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2001: A Guitar Odyssey

A Presentation of the UC Santa Cruz Department of Music

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I have been playing guitar for three years now, but I haven't really been playing. I struggle and complain, hardly understanding why I even play the instrument. It's not that I'm tired of the instrument or that I'm not improving, I just lack inspiration.

This was true until last Wednesday, May 2, where my desire to play reemerged. It happened when I embarked upon **2001: A Guitar Odyssey**, part of the UC Santa Cruz Festival of Contemporary Music.

Experimenting with a stunning range of styles, guitar infused musical scenes were formulated exquisitely throughout the presentation. Featuring **Benjamin Verdery**, **Mesut Ozgen**, and the **UCSC Guitar Orchestra**, Guitar Odyssey focused mainly on pieces written by Verdery.

Classical guitarist Verdery kicked off the show with "A Little Prince Sweet," an arrangement of three Prince songs mixed with an interpretation of classical guitar techniques. A new system of digital delay was used in two pieces. "Soepa" made one guitarist sound as if there was three or four, taking the audience through incredible musical loops.

The most beautiful piece of the night was "Prelude and Wedding Dance," written by Verdery for his wife. Beginning and ending softly, Verdery brought the music up through the song with a feeling of a full circle dance.

During the second half of the show, Ozgen played one of Verdery's pieces named "For Those Who Came Before Us." A three-part piece with unusual guitar effects and irregular spurts of Latin rhythms turned into a spiraling showcase of lightning fast finger work and distinct strumming.

Friends since 1989 from their days of studying music together at Yale, the two followed with a duo composed by Verdery about

four cities and the feelings he got from traveling through them. "Capitola, CA, Mobile, AL, Miami, FL, Milwaukee, WI," are very different and original depictions of the cities, reflecting his view of the flavor and colors of each city.

The final piece, and perhaps the most impressive, was "Pick and Roll." An elaborate scheme, written by Verdery, and directed by Ozgen, "Pick and Roll" involved the UCSC guitar orchestra, a saxophone, two violins, and a basketball player.

The performance can not be described in words. Try to picture a basketball player dribbling rhythmically across the stage, ending with an anticipated slam-dunk. Strategically, a violinist and saxophonist were placed in different parts of the concert hall, making their entrance unforeseen.

"Pick and Roll" took months to prepare. Constant adjustments were made to improve the performance because of the extreme difficulty in keeping rhythm between a basketball and an entire orchestra.

I walked out of the recital hall amazed and inspired. Verdery, an extraordinary compositionist and musician, was only enhanced by Ozgen's gifted playing ability. Watching their fingers move flawlessly up and down the fret boards reminded me why I began playing guitar in the first place.

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