

Music review: Guitarist and VSO pack the Paramount

By [Jim Lowe](#) | Staff Writer



Sharon Isbin performs with the Vermont Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jaime Laredo at the Paramount Theatre in Rutland. Anthony Edwards / Staff Photo

The Vermont Symphony Orchestra was greeted by the unexpected Sunday afternoon at Rutland's Paramount Theatre: a full house.

And the audience certainly wasn't disappointed. The orchestra, conducted by Music Director Jaime Laredo, played better than ever and showcased perhaps the world's most famous guitarist performing today. (The same program was performed at Burlington's Flynn Center on Saturday.)

Sharon Isbin, in turn, was showing off a concerto written for her just a year ago. *Affinity: Concerto for Guitar & Orchestra* by Chris Brubeck, son of the late jazz great Dave Brubeck, proved to be as American as apple pie. Combining styles from jazz to new age to pop, with a touch of contemporary classical, the work tended to be immediately audience-friendly yet musically challenging.

Rhythmically varying throughout, the concerto takes off, right from the beginning, with Isbin delivering rapid-fire virtuosity with infectious themes traded back and forth with the orchestra. Particularly interesting, at one point, the strings of the orchestra take over the "picking" while Isbin's part uses flowing broken chords to become the "orchestra."

The slow middle is a tender jazz-based tribute to Dave Brubeck, and Isbin played with heartfelt warmth and tenderness. The finale was an infectious rhythmically driven journey through myriad styles, yet the three parts formed a cohesive whole. It was as intriguing as it was moving, and Brubeck was on hand to enjoy the audience's enthusiasm.

Isbin also wowed and touched with certainly the most recognizable work for guitar and orchestra, Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*. She was truly charismatic in the virtuosic first and third movements, and eloquently tender in the gorgeous slow middle section. Isbin is much more than a virtuoso; she is an artist of depth. Her exquisite Francisco Tárrega encore underscored this.

The program closed with a joyful performance of Felix Mendelssohn's effervescent *Symphony No. 4*, "Italian". Not only were the rapid-fire driven passages precise, the performance sang, again proving Laredo a charismatic conductor.

Fortunately, there was a full house at the Paramount Sunday to enjoy it, and their standing ovations proved they did.