

FOR ART'S SAKE

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# FOR ART'S SAKE

ANY FIELD USING THE SKILLS OR  
TECHNIQUES OF ART

by Maurice Bobb

## THE ANTI-CHRIST OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

DBR &amp; The Mission



Photography by [unreadable]

DJ Scientific and Daniel Bernard



Daniel Bernard



Photo by Leslie Lyons

Classical music has a special distinction. **It's the genre most people secretly aspire to appreciate in an intelligent manner and, conversely,** the genre those same people would deny like a boy would his nerdy friend in the heat of incessant heckling by school-yard bullies.

The same thing could have been said about golf ten years ago. Known for its dogged stodginess, golf offered no excitement to younger sports fans. But here comes Tiger Woods, with a new look and energy, and suddenly, **the gentlemen's game known for grown men in plaid knickers and funny hats became cool and entertaining enough for playback highlights on ESPN.**

Classical music now has its own fresh face flaunting convention in Daniel Bernard Roumain, the Haitian-American violinist and composer who sports a silver nose ring and dreadlocks that reach to his waist. **But add to that image the infusion of jazz and hip-hop to his repertoire of classic violin and you've got the kind of classical music provocateur that just may be relevant to the MTV and iPod generation.** "I'm trying to transcend the music," says Roumain, who received his Ph.D. from Michigan. "I want to perform music that's hip and relevant. **I want to be relevant.**"

Roumain was raised in South Florida but now calls Harlem home. At the tender age of five, he performed Israel's national anthem *Hatikvah* on his violin in one of the sunshine state's public schools. "Playing the violin wasn't cool growing up," says Roumain, who sells his music through his MySpace and YouTube fansites and on iTunes. **"You could get beat up carrying a violin case.** But I'm a composer today because I was more afraid not to be one."

Roumain did graduate studies under the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer William Bolcom. Now, Roumain has big-name collaborators, including the minimalist composer Philip Glass and choreographer Bill T. Jones.

Roumain founded his band, DBR & THE MISSION, in 2002. **The band is comprised of nine young musicians from diverse musical backgrounds** including an amplified string quartet, drum kit, keyboard, a vocalist, DJ and several "laptopists." Each member is well-versed in modern classical, jazz, rock and hip-hop performance practices and has the

profound ability to perform DBR's own wide range of pieces. "I started this band because I wanted to start an ensemble that could function like a band," says Roumain, who was honored for his business acumen as one of Crain's New York Business' 40 Under 40. "It's an honor to be sharing the stage with these kinds of musicians."

**DBR's Houston debut performance, Friday, April 13, in Wortham Center's Cullen Theater, will feature Hip-Hop Studies and Etudes: small, intimate, musical vignettes** (one in each key) that explain, examine and express aspects of hip-hop music, from rhythm to timbre to form. These works represent DBR's own hip-hop and rock-infused renderings of Bach's *Well-Tempered Klavier* and Philip Glass' *Music in 12 Parts*.

"I've been able to combine the music I grew up with – hip-hop, classical music, rock, jazz and soul – and in some ways, to be an ambassador, certainly for what's going on in Harlem, where I live, but also for what's going on in contemporary classical music. I mean, how many people like me do you know? I need peers, we need more minority composers. **I don't want to be the only one.**"

*The Los Angeles Time* declares his "dynamic fusion of jazz, classical, hip-hop and rock has people likening him simultaneously to Mozart and Prince."

"When you come to a performance of mine, expect to want to dance and not be allowed to," says Roumain. "You can expect a virtuosic performance. Come to the show wanting to have a conversation about the music. I want a reaction."

**As for reactions, not all of them have been positive. Many traditional patrons of classical music find his sonic departure disrupting.**

"Some people say I'm the Anti-Christ of classical music," says Roumain. "Most classical musicians are not expecting a composer to look like I do. I am redefining, reappropriating and remixing what it means to be a composer."

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON DBR'S CONCERT, PLEASE LOG ONTO [WWW.SPAHOUSTON.ORG](http://WWW.SPAHOUSTON.ORG).