

On this trip to Santa Fe, the thought occurred to me one day downtown that in all the shops on the main drags, shop after shop offer nothing man needs. Doesn't mean he can't max out his credit card on turquoise hatbands and Indian saddle blankets. Doesn't mean milady can't blow a wad of dough on ruffled blouses from native looms, or stone-studded necklaces from the Indian reservations.

It means what the opening said: there's nothing downtown that man needs, unless you count the old "Five and Dime" store leftover from the memory pf when things once sold for fives and dimes. An excellent independent bookstore four blocks off the main streets offers a good sanctuary to rest and read. However, my main focus centers on the concerts and rehearsals.

For three days last week, a harpist, along with horns and other strings, played a concert of Debussy and Ravel. In rehearsal, (patrons can come free of charges) a sign 10 rows from the stage keeps spectators back. At the performances, however, I sat within 15 feet of her place on the stage. In close earshot her fingers tuning each string held thrums suspended in the air.

You may know the experience at symphony concerts where a gold harp sticks up way to the side, barely visible once the musician tilts her instrument to play. "Tilts her instrument to play" means she may not hit more than a few notes the whole piece. (Out at Mertzon, we think of all harpists as feminine. I'd like to know some day who was responsible for discovering that angels play harps.)

Here on this stage, the lady plays through the whole program. She brings a haunted resonance to the airs equal to the charms of the dusk colors of evening skies. Rumbled melodies from a gold arc, strung in red, blue and green-colored strings, imposing as an organ – a church organ.

It's impossible for a writer of this caliber to capture completely on paper. He sits there (in a trance?) saying, "Good gawd-a-mighty, little cowboy, give yourself a break. Readers know, or perceive, that you thought a harp fit in a shirt pocket until you were over 40 years old. Further, that you believed Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys ranked as virtuosos."

Two hours rehearsal is all the musicians can abide. Thirty or 40 of us sit back in the hall to the exit, warned by signs saying "Shut off cell phones, No recording permitted, No food or drink allowed."

Exhausted, (wrung out) I go across the street and down one block to the Plaza. There are no signs for these throngs of backpacking, kid-herding, and ice cream dish-eating folks. Were signs around, they'd probably read, "Smoke from the pack, Drink from the jug, Braid your hair, Show off your tattoos, Shave next time you come to town."

Not even a leash law can be stated to cover the dogs and rabbits and mice the backpack folks string along or cage to sleep with on troubled grounds, unlighted doorways and shaded benches. (Feel free to label these pitiful wretches. The name "homeless" seems to excuse facing the problem.)

I hear the music before I see the guy playing a harp. He draws such a big crowd that a concrete seat around a sculpture is the only place to sit.

His harp lacks a long ways of being the instrument the lady plays a block away. The wood shows through flecked gold paint. The strings are dull, worn, unlike the lady's reds and blues. His rig, his harp, his greeting card display, and his bedroll all ride on a cart designed for handicapped people — perhaps a bit longer to accommodate the harp.

His costume fits the street except his socks have red faded knit balls to accentuate pedaling the harp. His feet

dance a jig like he expects a brown bear to join him in the act. Nearby, distinguished by a rhinestone band around a greasy crown, a cowboy-looking hombre moves closer to the harpist. You feel tough times – an eagerness for recognition.

The minute the act ends, the harpist arises and takes the bills from his hat. He nods to the rhinestone hombre. The cowboy comes forward in a swift motion and seizes all the change in the hat. The harpist gives a mere nod. In 10 minutes, he backs out his cart on a sidewalk and leaves only a bare spot in the grass.

The next morning, I walk the mile from the Guadalupe Inn to the Plaza at 7 a.m. to look for more material. No one is about except a woman guarding her pal's pack on a bench.

She doesn't utter a sound. Her dog sleeps under the bench. The pack lies open to reveal pencils and crossword puzzles to open their day.