

Their cellos aren't mellow

2Cellos strays from classical for a 'big sound'

By Jim Beal Jr., Staff Writer

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Cellists Stjepan Hauser (left) and Luka Sulic of 2Cellos got the music world's attention with a music video rendition of Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal."

Photo: Courtesy Photo

If comedian Rodney Dangerfield believed he got no respect, he should've tried working a cello into his act.

"Even in classical music the cello doesn't get a lot of respect because the piano and the violin get it all," said Luka Sulic, letting loose with one of his frequent laughs. "But we want to change this."

"We" are Sulic, 25, and music-making partner Stjepan Hauser, 26. The Croatian cello wizards are 2Cellos. And yes, they are changing the image of the instrument.

In early 2011, their cello battle video, on a version of Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal," went viral on YouTube. That led to a record deal and a tour with Elton John. 2Cellos furthered its career, and the reputation of the cello, on the hit TV show "Glee" doing "Smooth Criminal" with Naya Rivera.

The duo, along with their Croatian compatriot, drummer Dusan Kranjc, are on the tour road with the 2Cellos album "In2ition." They'll be in concert Sunday in the Majestic Theatre.

"In2ition" features Fleetwood Mac's "Oh, Well" with John on vocals, guitar shredder Steve Vai guesting on "Highway to Hell," Rivera singing "Supermassive Black Hole," Lang Lang contributing piano to "Clocks," Sky Ferreira singing Sonny Bono's "Bang Bang" and "Il Libro Dell'amore" with Zucchero. There's also plenty of space for Sulic and Hauser to cut loose.

"I started playing when I was 5," Sulic said. "I'm from a family of musicians. Stjepan started the same way. We're both classically trained, but we started in different places.

"The cello is such a versatile instrument. It can rock like the hardest rock guitar and it can sing like the human voice. We couldn't do what we do without the classical training. It's a hard instrument to play. There are no frets and it takes finesse and technique to play."

On the album, and even in the videos, it's not easy to figure out who's doing what. Both men excel at playing pizzicato (plucking the strings) and arco (with a bow).

"We try to make it as interesting and diverse as possible," Sulic said. Sometimes I play the melody and Stjepan plays the riff. Sometimes it's the opposite. The main thing is to make it interesting.

"We tune differently, and we use some tricks. There's just the two of us for much of a concert, so we want a big sound. We do use some guitar effects, distortion and delay. Playing cello with distortion sounds so good."

With a repertoire that ranges from classical to heavy metal, it can't be simple to choose songs.

"We love everything," Sulic said. "We have to love the song, and it has to suit the cello. We have to feel we can express something. If everything fits, great. On the album, we also had to find songs that fit the guests.

"Our producer, Bob Ezrin (Alice Cooper, Pink Floyd, Kiss, Lou Reed), did such a great job. He actually suggested we do 'Oh, Well,' and Elton, who has been so good to us, offered to sing it. Steve Vai fit right in, and we had worked with Naya Rivera in 'Glee,' so we had to have her on the album. Everything blended naturally."

A 2Cellos concert features the group's full range.

“Our show starts very calm and slow, but by the end we add the drummer and it gets nuts,” Sulic said, laughing again.

Reaction to 2Cellos music has been almost universally positive, but not quite.

“We still play classical music, and there are still some very conservative people in classical music who don't like what we do, but who cares?”

“We played a concert in Vienna for 15,000 people. We started the concert playing classical music and they all listened. It isn't easy getting that many people to listen to classical music, especially young people. When people come up to us and tell us they have never heard the cello but they love what we do, that's the best compliment.”

2Cellos likes playing for American audiences.

“The reaction is similar wherever we play, but, in America, everyone is much louder,” Sulic said.

Sulic and Hauser look like fashion models. Yet Sulic said they don't have groupies waiting at every stage door.

“Maybe one day we'll have groupies, but we're not there yet.”

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Read more: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/article/2Cellos-rock-with-a-classical-roll-4425227.php#ixzz2QGQ53Xak>