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David Garrett's "Revolutions": A Sociocultural Interpretation

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Introduction

Today's global village is characterized by increasing disintegration and reintegration of social conventions, rules and statuses. Most often these processes are natural – resulting from global migration and intercultural blending – but at times they are creatively launched by young, charismatic individuals who strive to challenge the established "world order", deconstruct mutual prejudices, and help bridge the gap between seemingly irreconcilable cultural extremes. From this mix-and-match of old norms and conventions arises a new global culture, which is far more diverse, flexible and accommodating than anything the world has ever seen.

In the world of music and entertainment, one of such "charming hooligans" is David Garrett[1] (1980) – a world-famous violinist who has gained a global popularity by his original arrangements of classical, pop, rock and R&B music as well as his virtuosic violin playing. David Garret was born in Germany (Aachen) to a family of a West German lawyer, Georges Peter Bongartz,[2] and an American prima ballerina, Dove Garrett (David later adopted the mother's maiden name as a pseudonym.) David has started playing violin when he was only four years old, and won his first prize at the age of five. He received his first Stradivarius violin when he turned eleven as a mark of honor from the former German President, Richard von Weizsacker (1920-2015), for his performance at the President's special reception. Finally, at the age of thirteen, David signed his first contract with Deutsche Grammophon (The German Gramophone Corporation),[3] which marked the recognition of David Garrett as a professional violinist and the start of his official onstage career. In 1997, David studied at the Royal College of Music in London[4] for several months but quit – juggling studying and concert activities turned out to be too challenging at the time. Later David commented in one of his interviews (2008) on his alleged "dropping

out" of the Royal College of Music: "Well, expelled wasn't the official term… It was mutually agreed that me and the RCM were going separate ways after the first semester. I did skip some lessons – but I also broke in to do extra practice, so that didn't help!"[5]

The turning point in David's life came when he was 17. Against the will of his parents, he secretly passed the exams to Juilliard School of New York and moved to USA. In New York, he experienced living on his own for the first time, earning living expenses as a fashion model. David got the opportunity to study music under the guidance of an outstanding Israeli-American violinist and conductor Itzhak Perlman[6] (1945). In Juilliard School he also got thoroughly acquainted with popular music while acquiring necessary skills for composing and arranging music. It was during that time that he obtained his particular crossover musical style. By definition, "Classical crossover broadly encompasses both classical music that has become popularized and a wide variety of popular music forms performed in a classical manner or by classical artists."[7] And it was exactly what David Garrett did after graduating from Juilliard School of New York in 2004 – he devoted his life to creating an innovative synthesis of classical and popular music which he later identified as "Rock Revolution" and "Classic Revolution" in his concerts and albums. In this article we briefly describe the essence of David Garrett's "Revolutions" and analyse their sociocultural character.

1. David Garrett's Rock Revolution

In the world of classical music, the most revolutionary change that David Garrett brought about was combining classical music masterpieces with various genres of popular music, rock music, and other elements of mass culture. On a performance level, David revolutionized the image of a classical musician, including the onstage behaviour, the interaction with the public during the performance, the manner of playing, clothing and appearance.

When David Garrett played for The German Gramophone Corporation, a traditional orchestral dress code was unescapable and he was usually dressed in a formal black tightly buttoned jacket with a white kerchief in a breast pocket, looking very much like a Japanese schoolboy's uniform. As David admitted in one of his interviews, he hated wearing frock coats and bow ties – the usual attributes of a classical musician – but according to the contract with The German Gramophone

Corporation the rules of the dress code were very strict and he was not free in his public statements also.[8] So, the first step of his rock revolution was a change in his individual onstage image, which invoked a more relaxed, flexible attitude to clothing and appearance.

