



P R E S E N T S

Harlem Quartet



Photo: Amy Schroeder

Ilmar Gavilán, *violin*

Melissa White, *violin*

Jaime Amador, *viola*

Felix Umansky, *cello*

Sunday, November 10, 2019
3:00 p.m.

John H. Williams Theatre
Tulsa Performing Arts Center

The Harlem Quartet's concert weekend and Any Given Child performances are underwritten by
The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
with additional assistance from TD Williamson, the Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation, and SemGroup.

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Harlem Quartet

New York-based Harlem Quartet, currently serving a three-year residency at London's Royal College of Music, has been praised for its "panache" by *The New York Times* and hailed in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* for "bringing a new attitude to classical music, one that is fresh, bracing and intelligent." It has also won plaudits from such veteran musicians as Grammy-winning woodwind virtuoso Ted Nash of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, who declared in a May 2018 *Playbill* article, "Harlem Quartet is one of the greatest string quartets I have ever heard. They can play anything." Since its public debut at Carnegie Hall in 2006, the ensemble has thrilled audiences and students in 47 states as well as in the U.K., France, Belgium, Brazil, Panama, Canada, Venezuela, Japan, and South Africa.

Harlem Quartet has three distinctive characteristics: diverse programming that combines music from the standard string quartet canon with jazz, Latin, and contemporary works; a collaborative approach to performance that is continually broadening the ensemble's repertoire and audience reach through artistic partnerships with other musicians from the classical and jazz worlds; and an ongoing commitment to residency activity and other forms of educational outreach.

The quartet's mission is to advance diversity in classical music, engaging young and new audiences through the discovery and presentation of varied repertoire that includes works by minority composers. Passion for this work has made the quartet a leading ensemble in both educational and community engagement activities. In this capacity, the quartet has written several successful grants, including a Cultural Connections Artist-in-Residence grant from James Madison University and a 2016 Guarneri String Quartet grant from Chamber Music America; the latter allowed the quartet to participate in an extended performance and educational residency in Mobile, Alabama that included a close partnership with the Mobile Symphony Orchestra. In the 2017-18 season Harlem Quartet undertook a week of residency activities with the Santa Fe Youth Symphony. And since 2015, it has led an annual workshop at Music Mountain in Falls Village, Connecticut, culminating in a concert at that venue.

In addition to performing a varied menu of string quartet literature across the country and around the world, Harlem Quartet has collaborated with such distinguished artists as classical pianists Michael Brown, Awadagin Pratt, Misha Dichter, and Fei-Fei; jazz pianists Chick Corea and Aldo López-Gavilán; violist Ida Kavafian; cellist Carter Brey; clarinetists Paquito D'Rivera, Eddie Daniels, Anthony McGill, and David Shifrin; saxophonist Tim Garland; jazz legends Ted Nash, Gary Burton, Stanley Clarke, and John Patitucci; the Shanghai Quartet; and Imani Winds.

Alongside its regular activities as a chamber ensemble, Harlem Quartet performs a variety of works written for solo string quartet and orchestra. In 2012, with the Chicago Sinfonietta under Music Director Mei-Ann Chen, the quartet gave the world premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* as arranged for string quartet and orchestra by Randall Craig Fleischer. It reprised its performance of that score with the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra under Fleischer's direction, and again with the Santa Fe Concert Association. Chicago Sinfonietta and the quartet recorded the *West Side Story* arrangement, along with works for string quartet and orchestra by Michael Abels and Benjamin Lees, for the Cedille Records release *Delights and Dances*.

Harlem Quartet has been featured on WNBC, CNN, NBC's *Today Show*, WQXR-FM, and the *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, and it performed in 2009 for President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House. The quartet made its European debut in October 2009, performing at the residence of the U.S. ambassador to the U.K., and returned to Europe as guest artists and faculty members of the Musica Mundi International Festival in Belgium. In early 2011, the ensemble was featured at the Panama Jazz Festival in Panama City.

