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Salute to Entrepreneurs 2013

CutTime Productions LLC, Detroit

Winner: Social Entrepreneur

By [Amy Haimerl](#)



Rick Robinson: The former DSO member formed CutTime Productions LLC.

Rick Robinson is bringing classical music to the masses -- which may be one of the most challenging jobs in all of music.

The former **Detroit Symphony Orchestra** bassist has loved classical music all his life, and it frustrated him that the genre struggled to find new fans. He couldn't understand why the sounds that moved him so deeply should be cooped up in grand concert halls and churches, inaccessible to new audiences.

"I grew up in a musical family going back five generations," Robinson said. "My mother played piano when she got home from work to relax; my older brother and sister played and had so much fun that I couldn't wait to grow up and study music in school. I just started hearing the wealth of beautiful music and how it took me on adventures. It comforts us with a sense of inevitability, and it's that kind of contrast that I want to share with as many people as possible."

So Robinson formed **CutTime Players** in 1995, an eight-piece ensemble of DSO musicians who could take symphonic music out into the nightlife. He started by transcribing and adapting classical works for the group and then began writing his own original works that blend classical with urban pop. It was just a side gig, keeping him busy when he wasn't at the DSO.

But when the symphony went on strike in 2010, Robinson was able to turn his attention to the company, **CutTime Productions LLC**, more consistently. He launched a Detroit chapter of the "Classical Revolution" movement and began a monthly revue of artists at Detroit area restaurants and coffeehouses. At the gatherings, they would perform and explore the nature of classical music and what makes it classical.

"We're really in the inspiration business," Robinson said. "It's how we set the context for this musical style that inspires people as much as the music. People are very surprised to see a black man advocating and explaining classical music."

In 2011, he faced a serious rethinking of his life. His father passed away, and it gave Robinson the courage to jump into entrepreneurship full time. He now writes and arranges tours and records, organizes classes and works with various nonprofits. For example, he'll be playing New Center Park on Thursdays, June through August, for **Midtown Detroit Inc.**

"The industry really needs new ideas and new ways to reach new audiences," Robinson said. "I can work as a guest artist or consultant or publishing my arrangements and compositions to help the industry at the same time as make a living."

Business has been steady, but the life of a musician is never a windfall. In 2012, CutTime posted revenue of \$20,000, up from \$15,000 in 2011.

Eventually Robinson would like to grow enough to hire a few employees -- "I need an agent and PR person," he said jokingly, "and I'm certainly a better artist than accountant" -- because he spends two-thirds of his time traveling. In the future, he'd like to be stable and able to work consistently in Detroit and Chicago.



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