

Sunday, March 29, 2026

Castle Of Our Skins: ICONS

Matthew Vera & Grant Houston, violins
Ashleigh Gordon, viola
Patrice Jackson, cello
Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR), electric violin
DJ Val-Inc, turntablist

String Quartet No. 1, "X" (1993)

Daniel Bernard Roumain

String Quartet No. 4, "Angelou" (2004)

Roumain

I. A Learned Conversation
II. Ravenous
III. Poem Won
IV. Table for One
V. I Wanted to be Appreciated
with DBR, electric violin, and DJ Val-Inc, turntablist

INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 2, "King" (2001)

Roumain

A. Hymnal-trance-dance
B. Seeds
C. Her
D. Life (fascination)
E. Lost

ISABELLA
STEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM

NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

Our longtime collaborators Castle of Our Skins perform a portrait concert of the violinist, composer, and musical firebrand Daniel Bernard Roumain. Roumain himself will play, along with the talented, eclectic “SoundChemist” and fellow Haitian Val-Inc. These two join the gifted string quartet of Castle of Our Skins: violinists Matthew Vera and Grant Houston, violist Ashleigh Gordon, and cellist Patrice Jackson. They will perform three of Roumain’s string quartets from his cycle of musical portraits of major Black figures. Roumain’s music thrillingly mixes classical American music, jazz, and hip-hop, all transformed through his own unique voice. This will be a memorable experience!

—George Steel, *Abrams Curator of Music*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

ICONS features three of Daniel Bernard Roumain’s five Civil Rights Portraits: a series of musical portraits dedicated to iconic figures from the civil rights era.

String Quartet No. 1, “X” (1993), composed when DBR was in his early 20s, combines Bartók-influenced motifs with a contemporary sense of funk. Having recently read Malcolm X’s famous autobiography, “I was moved to tears and rage and completely related to his struggles,” DBR said of the work’s creation. “I wanted this quartet to change my world.”

String Quartet No. 4, “Angelou” (2004), is the first of DBR’s quartets dedicated to a female civil rights icon. “Too often I think we tend to neglect the strong leadership roles black women have had in the civil rights movement,” DBR said. “Powerful though her words and poetry are, in this quartet, it is the wondrous timbre of the sound of her voice that forms the source material” for a series of electronic soundscapes.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR) is a Black, Haitian American composer, who sees composing as collaboration with artists, organizations, and communities within the farming and framing of ideas. He is a prolific and endlessly collaborative composer, performer, educator, and social entrepreneur. “About as omnivorous as a contemporary artist gets” (*The New York Times*), Roumain has worked with artists from J’Nai Bridges, Lady Gaga, and Philip Glass to Bill T. Jones, Marin Alsop, and Anna Deavere Smith.

Known for his signature violin sounds infused with myriad electronic and African American music influences, Roumain takes his genre-bending music beyond the proscenium. He is a composer of solo, chamber, orchestral, and operatic works, and has composed an array of film, theater, and dance scores. He has composed music for the acclaimed film *Ailey* (Sundance official selection); was the first music director and principal composer with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane

Company; released and appeared on 30 album recordings; and has published over 300 works. His latest project with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, *Forgiveness*, recorded with Albany Symphony, is out now on Bright Shiny Things records. He has appeared on CBS, ESPN, FOX, NBC, NPR, and PBS; and has been presented by and collaborated with the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Kennedy Center, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Sydney Opera House. He was artist-in-residence and creative chair at the Flynn Center in Burlington, VT. He was the first artistic ambassador with FirstWorks; the first artist activist-in-residence at Longy School of Music; and the first resident artistic catalyst with the New Jersey Symphony.

Roumain is an Atlantic Center Master Artist, a Creative Capital Grantee, and a Hermitage Artist Retreat Fellow. He has won the American Academy in Rome Goddard Lieberman Fellowship; a Civitella Ranieri Music Fellowship; two regional Emmy Awards for *The New Look of Classical Music: Boston Pops Orchestra* and *Art is Essential: New Jersey Symphony*; National Sawdust Disruptor Award; and the Sphinx Organization Arthur L. Johnson Memorial Series Award. He has been featured as a keynote speaker at universities, colleges, conservatories, and technology conferences, and was the first Arizona State University Gammage Residency artist. He has lectured at Yale and Princeton universities and was a Roth Distinguished Visiting Scholar at Dartmouth College. For over 20 years, he served as a board member for the Association of Performing Arts Professionals, most recently as vice chair; currently, he is a

board member for the League of American Orchestras and National Sawdust and is a voting member for the Recording Academy's GRAMMY® Awards.

