

STRUNZ & FARAH

THE HERBST THEATRE

September 23, 2007

FANTASEO



The Island-Life Review section got itself collectively healthy enough to foray out for the benefit for Benicia Performing Arts Foundation at the stately Herbst Theatre.

The Herbst Theatre, located in the center of the War Memorial Veterans Building, is a vital and active performance venue for numerous organizations presenting a wide range of artistic, cultural and entertainment programming. Originally designed as the Veterans Auditorium, the theatre was refurbished and

renamed Herbst Theatre in 1977. It was on this stage that the United Nations Charter was signed on June 26, 1945, making the Herbst Theatre of international historic importance.



Entrance to the Herbst Theatre is through a stately foyer off of the Veterans Building main lobby. Once inside the auditorium, patrons encounter eight large, brilliantly-colored beaux-arts murals (created by Frank Brangwyn for the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition) and five chandeliers hanging from a luxurious blue and gold-leaf ceiling.



You might not remember Strunz and Farah, for they began their careers together some twenty-five years ago, unless you are a devotee of fine Latin-inflected flatpicked guitar jazz. The pair, Jorge Strunz from Costa Rica (plus a dozen other points south) and Ardeshir Farah from Iran, merged the diamond with the pearl in their astonishing 1980 *Mosaico*, when they forged a distinctive sound, blending various Latin, Afro-Latin, jazz, and flamenco styles into an intoxicating brew that they have occasionally peppered with Middle Eastern influences.

For a time after their incendiary beginning, they floated into an easy listening Al di Meola sort of fusion jazz lacking the requisite passion that Jorge first imported from his significant flamenco background, but latterly they have

seemed to find their fire again, perhaps by working with younger musicians still possessing the fire in the belly, and Saturday night they certainly turned a 90 minute non-stop, no stage-patter set into one all too short explosion that actually brought one of our Island-Life staffers to tears with the virtuosity and emotional power of the performance. Two standing ovations from the very discerning black tie Herbst Theatre pit also attested to the renewed vitality of the pair, who were backed by a flautist and bassist from Cuba, plus a more than capable percussionist.

It was high-energy rocking jazz of the sort that shocked the world before RodGab were even born, but which seems to have snagged public attention now that concert goers want, and can appreciate, the unadorned performance which can highlight the distinctive sonorities and tonality of the acoustic dreadnought, which have long been subsumed beneath the fuzz box and the Spector "wall of sound."

The ensemble worked through several instrumental pieces, never touching anything like a capo, never detuning their guitars, remaining entirely magical and relying on energy, improv and varied dynamics and technique to keep the audience enthralled. At one point, Strunz began hammering unbelievable 32nd notes into a dense tapestry that evoked Philip Glass and his wave-live motion changes. At another point, the two went into Middle-eastern drones that would have been entirely appropriate performed upon an oud, and which resolved into a raga. Avoiding golpe and rasquado techniques, their flamenco methods restricted themselves to triad sequences and chordal

progressions with typically flamenco descending resolves. Not too ashamed to play to the crowd, there was a fair amount of fun and flashy single-string triplets right up to the bridge and back.

Nominated for Grammys any number of times, winners of Gold Record Million sales several times over, the two have well deserved reputations and with any luck, will continue to push the boundaries now popularized by groups like Incendio and Rodrigo y Gabriela.

BTW, there is a nice video on YouTube of the group performing at the Paradisio Hotel shortly before Saturday's gig. Here is the URL.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzvZsU1Pagw>.