

BLIND HAITIAN VIOLINIST BURIED IN EARTHQUAKE IS SUSTAINED BY THE MUSIC HE LOVES

Of the many compelling survival stories to emerge from the devastating earthquake in Haiti this past January, that of violinist Romel Joseph, Executive Director of the New Victorian School in Port-au-Prince, *must* move and inspire any musician. Although buried in the rubble of his collapsed school for 18 hours with crushed legs and a shattered left hand, his hope and courage were sustained by reciting in his head all the music he'd performed and loved. Blinded by illness at age 5, Romel rose from rural poverty through his love of music and went on to study at the The Juilliard School on a Fulbright Grant. His is a story that epitomizes the power of classical music: the power to carry one from hope to light; to improve the quality of education and life for children across all income levels; to inspire and bring comfort to people who have had little to begin with in a country ravaged by hundreds of years of enslavement, revolution, and dictatorship and the worst natural disasters; and the power to help heal the spirit and ease the trauma of the unspeakable tragedy that occurred in Haiti.

Romel has said: "I came from nothing. One pair of socks. Holes in my shoes. You have to do what you can for others." So instead of focusing on a performing career, he founded The Victorian School in Haiti in 1991, now only a massive pile of rubble. It had already been rebuilt once before as The New Victorian School after a catastrophic fire exactly ten years to the day before the earthquake on January 12th. Romel is committed and determined to rebuild it yet again. He also established the Walenstein Music Organization in Miami. The mission of both institutions is to bring educational, musical and performance opportunities to children and adults in Port-au-Prince and South Florida. (You can learn more at: www.thenewvictorianschool.org and www.walensteinmusic.org) What Romel has dedicated his life to, and as Secretary of State Hilary Clinton reminded the attendees at the recent United Nations International Donors Conference for Haiti:

Haiti not only needs new school buildings, but it needs teachers and administrators. It needs the people of Haiti to be given the tools to be able to deliver on the promise of their own future.

Romel's story has already garnered some media attention. Among celebrated musicians, when he heard the story, Stevie Wonder generously gave Romel his own keyboards while Romel was still in a Miami hospital; and a doctor with a hobby of making violins who heard about Romel sent him a violin he'd made. But as time passes, other disasters have replaced Haiti among the concerns of many. Yet for the people of Haiti still living in tents amid the rubble that was their country, and for the children who have lost their parents and school, the quake is all too immediate and real.

Not only needed desperately are monetary donations towards rebuilding **The New Victorian School**, but there is an *especially* urgent need *right now* for books, paper, pens and pencils, computers, strings, reeds, sheet music, and instruments—all gone in the earthquake, so the surviving children can continue their education and find comfort in making music, and *not* focus on the trauma and loss in their young lives.

This is where musicians can really do their part for the children of Haiti.



Romel Joseph before he was injured in the quake



The New Victorian School before the quake



**NVS after the earthquake—
all that's left**

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HELP REBUILD THE NEW VICTORIAN SCHOOL

THREE WAYS TO DONATE



- 1) Secure online donations can be made through the Network for Good, a non-profit organization helping other non-profits to simplify contributions, anywhere, anytime – online by going to: <http://www.networkforgood.org>, or through the New Victorian School website: <http://www.thenewvictorianschool.org>
- 2) Checks should be made payable to **Walenstein Musical Organization, Inc.** (Mr. Joseph's Miami, Florida-based non-profit 501 (c)(3) foundation, earmarked **New Victorian School Reconstruction**, and mailed to:

Walenstein Musical Organization
ATTN: New Victorian School Reconstruction
2817 NW 168th Terrace
Miami Gardens, FL 33056

Tel. 786-380-4533



- 3) Urgently need material donations, such as school supplies: books, pens & pencils, papers, sheet music, strings and musical instruments, etc. should be mailed to:

The New Victorian School
c/o Victoria Joseph
18320 NE 8th Avenue
North Miami Beach, FL 33179

Cell: 786-258-5289

For more information or to arrange an interview with Romel Joseph, please contact Victoria Joseph via email at: Victoria@walensteinmusic.org, tel. 786-380-4533 or 786-258-5289; or Emily Raymer, Special Projects, JRI Recordings via email at: Emily@jrirecordings.com