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DBR & The Mission offer musical civil rights portraits



Daniel Bernard Roumain will perform Saturday at the Carver DBR (Daniel Bernard Roumain) & The Mission

Where: Jo Long Theatre for the Performing Arts, Carver Community Cultural Center, 226 N. Hackberry St.

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Tickets: \$31 through Ticketmaster, Carver box office

By **Jim Beal Jr.** - Express-News

Apparently making music came fairly easy to Daniel Bernard Roumain.

“I started playing violin when I was 5 years old,” he said.

And how did that go over with his peers?

“Not very well,” he said. And he wasn't laughing. “I used to pay a friend a quarter to carry my violin into school. It wasn't easy for a young boy, particularly a young black boy, to play violin in those days, but slowly things changed.”

Thirty-plus years down the line, the Florida-raised, New York City-based Roumain is not only a well-respected violinist, he's a band leader and an in-demand, internationally praised composer for aggregations ranging from chamber ensembles to symphony orchestras.

Roumain, who'll perform Saturday at the Carver Community Cultural Center, also composes for theater, TV and film and has been known to collaborate with an array of other artists including DJs Scientific and Spooky and Lady Gaga. His works draw from classical, rock, funk, hip-hop, his Haitian American roots and more.

In 2002, the San Antonio Symphony presented the world premiere of Roumain's “Human Songs and Stories for Orchestra, Narrator and the People,” commissioned by Texas Public Radio to observe the 20th anniversary of radio station KPAC. David Robinson was the narrator. While in town for the premiere, Roumain staged a pair of all-ages, rock-oriented shows at Sam's Burger Joint.

“Composing came as an extension of playing the violin,” Roumain said. “I had a wild imagination and I wanted orchestral music to be wild, cool, hip and reflective of who I am. I'm always thinking about how a piece will play on stage. I'm a better performer for composing my own music.”

On Saturday, Roumain will work with his string quartet, The Mission, Earl Maneein (violin), Matthew Szemela (violin), Jon Weber (viola) and Jessie Reagen (cello).

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“They're some of the most talented freelance musicians in New York City. They've played with people from Jay-Z to Billy Joel. The program we're doing is ‘A Civil Rights Reader,’ musical portraits of iconic figures from the civil rights era.”

Roumain isn't too concerned about musical boundaries.

“My music has a broad range and it reflects my South Florida upbringing. There's a lot of music down there,” he said. “It also reflects the times. iTunes and iPods have expanded what people listen to. People are no longer bound to one genre.

“A lot of what I do is by invitation. The music scene is a very social scene. It helps music evolve to work with others. ... I just worked at the Olympics with DJ Spooky, and that's another performance that went out to millions of people. Still, there's nothing like performing in a smaller space like the Carver.”

Besides having a full slate of performances and composing commissions, Roumain is a husband and father.

“Time management is the key. Every day I find better ways to handle my time,” he said. “If you say you don't have enough time to do something, you won't. You have to remind yourself to use the time you have.”

Roumain also uses technology.

“I practice violin and I compose everywhere. I have composition software for my iPhone,” he said. “I haven't used paper and pencils in probably 15 years. I'm losing the ability to write.”

Roumain also is involved with Haitian earthquake relief. There are links on his Web site to aid resources.

“I'm committed to that,” he said. “Both of my parents are from Haiti, and I find ways to stay connected to that culture. I have a tiny little platform from which I can shout, and I do.”