

Classical first for rock violin pin up

Ross Purdie, National Entertainment Writer, AAP September 8, 2011, 7:06 pm

He's described as the David Beckham of the violin, was once named GQ magazine Man Of The Year and was America's best-selling debut classical artist of 2009.

His latest album Rock Symphonies features well-known headbangers by Nirvana, AC/DC and Metallica, transformed into epic classical works on violin and backed by an orchestra.

David Garrett prefers to be known for his exquisite craft and musicianship than any rock'n'roll poster boy pretence.

"The crossover stuff opens up a lot of doors but you've got to know your home," Garrett tells AAP in Sydney.

"It's all just a gimmick if you can't do the real stuff.

Around 70 per cent of his performances remain traditionally classical and when Garrett returns home to Germany he'll dive straight into a Beethoven concerto.

"You can never desert your roots because if you do you lose credibility - my heart belongs to classical music and always will."

Garrett's first visit to Australia is to promote Rock Symphonies and build a profile ahead of a likely tour next year.

Already well-known in America, his greatest achievements stem from the traditions of classical music he studied since the age of four.

He holds the world record for the fastest ever performance of a classical piece after blitzing Flight of the Bumblebee in 66 seconds, a feat the 28-year-old now laughs off.

"Some challenges are just fun and not too demanding and that was one," he says.

"I've always been good at playing fast, it came naturally to me from a young age so that's not a huge achievement.

"It's far more challenging to do a great arrangement of a rock song or putting together a Beethoven concerto."

Garrett has taken several leaps of faith to progress his career.

He was forced to go it alone after his parents withdrew their support from his decision to go professional.

Moving to New York and funding his own way through the prestigious Juilliard School gave him a sound grounding for surviving the music business.

"My parents certainly weren't helpful but it ended up being a positive thing.

"It was good to do something which cut me loose and made me question my decisions.

"Making that break was what convinced me to follow music professionally."

Rock Symphonies is Garrett's sixth album in four years, demand for his music boosted by appearances on US shows like Oprah and Late Night with Jimmy Fallon.

He decided to make a record of rock covers as a kind of "personal iPod" featuring all the tunes he listened to growing up.

It includes Master Of Puppets by Metallica and Kashmir by Led Zeppelin but arguably the most controversial decision was to turn Smells Like Teen Spirit by Nirvana into a classical piece.

"I always knew there was a huge risk with that one but I never was someone who's afraid of going for the more difficult decision."