When David started his independent stage career after graduating from Juilliard School of New York, he abandoned traditional symphonic orchestral attire such as frock coats and bow ties, and adopted the appearance of a noble rocker, despite the fact that classical music was still the main part of his band's repertoire. Even when he would give concerts with world-class symphony orchestras, he would remain faithful to his signature rocker appearance – in fact, it has become an intrinsic part of David Garrett's onstage image, marking his special position in the classical music world. A country-style hat, slightly slouchy jeans, big boots and rocker accessories, such as chains around the neck or a large ring with a skull on the right hand, stood in startling contrast with the appearance of other performers, symbolizing David's special place amongst symphony orchestra musicians. His free moving on the stage during the concert and his direct style of communication with the audience has also become his unique, unparalleled attributes.

David Garrett and his group went further by introducing the elements of sex appeal and erotica during their performances: thus, an attractive young woman would be invited to the stage and an exquisite piece of music (such as *Your Song* by Elton John) would be performed by David Garrett specially for her in close physical contact with the woman to the amusement of the public. Some eroticism and existential mystery can also be observed in David Garrett's playing the violin with the outstanding German classical pianist Valentina Babor[9] (1989), where David was playing the violin while standing on his knees on the piano Valentina was playing. Thus, high sensitivity, mystery, and the elements of eroticism and sex appeal can be also considered the essential parts of David Garrett's rock revolution.

In order to facilitate the perception of classical music for the wider audience, David Garrett often arranged it according to the standards of popular and rock music

compositions which usually have the duration of three to five minutes. For example, Concerto No. 1 (In B Flat Minor, Op. 23 arr. for Violin) by P.I. Tchaikovsky has the standard duration of approximately 20 minutes but in the *Rock Revolution* album it has a duration of 3, 2 minutes with a threefold repetition of the most effective musical phrase of the initial part of Tchaikovsky's Concerto No. 1. A similar technique is used in the video clip on Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 where the disturbing motive of the knocking on the door of fate[10] is fancifully combined with strange characters in Venetian masks chasing David Garrett down the street. Evidently, this kind of adaptation of a classical music masterpiece to the standards of pop and rock music is what makes it attractive for the audience not acquainted with classical music. The same approach to classical music is also evident in the film *Paganini: The Devil's Violinist* (2013; directed by Bernard Rose), where David Garrett played the role of Paganini and also directed arranging of the music of the film. He selected the most powerful yet very short fragments of Paganini's works and had dramatically interspersed them throughout the film.

The essence of David Garrett's revolution is that he succeeded in turning the most vivid and attractive fragments of classical music masterpieces into an integral part of the contemporary mass culture and entertainment industry. The secret of his projects' success lies in his virtuosic playing of the violin combined with his amazing ability to communicate with the audience. Having worked onstage for a long time, David Garrett reformed his performance style according to the demands of the public and arranged classical music in accordance with the peculiarities of the perception of music by a modern mass audience. As a result, classical music became more accessible to the modern public.

2. The Classic Revolution of David Garrett

David Garrett's classical music background enabled him to create amalgamations of pop-and-rock music and the classical symphony orchestra, with the violin as a leading solo instrument accompanied by electric guitars, drums, synthesizers and other rock music instruments. Not only did he adapt classical masterpieces to the standards of rock music, but he also experimented with adapting pop-and-rock music

pieces to the standards of classical music in his concerts. The most representative examples include the *Rock Symphonies* album (2010), which starts with compositions *Smells Like Teen Spirit* by Nirvana, and *November Rain* by Guns N' Roses. David Garrett adapts these famous rock songs to the works of Beethoven, Bach, Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky and other classical music geniuses. Having arranged the famous pieces of rock music this way, David Garrett made them attractive for the wide audience of connoisseurs of classical music, which normally would show no interest in Nirvana or Metallica. [11] In his musical arrangements, he demonstrated the coherence of the European musical tradition as well as the inherent connection between various genres of popular music and classical music. In doing so, he also helped highlight a high musical level of many of the popular rock music pieces.

David Garrett created hundreds of original interpretations of numerous pieces of rock, pop, and R&B music, expanding the possibilities of a violin. For instance, in *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen his violin covers the part of Freddie Mercury's singing, other group members' voices, and even the chorus oratory. So, we can say that David Garrett's onstage activity is a kind of revolution in using a violin as a universal leading instrument in rock music. His original arrangements of rock, pop, and R&B music gave a new life to masterpieces of Metallica, Queen, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Nirvana and other popular rock groups.

