

Daniel Bernard Roumain holiday

Fiddler/composer goes from Lady Gaga to the Boston Pops

By Brett Milano

Saturday, June 19, 2010

Nothing raises eyebrows in serious music circles like a composer who drops the names of Kanye West and Dr. Dre, works hip-hop into a violin concerto, or leads a rock band between orchestra engagements.

Or even more, one who plays with Lady Gaga on “American Idol.”

Skokie, Ill.-born violinist and composer Daniel Bernard Roumain (who performs under his initials DBR) has done all of the above. The son of Haitian immigrants, Roumain, 39, may be the only musician alive who’s collaborated with composer Philip Glass, choreographer Bill T. Jones and 2 Live Crew. His new piece, “Woodbox Violin Concerto,” which he debuts with the **Boston Pops** tonight, draws from pop and classical influences. For Roumain, the intersection of different worlds is where the real creative action is.



“I am excited by what they share,” he said during a rehearsal break earlier this week. “If you can find things that two people have in common, that’s where the art lies. If you and I were to stand next to each other, the differences would come readily and easily. But if we start to hone in and we have a conversation, then we’re bound to find things that we share in common. Something in there makes you feel good and relevant and real, and that is where the real possibilities start to open up. That’s what I’m trying to do as a composer.”

Though still based in NYC, Roumain now lives part-time in Boston since his marriage to a local resident. Now he gets to play his new concerto with the Pops. It’s based on themes from his last album, “Woodbox Beats and Balladry,” and he dubs the piece an orchestral remix in two parts: the Chromatic Remix and the Berlin Remix.



“You remember the synth-pop group Berlin,” he said, “so that title is kind of a pun on them. The second part begins with a very ’80s synthesizer sound. I tried to approach the concerto like I was a DJ or a producer, working with a large virtuosic ensemble - like what would Pharrell (Williams) or the Neptunes do with the Boston Pops?”

“I think of it as a way to have a conversation with 80-something people. I’ve already played every violin concerto there is and they put heavy emphasis on the violin, but not so much on the full orchestra. So in this piece, all the violins play before I come in. I make sure everyone has a moment to be heard. My mother would be very proud of that.”

Roumain sees his mainstream work - including his “American Idol” appearance playing “Poker Face” with Lady Gaga - as part of his evolution.

“You always take something with you,” he said. “For example, Lady Gaga is one of the reasons I started using synthesizer again. There are certainly growing pains happening in music right now. The performing arts are struggling, but I can’t imagine a time when there’s been more interest in singing, dancing and the theater. And, yes, ‘American Idol’ and those other novelty shows are certainly part of that.”

Daniel Bernard Roumain with the Boston Pops, at Symphony Hall, 8 p.m. today and 3 p.m. Sunday. Tickets \$20-\$89; 617-266-1492.