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What do Beethoven, bluejeans, violinist share?

By ERIC E. HARRISON



Daniel Bernard Roumain (also known as DBR) solos in his Voodoo Violin Concerto this weekend with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.

LITTLE ROCK — The Arkansas Symphony is going to make Little Rock's Robinson Center Music Hall a very busy place this weekend, inside and out.

Beethoven. Bernstein. Bluejeans. Brats. Beer. Younger musicians. Older musicians. And a Haitian-American electric violinist whose recent credits include a collaboration with Lady Gaga on TV's American Idol.

Inside, in the semi-formal part of the program (anything titled "Beethoven & Blue Jeans" can't be very formal), Daniel Bernard Roumain will solo in his Voodoo Violin Concerto with the orchestra and conductor Philip Mann, 8 p.m. Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday at Robinson, West Markham Street and Broadway.

The program will also feature Leonard Bernstein's Symphonic Dances From West Side Story and two Ludwig van Beethoven overtures — Egmont and Leonore No. 3.

It's the third concert in the orchestra's Stella Boyle Smith Masterworks series; sponsor is Deltic Timber. Those on stage will be wearing jeans; the orchestra encourages the folks in the audience to do likewise.

And the Arkansas Symphony Youth Orchestra will perform at 6:30 p.m. Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday, with Mann heading up a "supersize" Concert Conversation, which the orchestra calls "an interactive informance," between the youth group and the concert's official start.

Outside, the orchestra will host a street party on Markham Street in front of the music hall starting at 6 p.m. Saturday and 1 p.m. Sunday, free for ticket holders, with free bratwursts (courtesy of Ben E. Keith) and \$2 Diamond Bear Beer, where concertgoers can meet the musicians, board members, Mann and Roumain. The Episcopal Collegiate School Steel Drum Band will perform.

Tickets: \$14-\$52, \$10 for students and members of the military, free for the Sunday matinee for K-12 kids with a paying adult. Call (501) 666-1761 or visit ArkansasSymphony.org.

Roumain, who goes by his initials, DBR, says he plans to change the title of his concerto — still officially listed as his

Voodoo Violin Concerto No. 1 because it was his first violin concerto (he premiered a second, Woodbox Violin Concerto, with the Boston Pops in June 2010).

"I'm going to change the title to just Voodoo Violin Concerto," he affirms with a laugh.

His website, dbrmusic.com, describes the 25-minute piece for orchestra and electric violin as "an expression of DBR's roots in Haiti [with] hip-hop/jazz beats throughout. Loud, extroverted and fiercely funky, the concerto allows the solo violinist to show all of the many extended techniques and possibilities for the instrument."

"For me the piece is about attitude and a vibe, or a temperament," he says. "There's a lot of blues in it. The piece is a reflection of my upbringing, which is Haitian-American, so there's a transplanted [Haitian] culture filtered through American culture.

"There's a movement that evokes the Catholic church, going to church with my mom; there's a movement that's kind of raucous, [with] jungle beats and techno, which reflects my time listening to garage bands when I was growing up."

The piece also has what DBR calls "a built-in mechanism for participation by the entire orchestra, in an improvisatory way."

"It's in the score — there are three moments in which anything can happen," he explains. "In rehearsal, we usually find a way where one or two [musicians], or even the entire orchestra, improvise with me. For example, with the Alabama Symphony, we came up with a strategy toward call and response with each section."

Thursday and Friday, as part of a National Endowment for the Arts-funded residency, DBR will present a program called "Hip-Hop Studies and Etudes" to students of Central and Parkview high schools and members of the ASO Youth Orchestra.

"I talk about being 5 years old, wanting to play the violin, wanting to compose music, wanting to have a life in music. I talk about the dissonance of the different sounds, the way that I play the violin, the different sounds I can generate on the instrument."

Which does he think will more likely win over the students — his violin performance or the Lady Gaga collaboration?

"Both help," he says.

The Lady Gaga connection involves a DBR arrangement of her then-hit "Poker Face," on which he appeared with her on American Idol in May 2009. (Video is available on YouTube and on DBR's website.)