

Classical Love

Cellist Matt Haimovitz gets a good idea.

Matt Haimovitz is buried in national acclaim for bringing his cello into sold-out non-traditional venues and ripping out some of the most insane classical Bach you ever want to hear. He's no ordinary cellist; rather, he's a prodigy who's all grown up.

Touring in support of his new album, *Anthem*, featuring music by American composers, Haimovitz spoke with *EW* about sonatas, Satan and sex.

EW: *Where did the spark to do this kind of tour first ignite within you? Why you?*

MH: I think what led to it is a confluence of things. One is the age I live in and the generation I belong to, and years of looking out in the concert hall and seeing older, smaller audiences, and feeling sadness that there weren't members of my own generation. The desire to reach younger generations was part of it. We've taken for granted for many years that there's an audience for this music. At this day in age, the competitiveness, the immensity of how much information is out there; I think a classical musician needs to build an audience the same way an up-start rock band does. Whether it was written last year or 200 years ago the music has to be so strong that you can actually touch it, that it has a texture, that it moves you. Too often the concert hall is too routine. When I go into a place like Sam Bond's Garage, I can't really predict what will happen. The intimacy of that; that's where classical music, for the most part, originated.

EW: *It's great to have you back. How did your 2002 Sam Bond's performance rank among the other venues on your tour?*

MH: Oh, it was wonderful, one of the best ones for sure. An amazing turnout. I loved the guy; I think I remember correctly, in his 60s or 70s, spread out on the floor in front of me, following a score of the *Cello Suites*. He brought his own score, and he couldn't find a chair so he just came up on stage and lay down, turning pages, making sure I was playing the right notes, I guess. It was a lot of fun.

EW: *Have you ever made love while playing your cello?*

MH: While playing my cello? Boy, that would be tough ... I don't know how it'd be ... I'd have to somehow play from ... from behind, you know ...

EW: *Oh! I didn't say that.*

MH: Um, yeah, everything's covered up with the cello. You know it seems very erotic when you, when you see it, but yeah, no, I don't think so, although that's a really good idea! I've got to try that.

EW: *Odds say that by now someone's thrown up in the bathroom of a bar to your wonderful Bach. Are there people in the world of classical music who are bug-eyed hysterical that you're taking what has traditionally been for Americans a somewhat "sophisticated" experience, and giving it to the po' folk?*

MH: Yeah, I think I remember a venue in Cleveland; an old Latin ballroom where they used to dance and now present concerts. They have a bar. I remember after my sound check, someone very well dressed, an older man, walking in and looking around and saying, "This is no place for classical music," and walking out. There *are* wonderful things about concert halls. Nothing beats having an incredible acoustic and playing Concertgebouw in Amsterdam or Boston Symphony Hall or Benaroya in Seattle. It's wonderful to experience music that way, so I can understand that reaction. On the other hand, Bach was very much a human being. His music expresses universal human nature and emotions that all of us experience and approach at different levels. Instinctually there's something for everyone. So on the practical side of having ticket prices so high; if someone who loves classical music can't go in and hear it, that's a disaster. There are people intimidated by the concert hall, or the image classical music has. It's so extraordinary; it's for everyone, actually.

EW: *What can people, who listen to very little classical music, expect if they hear you on this tour?*

MH: I think this particular round is going to be the diversity and the range of what the cello can do. It transforms into different instruments and is sometimes unrecognizable as a cello. The raw energy that a single cello can create.

EW: *Crazy things must've happened on your tour. Any stories jump to the front of your mind?*

MH: I'd say one of the most surreal moments was playing at CBGB (a New York punk rock club) and looking out and seeing punks sitting next to people in suits, and having ... um ... I can't remember her first name, but Daughter of Satan was her *last* name, coming up to me afterwards and telling me, "Music is music. Great music is great music." She was happy to experience the *Cello Suites* in that context. And the first time playing at the Tractor Tavern in Seattle was really quite something when people were actually howling and whistling like a jazz concert. That took me by surprise.

EW: *At the age of 13 you replaced your teacher, the legendary American cellist, Leonard Rose, at short notice for a performance of Schubert's two-cello quintet at Carnegie Hall, along with Isaac Stern and Pinchas Zukerman. What the hell did that feel like?*

MH: Well, I was very honored to be asked, and one of my cello idols, Rostropovich, was playing as well. The only thing was that I'd learned the *second* cello part, not the first. Rostropovich was insis-

tent that I play the first. So I spent all night practicing my part, which I'd never played before. I was too nervous and focused to really know what was going on. In fact, I think Isaac Stern broke a string and I had no idea. They were all on the floor laughing at the end because I hadn't noticed what was going on. I was just glued to my music, making sure I didn't get lost.

EW: *Ever play any reggae on the cello?*

MH: Reggae, why reggae? I love reggae. That's interesting. I've never considered it. I've played a lot of different kind of genres, and the CD (*Anthem*) has a pretty wide range of music. Golijov is kind of inspired by Piazzolla so you have tango influence, and then you have Sanford's piece being influenced by John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*; you've got Twining's "9:11 Blues," a micro-tonal blues piece. A lot of American vernaculars are looked at through the lens of the cello, but no, never reggae. Have you ever heard of a cello in reggae? It sounds cool. Why not?

EW: *Why do you have that particular cello?*

MH: When I discovered it in London, I didn't fall in love with it at first sight, but there was something about the sound that really grabbed me. I was playing another Gofriller, the one that belonged to Pablo Casals. That Gofriller was too small for me; it was cut down for him. This one reminded me of that, but larger. It's been my companion ever since. Something about the quality of the sound, the richness and darkness of it.

EW: *When you're performing some difficult portion a master's work, and you're "on," doing it flawlessly, what does that feel like?*

MH: Well, like nothing else. It's overwhelming to the point that you can sometimes lose yourself in the music and you don't know what just happened. It's wonderful to have that creative control. When you're molding music, and it's coming out the way you hear it in your head, and you can communicate that to an audience ... that's why I do this.

EW

Matt Haimovitz performs at 9 pm Sept. 24 at Sam Bond's Garage. For more Haimovitz information, see Brett Campbell's music column in EW 9/11 or go to www.oxingale.com