

BOUNDLESS ARTISTRY

THE MUSIC OF DAMIEN ESCOBAR

by Diane Eaton



Sometimes called a "violin crooner," Damien Escobar is a musician you can't stuff into a single category. Melodic and spellbinding, his music seamlessly spins strains of hip-hop, jazz, dance, and classical music into a unique and cohesive art form that has earned him loyal fans around the world.

Often called a musical pioneer, Damien Escobar is no stranger to being different. Growing up in Jamaica, Queens, New York, his humble beginnings didn't portend greatness. But at 6 years, he met his first violin and fell madly in love. Practicing for eight hours a day, 7 days a week, he stunned the experts with his abilities. A child prodigy, at age 10, he became the youngest to enter the Juilliard School of Music—and graduated at the age of 13. His success seemed assured.

But Escobar's climb to international stardom was a rocky one. His inspiring journey of reaching the heights of success, losing it all, and then finding the inner resolve to fight to rebuild is as much a part of his message and his music as being a world-renowned innovative musical genius.

In his teens, he and his brother, Tourie, formed the duo Nuttin but Stringz. Together, they entered and won the *Showtime at the Apollo Theater* competition in New York which launched them into the media stratosphere with appearances on the Today show, the Tonight Show, Ellen DeGeneres, and performances at Carnegie Hall and the White House for President George Bush. The duo collaborated with musical

elite including Al Jarreau, Aretha Franklin, Brian McKnight, Chaka Khan, Drake, Gladys Knight, John Legend, Jonas Brothers, Justin Bieber, and Mary J. Blige. They performed at the inauguration of President Barack Obama and won two Emmy awards.

Then the music stopped.

The pair broke up in 2012 and Escobar took it hard. His life took a downward turn and, for a while, he found himself broke, depressed, and homeless. Sleeping on other people's couches, with no direction, he turned his back on his dreams just to survive emotionally. But he knew he had to find a way out of his despair.

"It was the worst moment of my life," he says. "It humbled me but it gave me an appreciation for human beings and for my gift of music. In that kind of situation, you have a choice: you can reflect on everything that went wrong or you can choose to rebuild. That's what started my journey again. And I vowed to maintain my humility going forward."

After a short but successful stint in real estate, Escobar couldn't deny the calling in his heart any longer.

Returning to the basement of his mother's home, he picked up the violin once again and started working on his first solo album. In 2013, he released *Sensual Melodies*, a cover album of classic and contemporary R&B. The album reached #10 on iTunes Hot 100 Charts.

But it wasn't until he released his second solo album, *Boundless*, in 2017, that his creative genius and signature style revealed themselves to his audiences.

"I could have called the album *Comeback*," Escobar says. "The *Boundless* album embodies the freedom I feel inside—a freedom to create and to let my inner artist express himself."

What makes his music so compelling? He likes to make his music accessible, relatable, and memorable. "I don't try to come up with a complex string line," he says. "Great songs are hummable. I take the same approach a singer takes to a song. Not everybody remembers lyrics but they remember melodies."

His subsequent *Boundless Tour* brought sold-out arenas all across the U.S. His music is universal and ageless: audiences hail from all generations. He's been featured all over the media, including *People Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, *CNN*, *The NY Daily News* and the *Chicago Tribune*. He's been interviewed on every major TV network as well.

Most recently, Escobar is exploring several entrepreneurial options. But no matter what he's into, the message he imparts with his music is always key.

"You only have one life," he says, "so you have to live out your dreams. Don't waste the time that you have. Get out, risk a little, explore and live."