear the guitar.’ Rodrigo needed money at that point, and took him on, and that became his first major work for the instrument.” Yet great art can transcend immediate experience, and the work soars above Rodrigo’s situation at that time.

At least, the bright outer movements do. At its center is something quite different. The “beautiful Adagio,” Sharon reminds us, grew out of “the experience he and his wife had when they were expecting their first child. She miscarried and was hospitalized. Coming back every night from visiting her at the hospital, he would sit at the piano and play the theme that had come to his mind”—the theme that’s the heart of the movement. “It will bring tears to people’s eyes,” she says, “even if they won’t even know why.” The Adagio concludes with one of Sharon’s favorite moments: “a cascade, very slow, of harmonics, which Rodrigo, in his memoir, likened to the ascension of the soul of his lost child. Knowing the history makes it even more amazing.”

That sublime moment is only one instance of the extraordinary sonic beauty in the work. Throughout, it’s characterized by “the beautiful lyricism that, for me, makes the guitar a remarkable instrument” and by its color. Indeed, says Sharon, the guitar has a coloristic range, greater than that of “any other instrument. We play with fingernails”—and “the angle of the nail that you use, how

Program Notes

much flesh you add, and the position” all alter the color. Then, too, “If you play by the bridge, you can get a very bright metallic sound—but if you move your hand up, a very *dolce* sound. And when you change fingering in the left hand. say, for example, you can play the same note on five different positions with the left hand. Each fingering will have a different sound quality. Add the component of vibrato and how that interacts with all of these other variables, and you have an enormous possibility of choices.”

The Spanish character of the 1887 *Capriccio espagnol* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908) is just as infectious—although the work is even less rooted in immediate experience. Rodrigo may have had to recapture the spirit of Spain by relying on his memories; Rimsky-Korsakov, whose time in Spain consisted of three days docked in Cadiz while a naval officer, relied on melodies drawn from a printed collection. In other words, for Rodrigo, the music evokes home; for Rimsky-Korsakov, it evokes an imaginary, exotic world. Yet this work, too, is magical in its effect.

Even more than in the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, the magic comes through the instrumental sound. Following in the tradition of Berlioz—who was the first of the great Western composers to elevate timbre to a position equal to melody, harmony, texture, and rhythm—Rimsky-Korsakov claimed that his aim had been to “glitter with dazzling orchestral color.” Indeed, it’s fair to say that color is the end, rather than the means; the melodies serve primarily as the scaffolding for what the composer called “multiform orchestral effects.” At the same time, he

demanded extreme virtuosity from his players. As conductor Larry Loh puts it, “it’s a devilishly difficult piece to pull off, because it requires all these astonishing soloists throughout the orchestra.”

At first, you might be puzzled about how the characteristically Czech *Symphony No. 8* (1889) by Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) fits this otherwise Spanish-inflected program—but it does so in two ways. First, with the obvious exception of the profound central movement of the Rodrigo, the music tonight tends to trade in sunshine (in fact, an “alborada”—a celebration of dawn—opens *Capriccio espagnol*, and returns in the middle and at the end). And the Eighth Symphony is one of Dvořák’s sunniest pieces. Second, the program serves as a follow-up to our season’s opener. That concert featured three works that resisted the hegemony of Austrian and German classical music in the 19th century—and this one similarly showcases three composers with a strong interest in the idioms found in countries outside that orbit.

When he wrote the Eighth Symphony, Dvořák was at the peak of his international fame, about to embark on his famous American years. It was a visit that altered the course of American music. At the time, classical composers in the United States like Edward MacDowell tended to mimic European, especially Austro-German, models. To resist this aesthetic inclination, the founder and president of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, Jeannette Thurber, chose Dvořák as the school’s artistic director. Dvořák, of course, was European, too—but he was a nationalist, and she hoped that he would encourage local

Program Notes

composers to nurture themselves on the vernacular of their own country instead of turning to Europe for inspiration.

This symphony provides a model for the nationalism he promoted. True, no specific folk songs are quoted. But the symphony is deeply grounded in the sense of the Bohemian countryside, where it was composed. He wrote it quickly and confidently in less than three months—and, although there are brief shadows (especially in the slow second movement, tinted with hints of funeral music), it is shot through with almost boundless high spirits. Indeed, Larry says, in “the way it revs up at the end,” the final pages are unequalled in the

Dvořák canon. Just as Sharon has known the Rodrigo since childhood, Larry has known the Dvořák since he first played it as a teenaged clarinetist—and he first conducted it while still a student. “Because of how I first encountered it, it’s a piece that has always remains exciting to me in a very youthful way.” That excitement will surely carry over to you tonight.

Peter J. Rabinowitz

Have any comments or questions? Please write to me at prabinow@hamilton.edu

The Nutcracker

Saturday, December 12 / 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 13 / 2:00 p.m.

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