

THE OUBYSSEY

DBR preaches the word

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND TURNTABLES at the PuSh Festival for the Performing Arts

by Jennifer Chromka

January 16, 2007

“What is the sound of you being alive?” asks Daniel Bernard Roumain in earnest from his apartment in Harlem, New York City.

Known simply as DBR, Roumain is a composer who’s made a career out of stretching music genres and blending them together onstage around the world. The result is a unique musical style, a postmodern take on classical music that makes references to hip-hop, rock and jazz.

“For me it’s wailing on a violin,” he said.

Roumain picked up the violin at five years old and hardly seems to have put it down since. He received his PhD in music composition and theory from the University of Michigan and has since collaborated with artists, such as DJ Spooky, Cassandra Wilson, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Philip Glass and Susan Sarandon (she was the narrator of a piece for which he played background music.)

This past week he made the trip from the East Coast to the west to perform with DJ Scientific as part of Vancouver’s PuSh International Performing Arts Festival on January 11th at the Chan Centre. The show was called *Sonata for Violin and Turntables*.

He claims that his music comes from the heart; indeed, it is stirring and complex. While his bow sweeps wildly up and down notes on his violin pouring out melodies, the assertive bass of hip hop brings it tightly together.

But not only is DBR a composer, he is a philosopher, a young artist on a path of self-actualisation. This night, with the TV blaring in the background, Roumain is revealing his convictions to a stranger on the other end of the phone.

“I’ve decided that I’m trying to be as cooperative a person that I can be,” he said. “I’ve had enough of conflict.”

“Sometimes the best way to lead is to follow,” which is also the title of a piece he just wrote. “And not just anyone—choose who you want to follow. That’s an act of leadership,” he emphasised.

“One of the big choices I’m wanting to make in my life is to be cooperative, to be part of something constructive.”

He is attempting to find meaning in small acts—from picking up a piece of litter off a sidewalk and pondering its lifetime, to paying attention to the candid acts of strangers that the rest of us ignore.

Sound a little cliché? Well for Roumain it all has meaning. “I went bowling the other night in Fort Lauderdale with my sister and it became about, not the game, but just being there with all of these people and watching them bowl,” he said. “Watching this nine-year-old boy with long, long, hair, bowling with his family. Watching how he got so happy when gutter ball after gutter ball, finally, he got one. To see his family react!”



“We’ve got to enjoy these moments. Bjork talks about this notion of love being everywhere.”

Admittedly from the iPod generation, Roumain is a pop-culture musical mastermind. With dreadlocks to his waist and a classical violin in hand, he looks the part.

His growing audiences are challenged by his unconventional fusion of classical and electronic music. With Roumain on acoustic violin and DJ Scientific on turntables and laptops, his music has the ability to open minds. “It’s not a matter of liking the music or not,” he said frankly, “It’s a matter of having an opinion about it.”

Before he goes he has one final bit of advice: “You don’t have to change the world,” he said with encouragement. “Just change your world and your world is everyone you’ll ever meet.”