



Daniel Bernard Roumain @ The Egg 1/22/10

By JOSEPH DALTON

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ALBANY – Daniel Bernard Roumain, also known as **DBR**, is a composer with ample classical chops, but he also knows how to improvise — and not just with notes. He turned his long-scheduled return to The Egg on Friday night into a benefit for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti, which is where his own family roots lie. His opening violin solo was a kind of theme and variations on the country's national anthem.

The musical heart of the program remained mostly in tact, a series of string quartets written in honor of civil rights leaders. During one lengthy movement, a striding tribute to Adam Clayton Powell and Harlem style, Roumain didn't have to read the vibe of the room to know that the crowd was down with the music. They'd started calling out their appreciation, as at a gospel service. Immediately Roumain brought the audience into the performance, leading them in finger snaps of increasing rhythmic complexity.

A few minutes further into the piece, a telephone rang out in the hall and Roumain halted the quartet. He'd warned us that something might happen during the piece, but a phone call?

Through the speaker system, Roumain conducted a conversation with two American friends who recently arrived in Haiti, asking them to describe in detail the situation and how they're getting by. If the musical program was curtailed for a while to make time for the dialogue, no one seemed to mind and members of the local Haitian community were allowed to ask a few questions.

Roumain's series of Civil Rights Portraits features five quartets and portions of four were performed. The music is post-minimal with most sections consisting of a perpetual rhythmic motion. Much of it might feel pretty stagnant when played by a traditional quartet, politely seated on stage. But Roumain's amplified band — the SQ Unit, he calls them — swayed their bodies, grinded their bows and made it all rather gritty and gripping. Their encore of free improvisation was full of daring and personality.

Roumain, 38, is one of the most prominent of the new generation of composers who don't hide offstage. He's a dynamic emcee and showman, who sometimes scratches the violin like it's a turntable. Also part preacher and music instructor, he brings a so-called classical concert to life like nobody else can. Cheers to The Egg for bringing him here regularly.

Joseph Dalton is a local freelance writer who contributes regularly to the Times Union.

MUSIC REVIEW

DBR and The Mission

When: 8 p.m. Friday

Where: The Egg, Albany

Duration: One hour, 45 minutes with no intermission

The crowd: About 450, with a rare mix of races and ages