

Presents

The Harlem Quartet



Sunday, October 12, 2025, at 3:00 PM
Sweeney Concert Hall / Sage Hall
Smith College, Northampton, MA

The Harlem Quartet

Ilmar Gavilán and Melissa White, violins
Jaime Amador, viola, and Felix Umansky, cello

Program

Echoes of Inspiration

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5 (1798)

- I. Allegro
- II. Menuetto
- III. Andante Cantabile (Theme and Variations)
- IV. Allegro assai

Guido López Gavilán (b. 1944)

Cuarteto en Guaguancó

Intermission

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)

Entr'acte (2011)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

String Quartet No. 2 in C major, Op. 36 (1945)

- I. Allegro calmo senza rigore
- II. Vivace
- III. Chacony: Sostenuto

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About Today's Concert

John Montanari, Artistic Director

The Harlem Quartet, making their third Valley Classical Concerts appearance, have a typically varied and lively program for us this afternoon.

Beethoven's Six Quartets, Op. 18, were composed between 1798 and 1800, and published in 1801. This was sixteen years after the publication of Mozart's Six Quartets, Op. 10, bearing a dedication to Joseph Haydn. (Digression: Did you know that some of Mozart's works have opus numbers in addition to the usual K. or Köchel numbers?) I bring this up because the Beethoven Quartet in A Major that opens today's program was closely modeled on the Mozart Quartet in the same key from the Haydn set, about which Beethoven was quoted saying to his pupil Carl Czerny, "That's what I call a work!"

Guido López-Gavilán is a Cuban musician, composer, arranger, and conductor – and the father of the Harlem Quartet's first violinist, Ilmar Gavilán. To quote from his online bio: "López-Gavilán has received awards in the most important composition competitions held in Cuba, and as a conductor has achieved extraordinary success and received recognition from international critics for outstanding performances in Latin America and Europe. He has also been invited as a guest speaker to many important festivals and musical events at various prestigious universities. In 2005 he was awarded the UNESCO Medal in Chile. He has also made an outstanding contribution to the development of the Cuban Youth Orchestra Movement, is the President of the Havana Festival and Chairman of the Orchestral Conducting Department at the Instituto Superior de Arte.

Guido López-Gavilán's style of composition incorporates rhythms from Cuban popular music, polytonality, unconventional sound resources and fine lyricism. His music ranges from humorous and joyful compositions to solemn and dramatic works.

About Today's Concert (cont.)

He is one of the most popular musicians of his generation, not only among musicians but with the rest of the Cuban people, who know his melodies such as “A Memory,” the “Cumbanchero Variations” or “Camerata en Guaguancó.” That last term, seen also in the title today’s “Cuarteto en Guaguancó,” refers to a flirtatious dance accompanied by a variation of the Afro-Cuban rumba rhythm – in fact, a UNESCO World Heritage dance which you can learn to do on YouTube!

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Music (the youngest recipient ever) in 2013 for her “Partita for Eight Voices,” Caroline Shaw maintains an active career as singer, violinist and composer of works which, to quote from her website, “(try) to imagine a world of sound that has never been heard before but has always existed.

Again from her website: “‘Entr’acte’ was written in 2011 after hearing the Brentano Quartet play Haydn’s Op. 77 No. 2 — with their spare and soulful shift to the D-flat major trio in the minuet. It is structured like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further. I love the way some music (like the minuets of Op. 77) suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice’s looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition.”

Benjamin Britten’s Quartet No. 2 was composed in 1945, following the extremely successful premiere of his opera *Peter Grimes*. The Quartet was first performed on a concert commemorating the 250th anniversary of the death of the great British composer Henry Purcell.

In homage to Purcell, Britten concluded the Quartet with a movement which he named “Chacony” after one of Purcell’s more familiar instrumental works. You might be more familiar with the French spelling “chaconne” (cf. Bach’s Chaconne for solo violin), referring to a set of variations on a repeated harmonic pattern or bass line – which is exactly what we get in this magnificent finale to a satisfying afternoon of great music.