Benevolent, open, humble, respectful towards the public and adhering to the highest standards of communication with the audience, David Garrett greatly contributed to the dissemination of high culture during his concerts. Tolerant and polite during his numerous interviews always avoiding vulgarity and keeping conversations up to the highest standards of exquisite public communication, he has been a paragon of sophistication and elegance amongst pop-and-rock musicians.

David Garrett's crossover method with a violin as the centerpiece of performance served to overcome the gap separating classical and popular music by demonstrating their intrinsic continuity. Based on his deep understanding of the unity of the development of the European

musical culture, David Garrett used a violin as a magical universal instrument capable to connect seemingly irreconcilable musical styles and genres. As virtuosic violinist of the highest caliber, David Garrett has expanded the original possibilities of a violin in rock music, including playing an electric violin. Thus, he managed to bring about a classical revolution into the fields of rock and popular music.

3. A Sociocultural View of David Garrett's Project

A wonderful success of a handsome and talented violinist is a product of the driving cultural forces of the contemporary world – globalisation, internationalisation, and the creation of a worldwide popular culture. Classical music is already the heritage of the entire world, but its listeners' circle does not noticeably increase because the approach to high culture requires a solid musical education. David Garrett with his musical talent, charisma and classical music education has succeeded in spreading the best pieces of classical music to the mass audience during his numerous concerts all over the world. His contribution to the formation of a worldwide popularization of classical music cannot be overestimated. In doing so, David Garrett has been going against the ubiquitous global trend of democratisation, oversimplification and ultimate vulgarisation of high culture. Throughout his musical career, he clearly demonstrated that mass culture can and should be risen up to the standards of high culture. In fact, we can observe this tendency everywhere, with subculture or mass culture elements found in other examples of amalgamation of various genres (for instance, comics and animation used in teaching foreign languages also tend to penetrate into high culture.)

Another sociocultural problem worth mentioning in regard to David Garrett is the problem of cross-cultural hybridity. In the 21st century the hybridization of cultures becomes one of the most active world processes due to the intensification of transnational movements. More and more people live in multicultural and multilingual societies – ongoing contacts and clashes of civilizations, languages, mentalities and different value systems generate hybrid forms of cultures, identities, and personality traits. David Garrett himself is an epitome of contemporary multiculturalism: born to a German father and American mother, he is perfectly fluent in English and German, he lives between Germany and New York,[1 2] and he is obviously a person of a complex identity. His education and professional career made David Garrett a member of the worldwide classical music community as well as a popular rock star at the same time. His music arranging style is a hybrid of classical music with rock and pop music. His intriguing and sensitive manner of performing onstage is a peculiar mixture of a wide range of musical and acting styles. In a word, it was this very symbiosis of musical traditions, styles and genres that made David Garrett so famous in today's global

village.

David Garrett's success phenomenon can also be analysed within the context of today's global tendency for centralizations and decentralizations of cultures. Modern societies are marked by the increasing growth of subcultural diversity and complexity. In the past, subcultures functioned as isolated and enclosed subsystems within society, but recently with the unprecedented increase of global migrations and intercultural blending, they often promptly shift from the margins toward the centre of the mainstream society (some famous examples include the hippies in the 20th century US or the criminal community in the post-Soviet Russia).

Evidently, the key element of the success of David Garrett's crossover musical project is the effective exploitation of the rockers' subcultural elements in the presentations of classical music (as mentioned above, David Garret skilfully utilizes a rocker image by means of his onstage clothes and appearance.) Once David Garrett's music and his stage image became popular among the mass audience, the subcultural character of his outfits lost its originality and became a common part of the mass culture reproduced by the fans. On the contrary, traditional frock coats and bow ties of classical musicians gradually transformed into a subcultural phenomenon, such as the festive attire of members of the royal family in the UK or Japan. Thus, the dialectics of the relationship between high culture and subcultural elements in David Garrett's crossover project is a clear illustration of how the marginal elements of the system gradually shift to the centre and start dominating the mainstream culture.

