



Daniel Bernard Roumain makes hip music on a violin

By [Calvin Wilson](#)

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

01/25/2007

If an evening of classical music doesn't strike you as a cutting-edge experience, fair enough. Unquestionably, the genre has a reputation for stodginess. But it's unlikely that anyone would accuse Daniel Bernard Roumain of being out of touch with the times.

A composer and violinist, Roumain — whose work has earned the attention of high-profile media outlets such as National Public Radio and The New York Times — will lead his Mission SQ Unit in concert Friday in the Edison Theatre's OVATIONS! Series.

Roumain is classically trained, but plugged in. At the Edison, he'll be accompanied by an amplified string quartet (a component of his nine-piece Mission band) and a DJ on turntables and laptop.

Who he is



Roumain was raised in South Florida but now lives in Harlem. His collaborators have included choreographer Bill T. Jones, jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson and minimalist composer Philip Glass. And his "String Quartet No. 5: Rosa Parks" is performed by the Lark Quartet on their 2006 album, "Klap Ur Handz."

Roumain did graduate studies under the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer William Bolcom.

"He's a great pianist, and we often played together — me on violin and him on piano. He has a voluminous memory and broad knowledge. So what I think I learned from him is, know everything: literature, art, art history, movies, world history, politics."

What he does

Roumain isn't your grandmother's classical performer — or even your mother's. His music encompasses influences such as jazz, rock and hip-hop. But his choice of instrument — the violin — couldn't be more traditional.

"Sometimes instruments choose you, and I feel like the violin chose me. It just kind of called my name. I took to it. The violin is always with me."

Along with such performers as the Ahn Trio and violinist Hilary Hahn, Roumain successfully straddles old and new musical approaches. Younger classical performers, Roumain says, "are reflective of the hip-hop generation and the iPod generation.

"They're listening to a broad spectrum of music, and they have broad interests. And all of that influences, literally, how they play." Indeed, there seems to be something of a generational shift occurring in the music.

"I feel that (the classical music establishment) is reacting to it very well," Roumain says. "I've been met with a lot of support and success, I have a lot of peers, and I know a lot of people who write music for a living. Things are changing — but the world is changing."

What you'll hear

"A Civil Rights Reader," Roumain says, comprises "four string quartets, which are musical portraits drawn from iconic figures from the Civil Rights Era: Martin Luther King Jr., Maya Angelou, Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell Jr." (The Rosa Parks piece will not be performed).

"Living in Harlem, the ghosts and spirits (of the civil rights movement) are everywhere — all over the street. And I'm living, in some ways, in the Zion of African-American culture. Really, the promised land."