

Violinist to bring strings to hip-hop

BY AYOFEMI HUNTER KIRBY
STAFF WRITER

Few musicians trained to play the notes of classical legends like Isaac Stern and Ludwig Strauss have successfully made the transition from the stately halls of strings to the beat-filled streets of hip-hop.

Miri Ben-Ari, a hip-hop violinist and an Apollo Legend, has done just that.

Ben-Ari has performed violin for musical power players Jay-Z, Alicia Keys, Mos Def and Janet Jackson.

She will bring her formula of hip-hop with a classical twist to the Student Union's Great Hall tonight in the last performance of the Carolina Live! concert series.

With classical talent and unprecedented creativity, Ben-Ari has connected two worlds of music that seem millions of miles apart — and in the process, she has taken the hip-hop world by storm.

"To have the opportunity to be a hip-hop violinist is the opportunity of a lifetime," Ben-Ari said. "Many see me as a pioneer, doing something that's never been done before."

In two years, the 27-year-old Israel native has added to her resume names with which most new artists spend years trying to work.

She is responsible for all the string arrangements, production and performances on Kanye West's debut album *The College Dropout*, and she earned her first Grammy for her work on "Jesus Walks," the spiritually conscious "Rap Song of the Year."

Ben-Ari grew up in a small town outside of Tel-Aviv, Israel, where she began to play the violin. During her mandatory military service in the Israeli Army, she was intro-



Violinist Miri Ben-Ari laid down tracks for a list of hip-hop stars including Kanye West.

duced to the music of American jazz legends like Charlie Parker.

She moved to New York City to study at the Mannes College of Music, where she often missed class to play gigs at local venues to support herself. After two years, she dropped out of school and began pursuing her career full time.

"You know, they failed me out of music," she said. "But I got the last laugh — now they use my name to sell the school."

The college drop-out has released three critically acclaimed jazz albums and a hip-hop album, *The Pulling Strings Mixtape*, which features artists including Jadakiss, John Legend and Lil' Wayne. Later this year she plans to release her first hip-hop-centered debut on a major label.

"It's like I have a drum machine in my stomach," she said about her work. "My passion in music is very soulful, I think hip-hop is about soul, it's not like soul music in the fact that it's clean — it's very, very dirty, and that's me."

Ben-Ari will be accompanied by her band, singers, a member of rap trio the X-Ecutioners and soul singer Chinua Hawk. The show starts at 8 p.m. and costs \$10 for the public and \$5 with a UNC ONE Card.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

'Chick' troupe finger-lickin' good

BY JIM WALSH
ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

The chickens do not have an agenda.

No, the women of the Chicken Ranch, a female performing group, instead have made a name for themselves with an original take on improvisational comedy that has broad appeal.

"We don't do 'chick' humor," said Cindee Weiss, one in the five-member troupe that was at UNC for the banner weekend of the Carolina Comedy Festival.

Weiss, her four cohorts and the group's director sat down for an interview with *The Daily Tar Heel* on Friday before their show.

They talked about Chicken Ranch, which was formed in January when five friends living in New York City and director Jen Nails decided to piece together an all-female comedy team.

"We just thought we'd give it

a try," said Leigh Angel, a North Carolina native.

So far, that try seems to be paying off. This is the group's first trip outside of New York since January.

In the city, Chicken Ranch does long-form improvisational performances, which are different from the choppy bits popularized by ABC's "Whose Line is It Anyway?" hosted by Drew Carey. The sketches they planned for the festival were more like short plays.

"The more people see long-form improv, the more people would get used to it," Nails said. "They would love it."

And that is what these actors are all about. The women of Chicken Ranch do not have an agenda.

"We just want to spread joy," said member Michele Medlin. She added — with a giggle — "I can't

believe I just said that."

Medlin, who went to Mars Hill College in North Carolina with Angel, has a voice that's as high-pitched as a 6-year-old girl's. She is a facetious sundrop in the group's jovial cache and says things like, "Our faces hurt from smiling," followed by a swear word.

She came up with the name Chicken Ranch but is just one of an eclectic bunch.

There's Sarah Nowak, a monologue writer and performer, who divvied the interview Friday between heart-felt expositions about her craft and half-serious jokes about the group.

"We were really drawn to each other magnetically," she said.

"It's just different with all girls."

And there's Amy Dickenson, an improviser for more than 12 years, who takes a high-brow approach to the trade.

"We have a pro good-ass improv agenda," she said.

Dickenson also admittedly reverts to saying "poop" during the group's warm-ups when they do word-association games.

Angel is laid-back, knitting a kitschy purple wrist band throughout the second half of the interview. She also has a nose ring.

"We generally don't go blue," she said, addressing the troupe's casual diction.

Together, the players form a cogent unit, one that runs the gamut from serious commentary to irreverent banter.

"That's the beauty of it," Medlin said. "We have five really smart women. We can rely on each other, and we don't have to do anything alone."

"We put the w-e-e-e in team."

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Nonprofits to get warning from state auditor

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — The state auditor is expected to send warning letters by Monday to about 1,000 nonprofit organizations that haven't accounted for how they spent millions in state dollars.

State Auditor Les Merritt is sending the letters to the groups, which were supposed to provide their spending reports by March 31.

Merritt's letter-writing campaign and a new set of state regulations are part of an effort to get a better grasp on the flow of tax dollars to nongovernment groups.

North Carolina awarded \$580 million in grants last year to

3,000 nonprofit groups.

More than 1,800 of those groups received enough state money that they are required to file financial reports or audits, but auditors won't know how it was all spent for about another year.

One problem is that the state and nonprofits operate on some-

what different calendars, leaving a jumbled array of deadlines that make it impossible to monitor the state grants for as long as 18 months after a group spends its money.

A new set of regulations set to take effect in July would more clearly assign responsibilities and deadlines for nonprofits.

They can assemble an analysis one day, said David Nance, an audit manager with the State Auditor's office, and "the next day it's no longer relevant because (the information) is coming in on a constant basis."

The analysis for March 31, for example, didn't cover audits that aren't due until later this year.

THE Daily Crossword By Robert H. Wolfe

ACROSS

- Moves up and down
- Act well
- Police blotter letters
- Break sharply
- Silverstone of "Clueless"
- Remote ctrl. button
- Gillette blade
- Subsequent airings
- Eastern Can. province
- Common greeting
- Short, tubular pasta
- Other finisher
- Record co.
- Genus of dogs
- Cravings
- Sally Field film, "Norma"
- Young adult
- AST part
- Common greeting
- Directional suffix
- Accompanying
- Nautical dir.
- Penn or Connery
- Of the Arctic
- PC key
- Land area
- Heart chambers
- Common greeting
- Pillfer
- Birchbark transportation
- Partiality

DOWN

- Youth grp.
- In a struggle, as wrestlers
- Peerage estates
- Engender
- Denuded
- Alt.
- Take on
- Line of Hondas
- Plastics base
- Bridge positions
- Strive (toward)
- Actor Wynn
- Trues up
- Military division

22 Authority on card games

23 Gilpin of "Frasier"

27 Very long time

28 Buntline or Beatty

29 Down the middle

33 Cinematic canine

34 Shah's capital

36 "The Screens" dramatist

37 Lubricate

38 Restless desire

39 Bind

40 Org. of court players

44 Flew into a rage

45 Resounded

46 Fit for cultivation

47 Goober

50 Fancy cravat

51 Accra location

53 Leg bone

55 Kellogg's competitor

56 Outer banana

57 Caesar's being

61 Abbr. on many cameras

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