# NATHANIEL AYERS and STEVE LOPEZ

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This still shot—from a *60 Minutes*' segment entitled "Mr. Lopez Meets Mr. Ayers"—depicts the two friends in 2009 (four years after they first met). Steve Lopez, who works for the *LA Times*, wrote a series of stories about Nathaniel Ayers in his "Points West" column. Those articles were later the basis for his book, *The Soloist*. Copyright, CBS, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

Before he played a violin with two broken strings, at Pershing Square in Los Angeles, Nathaniel Anthony Ayers was a teenager who played the double bass in Cleveland. At the time, he demonstrated great talent and no signs of mental illness.

His mother, Dorothy, was a beautician; his father ultimately left the family with another woman. Mrs. Ayers raised her daughters (Jennifer and Delsenia) and her son (whom the family called "Tony") to believe in themselves and to be respectful of others. Years later, despite the devastating illness which interfered with Nathaniel's life, he still reflects his Mother's positive influence.

Harry Barnoff, Nathaniel's mentor at the Cleveland Music School Settlement, tells us about his protégé's talent (and about his early approach to honing skills). Though initially unfocused, the young double bass player was able to perform well even when he ignored assignments and skipped practice.

Barnoff (a Juilliard-educated bassist with the Cleveland Orchestra) urged Ayers (who was born on the 22nd of January, 1951) to recognize and develop his gift. His faith in the young man helped Nathaniel to get serious about his goals—like performing in a world-class orchestra, just like Barnoff. Talent, said Harry, wasn't good enough:

> *You've got to make music your life. You've got to practice, practice, practice.* (Steve Lopez, *The Soloist*, page 18.)

Nathaniel took his teacher's advice. While his city erupted in riots, during the 1960s, he worked on his music at the Settlement School. After he won a scholarship to Ohio University, Nathaniel told Barnoff he wanted to emulate his mentor's career in another respect—to become a Juilliard student.

Flying to New York, for an audition at the famed school, Nathaniel achieved the ultimate prize: A Julliard scholarship. He was on his way to an exciting career in music.

Thirty years later ... Nathaniel met Steve Lopez. By the time he became friends with the distinguished journalist (who'd once worked for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Time Magazine* and other publishers), the musician's career had taken a drastically different turn.

Had Lopez not passed by Pershing Square, that day in early 2005, maybe no one outside the environs of LA's skid-row would have learned about Nathaniel Ayers and his musical gifts. What Lopez reported, however, was a much different picture than the scene of conservatory music in which "Nate" thrived, during the early 1970s.

Back then, the elite world of top-performing musicians was open to this young member of Juilliard's concert orchestra. Until ... he got sick.


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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/NATHANIEL-AYERS-and-STEVE-LOPEZ-The-Soloist

## Media Stream

### Nathaniel Ayers - Plays Double Bass

Photo by AndrewKepert, online via Wikipedia.

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### Jennifer Ayers-Moore and Floria's Beauty Salon

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### Nathaniel Ayers - Cleveland School

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### Nathaniel Ayers - Student at Ohio University

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### The Soloist - Nathaniel Ayers Meets Steve Lopez

Image online, courtesy CBS' *60 Minutes*.

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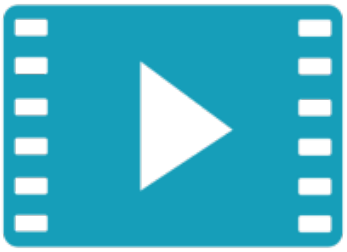

### Cleveland Riots, 1966 - Hough Neighborhood

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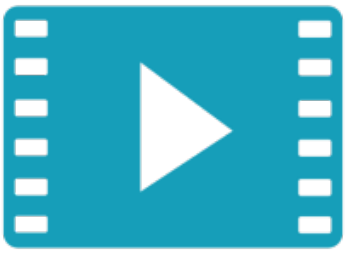

Nathaniel Ayers - Double Bass Player

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