A student of William Albright, Leslie Bassett, and William Bolcom, Roumain graduated from Vanderbilt University and earned his doctorate in music composition from the University of Michigan. He is currently a tenured associate and institute professor at ASU Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts.

Known for bringing "an endlessly curious and almost archaeological mind to our programming" (*The New York Times*), **Castle of our Skins** is a Black performing arts institution that centers Black arts, culture, and history in each curated event, musical selection, and artistic collaborator chosen. With its 11-season track record of creating multidisciplinary experiences, building collaborations, and promoting under-celebrated narratives, they are known as being "champions of Black artistry" (*The Strad*) with "ambitious hopes" that "seem right for a world that more often than not seems agonizingly divided" (*The Boston Globe*).

Co-founded in 2013 by two African American musicians who met while attending the New England Conservatory, Castle of our Skins has presented thought-provoking programs throughout Greater Boston and beyond at such venues as Hibernian Hall, the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts (Philadelphia), and Sheldonian Theatre (Oxford, England). Over the years, they

have partnered with diverse organizations ranging from the youth-focused Project STEP, Conservatory Lab Charter School, and the Boston Public Schools system; to cultural institutions including the Celebrity Series of Boston, Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the Museum of African American History; to national and international partners such as the Boulanger Initiative (Washington, DC) and Ensemble Recherche (Germany). Across all of their collaborations and programmatic efforts, they strive to reach new audiences—particularly those identifying from the African diaspora—while centering Black culture, arts, and community.

Committed to education—especially early intervention through music and the arts—they are proud to create culturally responsive workshops and curriculum guides for young learners, commission new works by Black composers for primary school music students, and lead multi-day college residencies around the country. In 2024, they released several publications through the newly created Music Inclusion Hub and Rising Tide Music Press in partnership with Boston Public Schools.

Fundamentally, they are storytellers—griots—who engage with a medium of art practices to highlight the multi-dimensionality of Black creativity. Within the Greater Boston classical music and arts scene, they are unrivaled in their dedication to program works by African diasporic composers in collaboration with other artistic disciplines—spoken word, visual arts, dance, multimedia, crafts, fashion design, etc. Their highly collaborative spirit and unwavering commitment to elevating

Black creativity are balanced by their long-standing curiosity in history and impactful storytelling. For more information, please visit: www.CastleSkins.org

Val Jeanty, also known as Val-Inc, is a GRAMMY® Award-winning Afro-Electronica composer, turntablist, and SoundChemist whose work bridges ancestral Haitian Vodou traditions with experimental electronic soundscapes. A professor at Berklee College of Music, Jeanty has performed at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and internationally at the Venice Biennale in Italy and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. A recipient of the 2024 United States Artists Fellowship, the 2019 NYSCA/Roulette Residency, and the 2022 CBA-National Sawdust Toulmin Fellowship, Jeanty continues to expand the frontiers of sonic expression while honoring her Haitian heritage.



UPCOMING PERFORMANCES:

PAUL GALBRAITH, GUITAR

Sunday, April 5

RANDALL GOOSBY, VIOLIN, WITH ZHU WANG, PIANO

Sunday, April 12

BOSTON CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Saturday, April 18, at 2 pm

IMANI WINDS

Sunday, April 19

BUTTER QUARTET

Sunday, April 26

ISATA KANNEH-MASON, PIANO

Sunday, May 10

RENAISSANCE STRING QUARTET

Sunday, May 17

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum resides on the homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe, who belong to this place and continue to regard these lands and waters as sacred.

Music at the Gardner is supported by Manitou Fund. The Museum thanks its generous concert donors: The Coogan Concert in memory of Peter Weston Coogan; Fitzpatrick Family Concert; James Lawrence Memorial Concert; Alford P. Rudnick Memorial Concert; David Scudder in memory of his wife, Marie Louise Scudder; Wendy Shattuck Young Artist Concert; and Willona Sinclair Memorial Concert. The piano is dedicated as the Alex d'Arbeloff Steinway. The harpsichord was generously donated by Dr. Robert Barstow in memory of Marion Huse, and its care is endowed in memory of Dr. Barstow by The Barstow Fund. Music at the Gardner is also supported in part by Barbara and Amos Hostetter, Joseph Mari, Sallie and Jim McGregor, Nicie and Jay Panetta, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Inc., and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which is supported by the state of Massachusetts and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Kindly turn off all electronic devices during the concert and refrain from any photography or filming in the hall. Also, please note the location of the emergency exit doors: across the hall from the doors through which you entered.