

Time out: guitarists Sharon Isbin (right) and Nancy Wilson collaborate on *Guitar Passions* in 2011.



Spanish flavour: Sharon Isbin (left) records *Alma Española* with soprano Isabel Leonard



was special to be able to do the setting of 'Aranjuez, ma pensée' by Rodrigo. When he was writing his *Concierto de Aranjuez* back in 1939, there was so much turbulence in his life: he and his wife lost what would have been their first child. He would console himself, playing the *Concierto's* Adagio theme, which in 1988 became, with his wife's lyrics, this song. They tracked me down after I played the *Concierto* live on the radio and we enjoyed a 20-year friendship.



REWIND

Great artists talk about their past recordings

This month: **SHARON ISBIN** *Guitarist*

MY FINEST MOMENT *Dreams of a World*



Sharon Isbin (guitar)
Teldec / Warner Classics
(1999)

This 1999 album won the 2001 Grammy Award for Best Instrumental

Soloist Performance. It broke the glass ceiling, both for guitar and for women, because it was the first time in 28 years that a classical guitarist had won a Grammy – I'm still the only female guitarist who's ever been awarded one.

When I put the repertoire together, the concept evolved into folk-inspired music from eight different countries – the British Isles, the US, Brazil, Greece, Israel, Cuba, Venezuela and Spain. The centre-piece was the premiere recording

of *Appalachian Dreams*, a five-movement suite composed for me by the late John Duarte. I researched a lot of folk material when I was giving concerts in the Appalachian region of the US, and he did his own research, too; he then selected material for his suite. It's so beautiful, like a creative arrangement of folk songs.

However, just before I recorded the album, one of my former Venezuelan students arrived, excited about some new music he was learning. I asked him to play it for me, so he sat in the hallway at the Juilliard and played works by Brazilian composer Antonio Lauro that had never been published or recorded before. They were so gorgeous I knew I had to put them in the album. I delayed the recording for another two months so I could get the scores and learn them.

MY FONDEST MEMORY

Alma Española

Isabel Leonard (soprano),
Sharon Isbin (guitar)
Bridge BRIDGE9491 (2017)

Alma Española was soprano Isabel Leonard's idea. As an Argentinian-American, she grew up speaking Spanish as a first language alongside English. She's performed Spanish music all her life, as have I, so gravitating towards this music was natural for us both. We spent two and a half years on the road playing this music before going into the studio, which was a luxury. It gave the music a chance to evolve and be shaped and refined. The process of making the arrangements was collaborative – Isabel and I went through the lyrics and verses to explore their meanings. I have cultivated a way of playing that is like a human voice – having worked with singers for years, the voice is something I want to emulate.

This disc also speaks to our vulnerable political times. More than half the composers on it were murdered by or fled from fascist governments. It also communicates that Spanish yearning, nostalgia, sadness and celebration. It

I'D LIKE ANOTHER GO AT...

Sharon Isbin & Friends: *Guitar Passions*

Sharon Isbin (guitar) et al
Sony 88697842192

This is one of my more unusual and exciting projects – it celebrates my guitar heroes, with some pretty amazing guitarists and other musicians. I was able to honour those that weren't alive as well, including Segovia, by playing his most famous transcription of *Asturias*. I had a few lessons with him, aged 14, when he visited the US for concerts. To sit inches from him and hear him play – that tone will always stay in my ear.



My only regret with this album is that it would be another four years before I could perform with Sting and Josh Groban at Carnegie Hall. The songs we did were so magical – it would have been wonderful to include them on the disc. *Sharon Isbin's* disc *Alma Española* was reviewed in the January issue.