



BRAVO!

by **Rick Woodall**
photography by **Andrew Morrell**

Roberto McCausland-Dieppa (81C) may have been blessed with “a good ear,” but the Colombian-born pianist is quick to admit that it takes more than talent to forge a successful career.

“Any type of music career that you have is a lot of work,” he said. “I think there’s talent and there are gifts – there’s all of that – but it takes a lot of work and education and, obviously, good luck.”

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Roberto McCausland-Dieppa

For Roberto, all of these factors have woven together to produce a career that spans continents and oceans, carrying him from America’s Carnegie Hall to the great performance halls of Europe. His audiences have ranged from small, intimate gatherings of music aficionados to a crowd numbering in the tens of thousands for an outdoor concert in Cleveland, Ohio, where he now resides. Regardless of the venue or the size of the audience, the excitement never wanes.

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Gift of music

From his earliest days in Barranquilla, Colombia, Roberto was exposed to a wide variety of music styles. Still a young boy when he first started experimenting at the keyboard, he quickly developed an affinity for that particular form of musical expression.

“For me, it was natural,” he stated. “It was something that I loved and I wanted to do.”

Playing mostly by ear, Roberto steadily grew in skill and ability. As a teenager, he composed his first orchestral work, a symphonic suite incorporating Latin

American instruments and a choir. His efforts, aided by a handful of more experienced musicians, drew the attention of the public and the press in his native Colombia and cemented his ambition to build a career as a musician.

“That was really the first time that I did something larger than just a few people here and there,” he said, recalling a crowd of 1,000 or more. “It was very, very exciting. It took a long time, and it was a lot of work.”

“At that point I thought, ‘This is really, really what I want to do.’”

Forging his skills

While his talent was undeniable, Roberto yearned to broaden his repertoire and learn more about theory and other aspects of music. His opportunity came at Berry, where for the first time burgeoning talent was combined with formal training.

Roberto, who previously had attended musical camps in the Southeastern U.S., learned about Berry through a friend. Despite the inherent challenges (he could speak English but had trouble writing it), he immediately recognized the potential that the small Georgia college represented.

“It seemed like a perfect place for me,” he

said. “Not only was it beautiful, but it seemed educationally outstanding. It just seemed a very healthy opportunity for learning and for the different things that I wanted to do.”

Roberto still raves about the quality of the Berry faculty and their willingness to make themselves available to him. He needed a place where he could devote himself to his craft and focus his talents, and Berry suited those needs.

“It was a wonderful learning atmosphere,” he said. “You never felt that your questions were unanswered. You could go as far as you wanted in whatever area you wanted, whether it was music theory, piano performance or some other form of expression.”

Spanning the globe

Building on his Berry experience, Roberto has found success in a variety of different arenas, literally and figuratively.

A successful performer who has been praised for his keyboard mastery by none other than the New York Times, he also received the Merrill Lynch Prize in teaching and piano while serving on the faculty of The School of Fine Arts in Cleveland. His performance schedule, which can include as



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many as 25 solo concerts a year, has carried him to Latin America, Japan, India, the United Kingdom and Australia, in addition to numerous cities across Europe and the United States.

Though all venues leave an impression, Roberto especially enjoys playing in the concert halls of Europe. When he takes the stage in these venues – many of which date

back to the time of Beethoven and Brahms – he is keenly aware that history surrounds him.

“Performing in these places and experiencing the halls as they may have existed in centuries past certainly brings a whole different perspective to what you do,” he explained. “All of these performances and programs have been thrilling.”

Much like his travel schedule, Roberto’s

musical tastes have an international flair. Ironically, this Colombian-born musician who is now a naturalized American counts among his favorite composers Ferenc Liszt and Bela Bartok of Hungary. His reputation for performing their works is such that he has been recognized with the Award Pro-Arte Patria by the Hungarian Ministry of Culture. He also was invited to take part in a recent celebration at the United Nations marking the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. Among those in attendance was former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

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Keeping it fresh

As his career has progressed, Roberto has embraced a multitude of outlets for his creative talents. In addition to performing on stage, Roberto also enjoys composing and arranging music. He has recorded a number of CDs showcasing his work and recently released an educational compilation for children, *Beethoven for Kids*.

When asked what he likes best, Roberto answered, “I think I enjoy all of it. I don’t know what it would be to do one instead of the other, but I haven’t tried it yet. It’s all different. Each requires different types of preparation, but they complement each other.”

Regardless of how he chooses to express his talents, Roberto is inspired by the act of communication that music represents. In the marriage of his hands and the keyboard, he sees manifested the theory that all human communication evolved from sign language.

“It’s performance art, so it’s never twice the same,” he noted. “You have to keep that in mind, and that makes it difficult. It’s a challenge; it’s never quite exactly as you want it to be. And you’re always getting better, hopefully. It’s from the heart, and it’s cerebral as well. It involves all these aspects, and they keep you going.” **B**