Not surprisingly, David Garrett's project is the perfect "case study" of the modern processes of cultural reintegration where it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw a clear-cut line between high culture and low (mass) culture. Eventually, the success of David Garrett's project reflects the global trend of creating cultural hybrids and postmodern experiments in mixing cultures in the process of forming a new global mass culture.

Conclusion

As demonstrated above, David Garrett's success phenomenon is a product of the contemporary cultural evolution of the global world. It is an illustration of a cultural activity which breaks the wall between high culture on one hand, and mass culture on the other hand. Globalization is the driving force of this process because it operates though mutually related processes of the integration and disintegration of cultures.

Having been raised as a member of the classical music community, David Garrett has succeeded in spreading classical music masterpieces to the mass audience. And in arranging classical masterpieces for the needs of the mass audience, he created a

special format of blending classical music with rock music acceptable for the adherents of both styles. Not only did he make a valuable contribution to the popularization of classical music but he also introduced rock and pop music to the classical music audience by exploring the possibilities of a violin in playing rock, popular and R&B music. In a word, David Garrett sparked a worldwide rock revolution as well as a classical revolution by means of his albums, CDs and onstage concerts. He has invented new ways of classical music presentations to the public and adapted classical music masterpieces for the mass audience perception.

Finally, David Garrett has been playing a great role in the popularisation of classical masterpieces to the international mass audience through his original CDs and concerts all over the world. In his original arrangements made for the mass audience' entertainment, he has helped to blur the boundaries between classical, popular and rock music. The popularity of David Garrett's concert activities is based not only on his musical discoveries and achievements, but also on his amazing personal attractiveness, his excellent ability to interact with the mass audience and to produce fun and pleasure out of his musical experiments. A genius entertainer with a great talent of spreading fun and joy, David Garrett stands alongside Michael Jackson, and as an outstanding music arranger, he can possibly be equalled to Paul Moriah or James Last. Yet, as a creator of revolutionary musical hybrids and new global trends, this "charming hooligan" may supersede them all.

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[1] The photo is a courtesy of: https://www.google.com/search?q=david+garrett&client=firefox-b&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwijoYKWn9XaAhUGTrwKHQn3B2YQ_AUIDCgD&biw=1525&bih=704#imgdii=aG4TDe4QMpam5M:&imgrc=Lo6Z3oM7WOBtiM: (accessed 25.04.2018).

[2] https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Гарретт_Дэвид (accessed 18.04.2018).

[3] https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/デイヴィッド・ギャレット (accessed 18.04.2018).

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Garrett_(musician) (accessed 18.04.2018).

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Garrett_(musician) (accessed 18.04.2018).

[6] https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/デイヴィッド・ギャレット (accessed 18.04.2018).

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossover_music (accessed 18.04.2018).

[8] https://vk.com/topic-39377647_26713550?post=6340 (accessed 20.04.2018).

[9] The photo is the courtesy of: https://www.google.com/search?q=david+garrett+und+valentina+babor&client=firefox-b&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=YTu-6iIATWmxuM%253A%252CPXXxaNhyYbV02M%252C_&usg=__YHANTiwehkS7r4wf6KaTqzHN8Hw%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiPrt-37sfaAhXBnZQKHYScBj4Q9QEIKjAA#imgrc=YTu-6iIATWmxuM: (accessed 20.04.2018).

[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._5_(Beethoven) (accessed 20.04.2018).

[11] The photo is the courtesy of: https://www.google.co.jp/search?q=david+garrett+Classic+Revolution&client=firefox-b&dcr=0&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjAl_CAurvaAhWDxLwKHX7GASoQ_AUIDCgD&biw=1525&bih=704#imgrc=NcG8qbhrd4dHhM: (accessed 18.04.2018).

[12] https://vk.com/topic-39377647_26713550?post=6340 (accessed 20.04.2018).