

Star violinist's debt to his Jewish teachers

By [Simon Round](#), November 24, 2011



David Garrett: bringing a touch of showbusiness to violin playing

If you had to work out David Garrett's occupation simply by his appearance, you would be unlikely to guess that he is one of the most gifted violinists of his generation.

With his long hair and skull ring he looks vaguely heavy metal-ish but, then again, with his Roger Federer-esque good looks he could also be a model. (Garrett actually did some modelling to make a little extra money while he was studying.)

The looks, the laid-back manner and the charm are all part of the David Garrett story - his showmanship has made him one of the world's most bankable classical crossover stars and he is equally comfortable playing with a rock band or with a symphony orchestra. However, his childhood was anything but rock 'n' roll - from the age of four, he spent long hours practising the violin and by eight he was regularly playing recitals.

Garrett is German, born in Aachen (he uses his American mother's maiden name). However, his musical education was, he insists, "almost 100 per cent Jewish".

He started to play when he picked up his brother's violin aged four. Within a year, his father was mapping out a career for him. Says Garrett: "My first proper teacher was Zakhar Bron, who pretty much established my technique.

After that I came to London to study with another Jewish teacher [Polish-born violinist] Ida Haendel. Ida is still a huge influence."

And then there was Isaac Stern. The legendary musician spent time with the young Garrett and recognised his prodigious talent



Perlman: a crucial influence

"For me, he was a god-like creature," says Garrett. "He had a wonderful way of saying little things that made a big impact. In the end he was even more important than I knew at the time. Sometimes you need a bit of time to think about what people have said to you. He told me that I was one of the most talented people he had ever heard but that I needed to be careful not to do too much too young."

This advice was important in persuading the young Garrett to study at the famous Juilliard school in New York, against his parents' wishes. "They thought I was the finished article. I can't blame them for that but I felt there were a lot of things I hadn't discovered."

At Juilliard he came under the tutelage of yet another Jewish virtuoso, Itzhak Perlman, whose influence on Garrett's career was also crucial, but whose personality and way of teaching were in contrast to that of Stern.

"He didn't take many students on - only about five at a time, most of them Jewish by the way. He was a more balanced character than Stern, I would say. Perlman showed how much passion he had for music but, when he was working with people who had talent, he liked to joke around. He's very motivating to work with, though - he really got your act together when practising."

It was at Juilliard that Garrett began to branch out. "The moment I got there it was like a breath of fresh air. For the first time, I started listening to a lot of music that was not classical. My friends would say to me: 'We need music for this or that'. Most of it was outside my comfort zone, but I loved experimenting, finding out what I can do on the violin."

In deciding to combine different musical forms, Garrett realises he is doing something of which many in the classical world do not approve.

But he says: "The other kinds of music I do are meant to bring people to classical who wouldn't otherwise be there. That makes it all worthwhile for me."

He adds: "The violin can be a very lyrical instrument but it can be a showcase for the flashy and the virtuoso. And I do love making people go, 'wow!'"

David Garrett and his band will be playing at the O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire on December 1. Tickets at www.o2shepherdsbushempire.co.uk