The quartet's recording career began in 2007 when White Pine Music issued *Take the "A" Train*, a release featuring the string quartet version of that jazz standard by Billy Strayhorn; the CD was highlighted that year in the November issue of *Strings* magazine. A second CD, featuring three string quartets by Walter Piston, was released in 2010 by Naxos. The quartet's third recording, released in 2011, is a collaboration with pianist Awadagin Pratt and showcases works by American composer Judith Lang Zaimont. More recently the quartet collaborated with jazz pianist Chick Corea in a Grammy-winning *Hot House* album that included Corea's "Mozart Goes Dancing," which won a separate Grammy as Best Instrumental Composition. Its latest jazz album, recorded with the Eddie Daniels Quartet and released in June 2018 on Resonance Records, is *Heart of Brazil: A Tribute to Egberto Gismonti*.

Harlem Quartet was founded in 2006 by The Sphinx Organization, a national nonprofit dedicated to building diversity in classical music and providing access to music education in underserved communities. In 2013 the quartet completed its third and final year in the Professional String Quartet Training Program at New England Conservatory, under the tutelage of Paul Katz, Donald Weilerstein, Kim Kashkashian, Miriam Fried, and Martha Katz. The quartet is represented worldwide by Sciolino Artist Management, www.samnyc.us. For more information on the group and its activities, visit harlemquartet.com.

Program

Three Rags for String Quartet

William Bolcom
(American, born 1938)

Poltergeist
Graceful Ghost
Incineratorag

String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10

Claude Debussy
(French, 1862-1918)

Animé et très décidé (“Animated and very deliberately”)
Assez vif et bien rythmé (“Quite lively and well-paced”)
Andantino, doucement expressif (“At a bit of a walking pace, gently expressive”)
Très modéré – Très mouvementé et avec passion (“Very moderately – Very lively and passionately”)

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Cuarteto en Guaguancó

Guido Lopez-Gavilán
(Cuban, born 1944)

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67

Johannes Brahms
(German, 1833–1897)

Vivace (“Sprightly”)
Andante (“At a walking pace”)
Agitato; Allegretto non troppo (“Agitated; Not too quickly”)
Poco allegretto con variazioni (“Moderately quick, with variations”)

We ask that the audience please hold their applause until after the last movement of each work.

Today's concert is preceded by a lecture by Dr. Jason Heilman, host of Classical Tulsa on 88.7 KWTU.

Chamber Music Tulsa's concerts and educational outreaches are presented with the assistance of
the Oklahoma Arts Council and Arts Alliance Tulsa.



About the Program

by Jason S. Heilman, Ph.D., © 2019

William Bolcom

Born May 26, 1938, in Seattle, Washington, U.S.A.

Three Rags for String Quartet

Composed in 1970 and 1989; 12 minutes

Though he has written nine symphonies, 12 string quartets, and seven stage works, American composer William Bolcom is perhaps best known for his modern piano rags, which stand in contrast to the more avant-garde music he wrote early in his career. The popularity of these rags, in turn, helped to push Bolcom towards a more accessible and eclectic musical style, one that continues to blur the boundaries between popular and classical music. Born in Seattle, Bolcom showed talent early on; at age 11, he began taking piano and composition lessons at the University of Washington, earning his bachelor's degree there in 1958. Bolcom then studied with French composer Darius Milhaud at Mills College, before going on to receive the first Doctor of Music degree ever granted by Stanford University. Bolcom's musical career has since unfolded across two parallel tracks: he continued performing as a pianist, releasing more than 40 albums, and, in 1973, he began teaching composition at the University of Michigan, retiring 35 years later as Ross Lee Finney Distinguished University Professor. In 1988, Bolcom won the Pulitzer Prize in Music for his *Twelve New Etudes for Piano*, and, in 2006, his song cycle, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, won three Grammy awards. That same year, he was honored with the National Medal of Arts, and he was named Composer of the Year by *Musical America* in 2007.

