

brava!

SHARON ISBIN

CLASSICAL GUITAR VIRTUOSO and multiple GRAMMY® winner Sharon Isbin has garnered numerous accolades for her performances in concert and on over 25 recordings. Her upcoming projects include the premiere this spring of a concerto by Chris Brubeck with the Maryland Symphony, and in November a song cycle by Richard Danielpour to be performed with mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard at Carnegie Hall. The documentary *Sharon Isbin: Troubadour* has recently aired on nearly 200 PBS affiliates. For more information on its DVD release on Video Artists International and the Warner Classics five-CD box set release of her most popular albums, visit sharonisbin.com and sharonisbintroubadour.com.

What is your first musical memory? Hearing my mother sing to me. She had a beautiful voice and loved to sing lullabies. I definitely have very warm and comforting associations with music based on that experience.

You started studying music at a young age. I took piano lessons at the age of six, and at nine my family moved to Italy. My brother wanted to be the next Elvis, so my parents took him to a guitar teacher who had studied with Segovia. When he saw that this wasn't for him, I volunteered to take his place. At first it was just a hobby, and I practiced only 20 minutes a day. A year later back in Minneapolis, I got into science and my father would say I couldn't launch my rockets unless I put an hour in on the guitar, so that's how he bribed me. At 14, I won a competition and performed with the Minnesota Orchestra in front of 10,000 people. I thought it was more fun than launching my worms and grasshoppers into space, so I shifted gears and decided to become a guitarist.

What advice do you have for kids who want to be classical guitarists? It's important to have a good teacher at a young age. If they're really motivated and have the passion for it, that will give them the opportunity to become as good a player as they can be.

You're heavily involved in music education. Can you tell us more about that?

I was thrilled when the Aspen Music Festival asked me to restart their guitar department in 1993. I was there as a student in the late 70s; the Rocky Mountains are paradise on earth. Juilliard asked me to create their first guitar department in 1989: an undergrad and grad program. I've worked with students from 20 different countries, and many have gone on to become the leading players in their own nations. I'm also excited about the new GRAMMY Music Educator Award. Their first recipient was a model of a teacher who galvanizes and inspires students. It showed what just one person can do, that everybody can make a difference, and that positive thinking, encouragement, and sharing skills can change the world. El Sistema in South America has saved so many people, brought them to the light, and transformed their lives in positive ways. It's important to share your knowledge with students—to let them benefit from the years of training you've experienced and to be proud when they take that to the next level.

Why do you think music education is important? Music is a valuable part of our culture. It's as important as studying math or literature, and it should be part of the process of education. Music is really the essence of creating beauty in our world.

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