

Violinist puts the 'cool' into classical with his brand of fusion

Risk-taker Pinto has the world on a string

By MAX MACCARI

FOR most young boys, the idea of extra-curricular activities usually take the shape of organized sporting leagues. Soccer moms and hockey dads everywhere see this as an opportunity for their kids to stay healthy, build social skills, and have some fun – a pastime to keep kids entertained and out of trouble.

Grenville Pinto was not one of these boys.

Instead of working his fingers around a football, young Grenville's fingers were busy trying to nail down the right note sequence to make Sonatas and Partitas sound just like Bach expected. And he didn't mind. In fact, when his parents introduced him to the violin at the age of seven, it wasn't long before his parents saw his gift reverberating from the strings.

"To me, the violin was just another toy," he says. "I didn't complain or fight them since my parents and sisters all played music. It was the natural thing to do in our household."

With his father the sole income earner in the family, finding the money to put Pinto through private lessons in his early years was a challenge, but an effort that came without compromise. With the family's strong ties to their Catholic faith, music was part and parcel to that experience. Denying it would almost be like denying one's religion.

After training privately under the Royal Conservatory of Music and playing in numerous recitals and performances, including the Hamilton Youth Philharmonic Orchestra, Pinto knew that he now had to take it to the next level: to find his own voice and style as a performing musician.

"The time comes when you can't be taught anymore,"



says Pinto. "You have to apply the training and create your own style."

And that's exactly what he did. He calls it "Classical Fusion" – the playing of contemporary music on a classical instrument. Perhaps the violin is misunderstood. Stereotyped. Stuck in a world that evokes 19th century British lords being dignified with the music of Mozart during a celebratory feast.

For those who haven't seen Pinto in action, it may be time to wipe any preconceived notion of violinists from your mind. "The violin is my tool. I can choose to wow my audience with a classical number or get them off their chairs and stomp their feet to the music of AC/DC. It's all about the performance."

AC/DC? You'd better believe it. Pinto's repertoire turns heads when he performs at weddings, corporate events and fundraisers. He makes it his mission to connect with the audience immediately, to sell his personality and not the stereotype behind the instrument.

But don't expect this musical risk-taker

to audition for a role with the Toronto Symphonic Orchestra. Even though he thrives in a concert setting with all eyes and ears focused on the performance, Pinto's act is best served solo – and not of the violin solo variety. He has broken the rules, pushed the buttons, and cracked the mould. "After coming this far, I certainly don't want to be lost in a sea of violins," he says with a confident chuckle.

Pinto, whose solidly booked calendar is evidence of his popularity, relies on his ability to stay current with the demands of his audience. "You're only as good as your last performance so it's critical for me to stay on top of the game, to keep my act fresh."

With each new arrangement, he is changing perceptions about the violin, influencing his younger audience to see the "cool" behind this historically revered instrument.

When asked about his career as a full-time performer and what it took to get there, he cites "luck" as one of the factors. Although he is now getting international bites of interest, he knows full

well that sometimes, getting the really big break has to do with being in the right place at the right time.

"I'm a big believer that my audience will 'sell' me. I'm not planning on knocking on doors just yet but if I want to fill up Massey Hall or the ACC, I have to become a brand."

There is no doubt that he is well on his way to achieving that goal. With requests coming in from celebrity personalities to the likes of Bill Clinton and Michael Douglas, this violinist-with-an-edge is truly poised for something big. And he knows it. In the meantime, his self-promotional efforts, the Internet, and word-of-mouth advertising are working to make his classic-meets-modern sound more accessible and popular.

"People won't 'get it' until they see me live. And judging by the reaction and feedback so far, this is how I know that the world is ready for me." **W**

• Grenville Pinto's forthcoming CD, Playtime, will soon be released and available at www.grenvillepinto.com where you can also purchase his two other compilations, download sample tracks, view video footage, and get booking information and rates.

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