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May 1, 2001

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## Community voices: The guitarists and the basketball player

*If the NBA playoffs aren't satisfying your basketball jones, you should go to the UC "Guitar Odyssey" concert Wednesday night, when the UCSC Guitar Orchestra presents the world premiere of Benjamin Verdery's "Pick & Roll" for guitar ensemble, two violins, saxophone and basketball player.*

*Orchestra leader and guitarist Mesut Ozgen explains how basketball fits into the concert world.*

### By MESUT OZGEN

Special to the Sentinel

When Benjamin Verdery writes a piece, it often seems to write itself. Midway through writing "Pick & Roll," it appeared to him as though it would have to include a basketball.

Maybe it was because he wrote it during the 2000 NBA playoffs.

Basketball players are moving percussionists. They can easily make accelerando and ritardando, as well as forte and pianissimo.

Pick-and-roll is an offensive technique in basketball. Ben used suspensions as a musical equivalent of this technique, including one passage where all guitarists are required to play with a pick.

They are also designated to roll (arpeggiate) several of the chords.

I have been working with the orchestra in my ensemble class since January, trying to find an effective way to interpret the piece and choreograph the dialogue between basketball player and orchestra.

The basketball player makes two entrances from backstage, in the middle and final section of the piece. She is a kind of percussionist, but also actually dribbling on the stage, hitting a big gong and slam-dunking in a basketball hoop.

The violins are used predominantly for color and sustain. The sax was added as a tribute to soprano sax player Wayne Shorter, the sax being the only instrument which could follow a basketball player.

This piece also allowed us to experiment with a wide range of tone colors and articulations on the guitars in painting the music.

During the concert, Benjamin Verdery and I will also perform some of his solo and duo guitar music, and works by Prince, Jack Vees and Ingram Marshall.

Verdery is the most influential musician in my life. When I was working as a doctor in Turkey, I was a self-taught guitarist. I met Ben in a guitar festival in Cordoba, Spain, in 1989. I was very impressed with his playing, teaching and personality.

He invited me to study with him at Yale School of Music. I decided to quit medicine and came to the United States in 1991.




One of the solo pieces in the program which I will play is "For those who came before us" by Ben Verdery. It was inspired by Native Americans. It is 11 minutes long, very unusual and a beautiful piece with special guitar effects.

Ben will play some solo repertoire, beginning with "A Little Prince Sweet," his arrangement of three pieces by Prince for solo classical guitar, fused with his own musical vocabulary.

His "Prelude and Wedding Dance" was written for his wife and dedicated to their wedding day.

Also, he will play two works by Jack Vees and Ingram Marshall for solo guitar with digital delay, which creates impressive multiple guitar sounds through loops.

After my solo, we will play four pieces for two guitars from Ben's "Some Towns and Cities," a cycle of 15 pieces, each one a musical depiction of an American town, including Capitola, Miami, Milwaukee, and Mobile, Ala.

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