

Boston Herald Jim Sullivan
Feb 17, 2010

"I'm a huge fan of Metallica," said violinist David Garrett, on the phone from his New York home. "They have a strong sense of rhythm. They're incredibly talented players and the pieces they write are very symphonic." Garrett's eponymous CD, his first American release, begins with the last, frantic movement of Vivaldi's "Summer" from "The Four Seasons" concerto. Next up, Metallica's "Nothing Else Matters."

Garrett – a handsome former model with long blonde hair and tattoos – looks like a rock star. But that's not how he grew up. Garrett - who plays Berklee Performance Center tonight Feb. 20 at 8 - started playing violin at age four. Considered a child prodigy, he never cared for the term much. It implied that he was born a genius, and did not have to put in the hours.

Garrett said his parents did pressure him, but "every morning I woke up and picked up the violin by myself. There was a deep love for the music and the instrument. There was inner drive."

Garrett studied classical music at the Royal College of Music in London as a teenager. At 18, he moved to New York and studied at the Julliard School for four years.

"My main work was learning classical concertos, chamber music, conducting and composition," Garrett, now 28, said. "But during those four years I did come in contact with people who were my age and were very interested in rock 'n' roll."

Most of the concerts Garrett plays are what he calls "core classical." But he's also adept at mixing rock and classical music. Last year, "David Garrett" was at the top of Billboard's Classical Crossover chart for nine straight weeks. Songs by Queen and AC/DC showed up alongside pieces by Bach and Bizet.

That's what he'll be doing tonight when he and his backing quintet play a two-set show. His band includes keyboardist John Haywood, guitarist Marcus Wolf, bassist Jeff Allen and drummer Jeff Lipstein, "Everything," Garrett said, "is entirely live."

Is Garrett using rock music as a Trojan horse?

"Basically the concept is to give them something contemporary, which they know and mix it with classical music," he said. "And next time, they'll come for a classical tour. That is the main point in the whole idea."

There are, of course, classical purists and rock purists. Are there dangers in doing classical/rock crossover? "There are the same dangers in doing classical music," Garrett said. "In the end, it's up to you to make your goal with what you do. You can do everything as long as you have the quality and you have standards. Of course, music is a matter of taste, and everybody has a different perspective, which is very good. I don't necessarily see the dangers as long as you stay true as to where you're coming from, which for me is classical music."

On his latest CD, there's continuity in the sound, despite the disparity of the sources. "That was the first thing the record company had a problem with," Garrett

said. "They said, 'There's so many genres, how are we going to put this on one record?' I was the only one saying, 'It all kind of makes sense. It's an instrumental record. Don't make me do a record where everything is the same.' It was always important to me that every track on the record had to be different, in order to get continuity."

Garrett has been pegged by some as the David Beckham of the classical world."I was trying to shake that off for six years," Garrett said, "but apparently not successfully."

No doubt Garrett's striking looks and flamboyant style is part of that equation. But, he added, " I would explain it this way: David Beckham definitely got a new audience for football [soccer]. And my challenge is to get a new audience for classical."