

---

# AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

## Violinist will ignite FUZE! concert series

Daniel Bernard Roumain to treat Akron audience to eclectic, electric show before Olympic concert

By Malcolm X Abram

Beacon Journal music writer | February 4, 2010



Haitian American composer and violinist Daniel Bernard Roumain will perform tonight in the FUZE! series at the Akron Art Museum. (Photo by Julieta Cervantes)

In 2009, the Akron Art Museum and the Tuesday Musical Association premiered *FUZE!*, a concert series designed to bring new, interesting and unusual artists and performers to a hopefully curious public.

The three concerts featured critically lauded artists — cellist/composer/multimedia artist Maya Beiser, SO Percussion and hipster string quartet Ethel. Each sold-out concert validated the organizers' belief that Akronites and their surrounding neighbors are interested in something different from the usual artsy-fartsy fare.

For 2010, *FUZE!* returns with three concerts featuring artists stretching the boundaries and incorporating the past present and presumably writing the future of their chosen fields.

The series begins at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Akron Art Museum with electric violinist Daniel Bernard Roumain.

On March 11, the series will feature hip New York string quartet Brooklyn Rider, which interprets the works of past masters such as Claude Debussy along with music from contemporary composers, and participates in cellist Yo Yo Ma's adventurous world and classical music mixing Silk Road Ensemble.

The series will conclude April 22 with avant composer/clarinetist David Krakauer, also known for genre hopping from traditional classical chamber music to outre improvisational outings. His group Klezmer Madness has brought the traditional Jewish folk music into the 21st century by dropping rock grooves, hip-hop beats and dashes of other world music into his toe-tapping mix.

Mix of genres

*The New York Times* called violinist/composer/educator/band leader Roumain "about as omnivorous as a contemporary artist gets."

The first generation Haitian-American's music frequently incorporates electronics, hip-hop and any and all genres into a filling musical bouillabaisse.

Roumain (or DBR as he's casually known) has recorded and/or performed with an impressive array of artists, including piano duets with composer Philip Glass, his hero and buddy. He's also performed on American Idol with the currently unavoidable chart-topping pop star Lady Gaga.

As a composer, Roumain's work can be heard in the feature documentary films *Strange Things* by Alexandria Hammond and *Off and Running* by Nicole Opper, which is scheduled to air nationally on PBS' award-winning series, *P.O.V.* later this year.

Roumain, 38, earned his master's degree and doctorate in music composition from the University of Michigan (don't hold that against him, please). He also serves as a visiting professor of composition at his undergraduate alma mater, Vanderbilt University.

Though Roumain is a world-traveling artist (shortly after his Akron appearance, he'll be performing in Vancouver at the Olympic Games), his thoughts of late have centered on his ancestral home and the devastating earthquake. Though Roumain's parents are from Haiti and he has family still there, he says the tragedy has left him feeling isolated.

### Thinking of Haiti

"I feel much removed from Haitians, Haitian-Americans and even Americans quite frankly," Roumain said in a telephone interview from Nashville.

"I didn't grow up in Haiti and I can't begin to understand the feeling that Haitians must have right now, at the same time growing up in America, I feel a victim of privilege," he continued. "I'm having lunch right now and drinking coffee and having water . . . [while some of] my Haitian brothers and sisters and cousins — and that's not a figure of speech, I mean literally some of my Haitian cousins — have died or are thirsty or hungry.

"So all of this amounts to a sense of alienation, of being in a weird vacuum, a sense of distrust and ineffectiveness."

After he learned of the earthquake, Roumain said, it was tough to continue to entertain people at first, but he also feels that he must do something to contribute. So he and Haitian singer Emeline Michel made a joint statement

---

# AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

urging fans to contribute to one of the many organizations offering aid.

He has been accepting donations at his recent shows and plans to do the same at his Akron performance.

When he's on stage, Roumain said, he knows he must walk a fine line between entertaining audiences and urging them to help his homeland. But he said, "I try to walk that fine line elegantly and articulately."

Roumain's Akron performance is titled *etudes4violin&electronix*, after his 2007 album that mixed classical forms with rock, hip-hop and turntablism and featured contributions from Glass, turntablist DJ Spooky, composer Ryuichi Sakamoto and DJ Scientific — Roumain's frequent touring partner, who will be onstage at the Akron show along with avant pianist Yayoi Ikawa.

## Upcoming release

In Akron, Roumain also will perform works from his upcoming 2010 release *Woodbox Beats & Ballady*.

While many classically trained musicians can play any sheet music placed in front of them but cannot improvise over a 12-bar blues riff to save their lives, Roumain is a fine blues/jazz improviser who uses every part of his stringed "woodbox," including tapping out funky beats on the body of it.

Roumain traces his musical journey back to his youth in small Margate, Fla., where first picked up the violin at 5 years old. Listening to the music in his racially mixed neighborhood introduced him to several genres, all of which he soaked up and has incorporated into his music.

"Etudes is my take on how a violin can have a meaningful conversation with electronic music, specifically working with a DJ, laptops," he said. "And what you can expect is a look at the tradition of violin playing and how I'm extending it, moving around and pushing it not only forward but sideways," he said.

"It's a conversation not only between an electric violinist and a DJ but it's also a conversation between the second Viennese School in classical music and old-school hip-hop."

## Serious and pop

Modern musicians and composers such as Roumain have helped to punch gaping holes in the walls that used to surround seemingly disparate genres. Many reject the previously established idea of "serious" music being above "pop" music.

For many young composers and musicians, John Coltrane and hip-hop producer Swizz Beatz share equal influence on their music.

A few decades ago, suggesting that (violin maestro) Jascha Heifetz and Jimi Hendrix jam onstage might have brought ridicule from rock and classical lovers. But today, Paul McCartney and Jay-Z sharing the same stage is not that crazy a notion.

Roumain appreciates this new attitude and largely attributes it to the advent of the iPod and its shuffle button, which he said has "liberated the ear" of many listeners who have grown used to hearing the latest top 10 pop hit followed by a 30-year-old classic rock or gospel or classical song.

"That kind of juxtaposition of sounds, genres, culture and artists leads to a juxtaposition of sensibilities," he said. "I think it allows for an accepted collage of sound which makes my job that much easier, because it's not that unusual then, to hear a violin followed by a DJ or perhaps a violin and DJ in tandem.

"A lot of artists overlook the fact that we owe so much to the iPod and how it made what was once a conscious determined act (picking something to listen to and actually placing it into a CD/record/tape player) completely indeterminate."

Exactly 10 days after his Akron performance, Roumain will be in Vancouver performing his *Voodoo Violin Concerto No. 1* with the Vancouver Symphony and performing at the Olympics site with DJ Spooky. And though he has performed on stages big and small all over the world, he considers each new place worth experiencing.

"I'm the proud product of a public school system in south Florida . . . I'll bet you anything is a much smaller place than Akron, Ohio — it's important for me to say, hey, I'm from Margate so there is nothing more exciting than playing in Akron, Ohio," he said.

"And, to literally go from Akron to Vancouver, well, there's something wonderful about that. But it's only wonderful because I'm holding in my memories of both Akron and Margate."