

THE ARTS

Music that simply flows

By CHRISTINE HAWES Correspondent

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Denis Azabagic is considered one of the world's finest classical guitarists, but it was a rock band that first captured his interest in guitar.

"I was not even 6 when my parents enrolled me in music school," recalls the former Bosnia resident and winner of 11 international guitar competitions. "A year later, when it came time to choose an instrument, I was thinking about the Beatles. I remember liking the band as far as I can remember, thinking it would be really cool to play in a band."

He credits an incredible teacher with steering him to the joy of classical music. Azabagic, who will perform here Saturday as part of GuitarSarasota's concert series, now says that coming as close as possible to technical perfection and playing a piece as closely as possible to the composer's intent is the epitome of musical liberation.

In an interview with Classical Guitar Magazine, he emphasized the importance of essentially internalizing a piece, including not only notes and interpretation, but also rhythms, fingerings, dynamics, expression markings, and structure.

He reiterated that message in a phone interview from his suburban Chicago home last week, describing the satisfaction and awe he finds in performing great classical compositions.

"For me, it has always been such a nice thing to accomplish and play a piece," he said, "to resolve it, to learn to play it so well that the conscious part of your brain can shut off, and something else takes over, and you're just flowing."

Azabagic, 37, has recorded seven albums. In addition to the awards he has won over the past 18 years, Azabagic also performs and records with his wife, Eugenia Moliner, in a duo called Cavatina Duo, and performs with orchestras worldwide.

After relocating to the United States 10 years ago, Azabagic said he was uplifted to realize how many young people today follow classical guitar and see the instrument as not just part of a rock band.

"I must say I have a lot of private students who are learning this for fun," said Azabagic, also a teacher of private guitar students at Chicago's Roosevelt College. "I've been pleasantly surprised at how genuinely the classical guitar moves young people, and by how intriguing and special they find it."

In addition to his performance here, Azabagic will present a free master class. He says the joy he finds in teaching has led him to consider one day offering online courses in classical guitar.

"I just like solving things and resolving problems. I think I have that kind of mindframe. I find it very nice when I work with students and help them with whatever problems they may have, guiding them on their own path."

**GUITARSARASOTA**

Denis Azabagic in concert, 7:30 p.m. Saturday. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 2256 Bahia Vista St., Sarasota. \$20 (\$15 for GuitarSarasota members, \$5 for students). 360-7399, (800) 660-4278; www.guitarsarasota.org. He will also present a free master class from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at Art Center Sarasota, 707 N. Tamiami Trail.