

Dissonant sounds compete

Street musician goes classical at rock-heavy HampdenFest

BY LARRY PERL

It was no surprise that the Oranges Band was rocking out on one of three stages at HampdenFest, an annual magnet for local bands.

The big surprise was barely a block away, where Gabe Donnay, 17, stood alone outside Cafe Hon, playing classical music on his violin and mentally tuning out the rock music up the street.

Donnay, of Roland Park, is a senior at Gilman School and studies music at Johns Hopkins University's Peabody Institute. He hopes to attend the New England Conservatory of Music next year.

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Gabe Donnay,
Roland Park resident and street musician



PHOTO BY KARALINE JACKSON OF GILMAN SCHOOL

front of an audience," he said.

But Donnay is a practiced street musician and has applied for a Baltimore City street performer's license.

He also plays private parties, and he has business cards that announce his services not only as a violinist but as a vocalist, bassist, guitarist, pianist and mandolinist.

Passersby threw dollar bills into the open violin case that lay at Donnay's feet Sept. 15, as he stood in the street late on a Saturday afternoon, wearing shorts and a T-shirt, reading sheet music on a stand and playing "A Chant from the Bulgarian Suite" by Pantcho Vladigerov.

"I've been here a half-hour, and I've got a pocketful of cash," he said, quickly adding, "I usually

Amid the din of rock music, Gabe Donnay, 17, played classical violin at HampdenFest. "I basically get to practice in front of an audience," said Donnay, a Gilman School student and Roland Park resident.

don't count it 'til I'm finished. It keeps me motivated."

At Artscape 2007, he played for eight hours over two days and made more than \$500, he said.

Donnay is also catching the eyes of people like Denise Whiting, the owner of Cafe Hon.

Whiting said she doesn't know Donnay and didn't know he would be playing outside her restaurant, but that he made a positive impression on her.

"He can play (there) anytime," she said.

There are more perks than just money for Donnay.

Playing at the city's various festivals "gets me a lot of places I wouldn't go," Donnay said. "I've seen all sides of Baltimore."

But money is the main thing, which is why he forced himself to concentrate and not get distracted by the Oranges Band.

Asked if he likes rock music, he said, "I love it, but I have to make a dollar."

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