

Classical Roots With a Digital Effect

Jessica Nicholas, Reviewer | October 22, 2007

At last year's Melbourne Festival, Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR) performed his *Sonatas for Violin and Turntables* with DJ Scientific. This year the Haitian-American violinist returned with his latest project, *etudes4violin&electronix*.

The recording of this project features solo violin pieces - often incorporating sampled beats - and musical dialogues with artists ranging from Philip Glass to DJ Spooky.

For his midnight show at the Spiegeltent last Friday, DBR was accompanied by 23-year-old pianist and laptop artist Wynne Bennett. Bennett has been collaborating with DBR for several years and is already a thoughtful and inventive performer. There were times on Friday when her piano work seemed a little reticent - especially when set against the intensity of DBR's amplified violin - though this may have been due to the sound balance rather than her playing.



Some of the duo "etudes" emphasised the violinist's classical roots, with only minimal digital effects to allow the instrument's natural resonance to emerge. *Divergence* shone with DBR's beautifully deft arpeggios over hymn-like piano chords. On *The Need to Follow*, Bennett's impressionistic clusters gradually gave way to a restrained wash of sound from her laptop as DBR's tone mutated from organic to defiantly electric.

And on the epic (and aptly titled) *Dark Loud Things*, the pair enveloped themselves in an eerie sampled fog that grew to an industrial cacophony before melting into silence.

Several pieces incorporated traditional Haitian rhythms - including the backing track for *The La La Song*, created by DBR using car keys, a knife and fork, a glass cup and his parents' bathtub.

Throughout the concert, DBR's rampant creativity was on sharp display, as was his passionate engagement with the music and its creative possibilities. He played - and spoke - as though the violin were an extension of himself, often breaking into wildly enthusiastic improvisations as he chatted to the audience between songs.

We heard a spontaneous snatch of *The Star-Spangled Banner*; a cleverly mangled *Waltzing Matilda*; and an imaginary national anthem for Navassa, an island off the coast of Haiti, which was bold, abstract and resolutely unhummmable - a friendly gesture, but unlikely to be adopted by the island's inhabitants any time soon.