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# Musical multitasker

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Daniel Bernard Roumain coaches second-graders Monday at Hunter Elementary School in Raleigh as part of his artist in residence program in the area. He will play Saturday at Stewart Theatre on the N.C. State campus.

RALEIGH -- One of the most compelling and increasingly visible musicians redrawing the lines between classical and pop - and mixing in other art forms, as well - is in Raleigh for a two-week blur of street-level music tutorials.

Electric violinist Daniel Bernard Roumain - DBR, as he's known - is midway through an unusually intensive residency based at N.C. State University and Hunter Gifted & Talented Magnet Elementary School. On his agenda: working with band students, master classes, holding forth on stage with a local indie musician and an arts school dean, a workshop at a Durham violin store, meeting with teachers, playing a gig with Yo Mama's Big Fat Booty Band, and capping it all off with the performance of a complex piece the likes of which is rarely seen around here.

This from a guy whose résumé includes appearances on "American Idol" with Lady Gaga and in a PBS documentary; collaborations with hip-hop musicians DJ Scientific and DJ Spooky, composer Phillip Glass, choreographer Bill T. Jones and jazz singer Cassandra Wilson; and extensive touring and residencies, along with his teaching gig at Vanderbilt University.

"You wouldn't believe how he connects with the kids," said Mim Sichel, a mother of three who asked Roumain to spend time at Hunter and helped raise money to bring him. "He's giving them something that will stay with them."

On Wednesday, he was preparing to meet with a history seminar at NCSU to talk about Charles Darwin. It's a subject he knows because of the research he put into his composition "Darwin's Meditation for the People of Lincoln," which will be performed Saturday at the Stewart Theatre.

Roumain was shifting gears into higher education after spending the first part of the week with students at Hunter Elementary near downtown. "I'm sharing with them how a contemporary composer uses contemporary techniques to compose music," he said.

Roumain said he takes the residency role seriously: Too often it has fallen to artists to bring arts education to the schools. (Although Hunter is not a school that lags in the arts.) Roumain was particularly complimentary of NCSU's Center Stage program for its efforts to bring performers to local schools and the rest of the community.

"I think they are not only changing lives, but I have a feeling they are saving lives," Roumain said. "I think this is a moral question. There's probably a study somewhere that accurately tracked the relationship between lower arts offerings and the rise of school violence. Columbine and the lack of violins in our schools have a direct relationship."

Born to Haitian immigrants and raised in south Florida public schools, Roumain was exposed to many musical styles when he was young. He took to the violin early and stuck with music; after high school he worked with the rap group 2Live Crew.

## Playing unusual venues

He fell naturally into the movement that has developed over the past decade or so that has seen classically trained musicians playing different kinds of music in bars, coffeehouses, museums and other unusual venues. It's part of a general redefinition of musical genres, and it's being seen more frequently in the Triangle in outings such as this summer's concert with N.C. Symphony musicians and the indie band Lost in the Trees. (Roumain was to appear with lead singer-songwriter Ari Picker from that group at the Busy Bee Cafe in downtown Raleigh last Friday night.)

"As a classical composer, the very definition of my job has radically changed," he said. "One of the results of those changes, you are seeing more - quote-unquote - classical musicians in nontraditional places. I think it has to do with the fragmentation and dissemination of not only how we hear music but where we hear music, the accessibility of music."

Roumain is working on a restaging of the Orson Welles movie version of "Othello," which he said will be performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Detroit Symphony and eventually several other major orchestras.

The Darwin-Lincoln piece that he will perform Saturday is a 90-minute theatrical production that involves an orchestra, actor and director D.J. Mendel, Haitian star singer Emeline Michel and DBR. It has to do with Roumain's combining Darwin and Abraham Lincoln (they were born the same day, he discovered) and Haiti. The New York Times called it "overstuffed."

"But I don't think that's a bad thing that it is an overwhelming piece," he said. "That was my intention. How could you not be overwhelmed by the words and legacy of Lincoln and Darwin?"

This will be the eighth time an audience has seen the piece, and Roumain says so far the crowds have been enthusiastic. "Audiences appreciate the breadth and scope and size of it," he said. "They appreciate that the piece asks more questions than it answers. It's a full evening at the theater, listening to new music and looking at new ideas."

## History with Raleigh

Roumain first came to Raleigh in 2003 as a guest artist with NCSU's Raleigh Civic Chamber Orchestra. He returned twice last year with different bands to perform for Center Stage.

Sichel introduced herself to him on a whim after the February 2008 concert and asked him to come to Hunter. In October, he squeezed in a one-hour workshop that drew hundreds of parents and children. When Sichel and others at Hunter learned NCSU was bringing him back for a longer residency this year, they set out to bring him to the school for an extended stay.

He agreed to two student workshops, a teacher workshop, two full school assemblies, and at the last minute threw in a free concert with Hunter participants open only to families, held Thursday at Carnage Middle School.

"He has such a following and such believers in the parents at Hunter," said Mark Tulbert, Center Stage's associate director. "Once you see him in action, you realize he's fascinating."