

ZINK

MUSIC
ISSUE

November 2008



THE PERFECT SCORE

BLENDING HIP-HOP, ROCK, FUNK, CLASSICAL MUSIC AND AMERICAN HISTORY, COMPOSER DBR CHANGES THE SOUND OF MUSIC.

Don't let the waist-long dreadlocks or Harlem address fool you, Daniel Bernard Roumain (that's DBR to you...) — a classical composer and violinist who once worked for 2 Live Crew and dreams up conversations between Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin — is the anti-stereotype. Crafting his own unique innovations by blending hip-hop, rock, funk and classical music, Roumain whips up a range of music — from the slow and reflective to the rhythmically complex. The son of Haitian immigrants, he was drawn to the violin at the age of five while growing up in the small town of Margate, Florida. "At the time, both violin playing and Margate were a bit embarrassing," he says. "Violin playing was 'for girls,' and Margate just didn't have the prestige or allure of Fort Lauderdale or Miami. But as I have toured other places and met other people, I've come to realize how precious the violin and Margate are to me and everything I do every day." From the family record collection that included tunes by Stevie Wonder, The Eagles and Beethoven to the sounds of Cuban, Jamaican and Puerto Rican music that trickled in from surrounding communities, music played a large part in Roumain's multicultural upbringing.

Today, Roumain plays bandleader to the diverse ensemble he calls DBR & the Mission, who have banged drums, tickled ivories and strummed bass with him all over the country during the past four years. Aside from making DBR & the Mission's international debut at Australia's 2008 Adelaide Festival, Roumain will also premiere his debut solo album, *etudesAviolin&electronix*, during a worldwide tour with Elan Vytal (a.k.a. DJ Scientific). Deep and contemplative, his latest recordings showcase a unified dialogue with classical ambassadors like Philip Glass and Ryuichi Sakamoto. Lately, Roumain has found himself focusing on our country's

national identity. Spending his summer in Massachusetts, he visited legendary sites of battle, war and revolution, drawing comparisons to the Harlem Renaissance. Walking the grounds where "echoes of resistance, innovation, perseverance and creation converged" led Roumain to a better understanding of the poets and musicians who came before him and fought so hard for artistic and personal freedom.

Using these same methods of examination, he composed one of his most recent and innovative works, a quartet concerto called *Darwin's Meditation for The People of Lincoln*, which includes parts written for a chamber orchestra, a Haitian singer, an American actor and a solo piano and violin, all combined with projected images and words. Through the creation of fictionalized conversations between Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln, who were born within hours of each other on February 12, 1809, Roumain brings them back to life in honor of their bicentennial birthday. "They never met and by all accounts, never had a conversation," Roumain says. But that didn't stop him from imagining their first encounter. "The texts are drawn from the writings of Darwin, Lincoln and other historical documents, all culled together into an original play by Daniel Beaty. One of my favorite passages from the play is 'Four score and seven years ago, my heart began to break; and for a while, I did not know what it means to be free. In love, we are all slaves. And in love, our human hearts all long to be free.'"

The epitome of a true composer — restless, imaginative and passionate — Roumain admits that even if, by some miracle, he were given the chance to meet the extraordinary leading men of his orchestral event, he would still prefer to set their conversation to music. "I wouldn't say a word," he admits. "I would ask the both of them to allow me to sit back and listen to them." **KIRA COPLIN**