Named for its syncopated or “ragged” rhythms, ragtime was a dominant force in American music around the turn of the twentieth century. Originating with rhythmically free interpretations of Sousa-style marches, ragtime reached its zenith with Scott Joplin (1868–1917), whose “Maple Leaf Rag” alone sold over a million copies of sheet music. After World War I, audiences began to move on, but ragtime experienced a mini-boom in popularity starting in 1968, prompted by a best-selling recording of rags by pianist Joshua Rifkin and a set of Joplin centennial commemorations by the New York Public Library, Morehouse College, and the New England Conservatory. (The ragtime-infused soundtrack to the 1973 film *The Sting* was a subsequent manifestation of this same trend.) Bolcom, recently graduated from Stanford, was at the forefront of this movement, and between 1967 and 1973, he composed more than 20 original rags for solo piano. In 1989, at the request of his friend Emanuel Borok, then concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Bolcom arranged three of these rags for string quartet: the bouncing “Poltergeist,” the lyrical and introspective “Graceful Ghost,” and the vibrant “Incineratorag.”

Claude Debussy

Born August 22, 1862, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France
Died March 25, 1918, in Paris

String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10

Composed in 1893; 25 minutes

By the late 1880s, when Claude Debussy’s musical career was just getting started, French music was at a crossroads. The composers of the previous generation, including Gabriel Fauré, Vincent d’Indy, and the Belgian César Franck, had all fallen under the spell of Richard Wagner, and their compositions imitated Wagner’s sumptuous instrumental textures and seemingly endless melodies. Debussy, however, had mixed feelings about Wagner: he famously dismissed Wagner’s distinctive musical style as “a beautiful sunset mistaken for a dawn,” yet he still grudgingly admired Wagner’s operas, having made his own pilgrimage to the late composer’s musical shrine in Bayreuth in 1888. Certainly, Debussy aspired to the same musical freedom Wagner enjoyed; he just wanted it on his own terms – and free from Germanic influence.

Instead of German hegemony, Debussy looked for inspiration in more exotic sounds. Before completing his studies at the Paris Conservatoire in 1883, Debussy spent three summers as the household pianist for Madame Nadezhda von Meck, who would later become famous as Tchaikovsky’s mysterious benefactor. This exposed Debussy to the folk-inspired music of Russian nationalist composers such as Alexander Borodin and Modest Mussorgsky. Years later, a visit to the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris introduced Debussy to gamelan, a style of pitched percussion music from the Indonesian island of Java. The unique tonality and trancelike rhythms of gamelan would exert a profound influence on Debussy’s harmonic language throughout the course of his career. At the same time, Debussy took a brief interest in medieval and Renaissance church music, and particularly the types of scales used in these pieces before the rise of major and minor keys. All of these disparate influences – Russian nationalism, Javanese gamelan, and medieval chant, plus Wagnerism filtered through Fauré and Franck – came together in Debussy’s most important early chamber composition: his only String Quartet.

Debussy cast his quartet rather conventionally in four movements, with the first (*animé et très decide*) beginning not exactly in the indicated key of G minor, but more specifically in the closely related medieval church mode of G Phrygian, creating an exotic yet ancient tonal color right from the outset. The opening theme of this movement is particularly significant: its basic building blocks will be heard in other movements of the quartet. The second movement (*assez vif et bien rythmé*) functions as a muted scherzo; its *pizzicato* effects, which have an almost rustic air, speak to Debussy’s Russian influence, while the unusual harmonies reflect his exposure to gamelan. The

expressively plaintive theme of the *andantino* third movement recalls the D-minor Symphony of César Franck, whose cyclical compositions influenced the structural layout of this quartet. According to Debussy's letters, it was the last movement that gave him the most trouble. It begins with a moderately paced introduction (*très modéré*), which feels at times almost like an operatic recitative, but soon accelerates into a tensely imitative main section (*très mouvementé*) that culminates with a triumphant reference to the Phrygian theme from the opening movement, ending Debussy's string quartet where it began.

Guido López-Gavilán

Born January 3, 1944, in Matanzas, Cuba

Cuarteto en Guaguancó

Composed in 1983 and 2016; 7 minutes

The colorful music of Cuban composer, conductor, and educator Guido López-Gavilán del Rosario is a reflection of the cultural diversity of his native country, blending influences from Africa and Latin America with the European classical tradition. Born in the port city of Matanzas, one of the main centers of Afro-Cuban culture, López-Gavilán came to music as a teenager, but went on to train to be a choral conductor at the Amadeo Roldán Conservatory in Havana. After studying orchestral conducting at Moscow's Tchaikovsky Conservatory in the early 1970s, López-Gavilán returned to Cuba, where he has served as a guest conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra and the director of the orchestra of the University of Arts and, later, the Amadeo Roldán Symphony Orchestra. He had composed throughout his career, but by the 1980s, composition became an increasingly important part of his professional life. Since then, López-Gavilán has written more than a hundred chamber, orchestra, and vocal works. In 2015, he was honored with Cuba's National Music Prize.

