

## A classical guy with a twist

### Wide-ranging tastes make DBR a musician to watch

By Stuart Derdeyn, The Province



### Becoming a classical soloist only wasn't enough for Daniel Bernard Roumain.

When this interview with Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR) took place, the Haitian-American violinist from Margate, Fla., was in a fine mood, pumped up about his Valentine's Day performance in Vancouver. Based on updates on his web-site at [dbrmusic.com](http://dbrmusic.com), his mood now is much more sombre following the tragic earthquake and its aftermath in his ancestral homeland.

Given his VSO show is a performance of his original composition "The Voodoo Violin Concerto," deeply influenced by Haitian musical traditions, one can anticipate a slightly heavier vibe to the work on Sunday.

He says the piece can go either way. Like his own career, the composition contains elements of classical, folk, traditional and hip hop. Fitting coming from an artist who performs with everyone from the Kennedy Centre Orchestra and Philip Glass to DJ Spooky and, on an episode of American Idol, Lady Gaga. Given his wide-ranging tastes, it's not hard to understand why Esquire showcased him as a "New Face of Classical Music," too.

"I actually started in clubs and was really happy with that," says DBR. "As a matter of fact, I was somewhat embarrassed to admit I played in an orchestra while I was working with such South Florida locals as 2 Live Crew. I enjoy both.

"But it's interesting that, once my non-classical colleagues found out about my orchestra work, they were really interested and when my classical colleagues found out about my non-classical work in R&B and hip hop, they were appalled."

DBR didn't let that set him back. He never saw a future in becoming a classical music soloist in the typical form, even though he considers himself a member of that genre and respects both its historic and somewhat mythological components. DBR notes that the longer a non-classical musician works, the more likely they are to be drawn into the art of composition.

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"Classical music has its own tradition of improvising and, for lack of a better phrase, a lot of non-classical/ cross-genre pollination, too," he says. "In the modern day, the only thing that hasn't happened yet is someone like Eminem or Beyonce composing for the New York Philharmonic. The only real difference is the lifespan of the piece. That's where classical wins out."

As a composer, he believes every work is a part of a process of constant improvement. "The Voodoo Violin Concerto" is one of his earliest works and yet also one of the most often requested. He says that it is particularly challenging because he is both composer and soloist. Influenced by the Haitian music he heard growing up, DBR says it also speaks to his father's wide-ranging music collection, which ranged from Motown to Barbara Mandrell. When I note that a section of the piece sounds like it could be taken from a Led Zeppelin song, he laughs.

"You know, as I solo I can also hear what I now think are slight mistakes in the composition. That Led Zeppelin-ish segment came out of a mind-blowing experience of listening to the band's entire catalogue and being really taken with the timbre of Robert Plant's voice. It wasn't deliberate."

The wildly diverse album *etudes4violin&electronix* on Thirsty Ear's acclaimed *The Blue Series*, on the other hand, is a highly personal recording where a lot of planning and composing went into the execution. It's one of his favourite albums in his catalogue and the followup, *Woodbox Beats and Balladry*, will be out later this year.

"It's much more aggressive and much more music to dance to with even a few ballads," DBR says. "There is a lot less improvisation and the recorded debut of my sonata for violin and turntables. It's really cool and I guess further proof that I am something of a victim of privileged musical circumstances because I can release it."

He's excited about being an artist today facing the new face of music with technology and how that changes composition and performance.

DBR/VSO: A VOODOO VALENTINE

Where: Orpheum Theatre, corner of Seymour and Smythe streets When: Sunday night at 8 Tickets: \$22.50-\$55 at [vancouversymphony.ca](http://vancouversymphony.ca)