

David Garrett's not just a pretty face

Oct 10 2008 By Andrew Cowen

*The David Beckham of the violin tells **Andrew Cowen** about the classical pop divide and why he has no time for modelling anymore.*



I want to ask David Garrett about his modelling career, but he's keen to talk about his classical music credentials.

German-born David, 28, is having a rare day off in Slovenia, where he's playing some Paganini with an orchestra. When he arrives at Birmingham Town Hall (ring box office 0121 780 3333) tomorrow night, he'll be backed by his band and the set-list won't be so high-brow.

"We'll play some classics, some pop and some rock songs," he tells me.

Garrett now spends 10 months of each year on the road, dividing his time between playing classical music and rock songs with his band.

For a while, he earned a crust through modelling but music is his main provider now.

I ask him if it's difficult for a model to be taken seriously as a musician, but he shrugs off the question with an "I'm a good-looking guy" and a reminder that he served his apprenticeship with the likes of Zubin Mehta, Claudio Abbado and Mikhail Pletnev.

His recent performance at the Last Night of the Proms saw Garrett prowling the stage like a rock star and a mainly-female part of the audience screaming. Not the normal reception for this dignified night.

"It was one of those amazing experiences," Garrett tells me.

"I love it when I have a huge crowd behind me, shouting."

Garrett maintains that it's his mission to bridge the rock/classical divide, using his youth, looks and virtuosity to turn a new generation on to classical music. He's not one to make distinctions between different genres.

"Leonard Bernstein once told me that there's only two types of music – good and bad, and I agree. To me, there's no difference between Schubert and Metallica.

"With my band I play music from across the spectrum and that includes AC/DC and Michael Jackson's Smooth Criminal.

"Besides, Beethoven knew how to write a good riff. The only thing that matters is whether it will sound good with my band."

Garrett's band shows are put together like rock shows in their pacing and dynamics.

The violinist is happy to throw some rock star shapes and milks the limelight mercilessly.

"As a performer, my main aim is to have fun on stage. When I started this strand of my career I had no idea whether it would work out.

"The real classical fans generally think it's a good thing, although the pop stuff doesn't go down well everywhere.

"In Slovenia, for example, they take their classics very seriously."

Garrett also thinks that the current trend for downloading single tracks via the internet, rather than buying full albums, has changed the way young people engage with music.

“The thing about the iPod generation is that everything is so quick. You hear a song and you can have it within seconds. That’s a great thing and people really enjoy that freedom.”

It remains to be seen whether David Garrett can unite two audiences which are poles apart, but there’s no doubt he’ll have a great time trying.

“There’s so much variety in my life,” he says. “I wouldn’t change a thing.”