From the sixteenth century until 1886, more than a million West Africans were brought to Cuba as slaves for the island's sugar cane plantations. Today, nearly a quarter of all Cubans claim at least some African ancestry, and African traditions have had a profound influence on Cuban culture, giving rise to, among other things, its distinctive musical genres like the *danzón* and rumba. Originating in the Matanzas region, the *guaguancó* is a subgenre of the rumba, marked by a distinctive rhythmic pattern played by a battery of percussion instruments, anchored by the claves and conga drums. Over time, this rhythm gave rise to a sexually suggestive couples dance that remains popular to this day. Inspired by the *guaguancó* rhythms and their cultural legacy, López-Gavilán composed his brief *Camerata en Guaguancó* for string orchestra in 1983, and the piece quickly became one of his most popular works. In 2016, the piece was arranged as the *Cuarteto en Guaguancó* for the Harlem Quartet, which includes the composer's son, Ilmar Gavilán, on violin.

Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67

Composed in 1875; 36 minutes

Anyone who composed instrumental music in the second half of the nineteenth century had to answer one all-important question: how do you follow Ludwig van Beethoven? This problem was particularly vexing for a young Johannes Brahms, who, more than any of his contemporaries, treated the Viennese classical tradition with a special reverence. The fact that Brahms had been named by Robert Schumann as Beethoven's greatest successor at a relatively early age only served to compound this pressure, as did Brahms's move to Vienna in the 1860s. Publicly, Brahms seemed to be avoiding the genres in which Beethoven excelled – namely, the symphony and the string quartet – to instead focus on orchestral serenades, string sextets, piano quartets, and a groundbreaking piano quintet. But privately, Brahms had been working on both his First Symphony and his First String Quartet for nearly two decades, composing and discarding draft after draft when they failed to measure up to his idol. In one particularly candid moment, he told a colleague, “you have no idea what it is like to always hear the footsteps of a giant marching behind you.”

The successful premiere of his *German Requiem* in 1869 finally supplied the impetus Brahms needed to break his creative stalemate. Four years later, in 1873, he completed and premiered not one but two string quartets, and the premiere of his First Symphony seemed imminent. But then Brahms decided to procrastinate: during the summer of 1875, while he was vacationing in the German countryside near Heidelberg, he set his symphony aside and started sketching out another string quartet – a relatively lighthearted work that stands in marked contrast to the turbulent and dramatic First Symphony. In fact, Brahms's Third String Quartet came together so quickly that summer that the composer was somewhat dismissive of his own efforts, describing it at one point as “a useless trifle.” His friends would not be so cavalier: violinist Joseph Joachim, who played the quartet's 1876 premiere, just a week before the premiere of Brahms's First Symphony, told the composer that he had “scarcely written any more beautiful chamber music,” singling out the third and fourth movements for special praise. And Clara Schumann summed up the piece succinctly as “too delightful for words.”

Set in the key of B-flat major, Brahms's Third String Quartet opens with a *vivace* first movement that immediately establishes a light, almost rustic tone. The opening melody has the galloping rhythm and leaping lines that have long been associated with hunting imagery, and here Brahms must have been making a deliberate allusion to the 1784 “Hunt” Quartet by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, which was also in the key of B-flat major. This music soon slows down to introduce a contrasting theme, resembling

a German peasant dance, and these two moods alternate throughout the movement. The *andante* second movement, with its deceptively simple melody in the first violin, projects a mood of quiet nostalgia, which is only briefly interrupted by a central interlude. In the *allegretto non troppo* third movement, Brahms asks the two violins and cello to use their mutes, allowing the viola to take the

lead in an agitated yet flowing scherzo with a subtly differentiated central trio section. The finale opens with a gentle *poco allegretto* theme that gets developed over a series of eight variations of markedly different characters. The last two variations bring back motives from the first movement, giving the quartet a sense of cohesion before the abrupt coda.

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