Artist Information

The Harlem Quartet

The Grammy-winning Harlem Quartet, featuring Ilmar Gavilán, Melissa White, Jaime Amador, and Felix Umansky, has earned acclaim for its dynamic performances and fresh approach to classical music. The New York Times praised their “panache,” while the Cincinnati Enquirer lauded their “new attitude to classical music.” Grammy-winning woodwind virtuoso Ted Nash of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra has been quoted saying, “The Harlem Quartet is one of the greatest string quartets I have ever heard. They can play anything.”

This ensemble has performed in 47 states and four continents, has been featured on numerous national television spots like the Today Show and News Hour, and has even performed for first lady Michelle Obama at the White House. They are most well-known for their innovative programming, both through their own work and collaborations, which seamlessly mixes classical repertoire with jazz and Latin. They also present contemporary works by composers from underrepresented backgrounds, championing diversity in classical music to their core. Equally dedicated to education, The Harlem Quartet engages communities through residencies and outreach programs, fostering a love for music among diverse audiences.

Their commitment has been recognized through prestigious grants, such as the Cultural Connections Artist-In-Residence grant from James Madison University and the 2016 Guarneri String Quartet grant from Chamber Music America, facilitating impactful community partnerships and educational initiatives. The Harlem Quartet has also served as quartet-in-residence at such institutions as the John J. Cali School of Music in Montclair and the Royal College of Music in London.

In collaboration with such renowned artists as pianists Michael Brown and Awadagin Pratt, clarinetists Paquito D’Rivera and Anthony McGill, and jazz legends Stanley Clarke and John Patitucci, the quartet continues to push musical boundaries.

Artist Information (cont.)

The Harlem Quartet's ongoing partnership with Imani Winds has resulted in acclaimed performances and a 2023 Grammy Award for their recording "Passion for Bach & Coltrane."

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

Beyond chamber music, the Harlem Quartet also performs string quartet works with orchestras, including a special arrangement of Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story" for string quartet and orchestra by Randall Craig Fleischer. This premiered with the Chicago Sinfonietta in 2012. The quartet has recorded this work, along with compositions by Michael Abels and Benjamin Lees, on the Cedille Records release "Delights and Dances." This season, they will perform Edward Hart's "A Charleston Concerto" with the Charleston Symphony both locally and on tour to commemorate the 350th Anniversary of the City of Charleston.

The Harlem Quartet's discography includes a wide range of their own albums and guest features, most notably their collaboration on Hot House with Gary Burton and Chick Corea, which earned a Grammy for Best Instrumental Composition. Their 2020 album "Cross Pollination" features works by Debussy, William Bolcom, Dizzy Gillespie, and Guido López-Gavilán. Released in August 2024, their most recent "Havana Meets Harlem" was recorded with Aldo López-Gavilán and showcases his original compositions for piano quintet.

Highlights of the Harlem Quartet's 2024-2025 season included appearances at Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, Broad Stage, Art Power in San Diego, Gaillard Center, SUNY Buffalo and the

Mary-Anne Rennolds Series, as well as residencies at Interlochen Center for the Arts, Queens University in Charlotte, NC, and Youngstown State University.



QR Code for more information about the Harlem Quartet.

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VCC is a virtual organization, so there is no office to commute to. Just bring your own computer! If you are interested in volunteering, write us at office@valleyclassicalconcerts.org or leave a message at (413) 239-0417.

From the Valley Classical Concerts Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Valley Classical Concerts, I would like to welcome you to our 2025-26 season.

We are thrilled to present an exciting season of chamber music. We have a wonderful variety of ensembles this year: three different string quartets, pianists, a wind ensemble, solo cello, even a chamber orchestra.

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Over the last two years, our expenses have gone up by 33%, and over the last decade, have exceeded inflation. Yet, our ticket prices have remained the same for almost a decade, as has the high caliber of our musicians. Your continued support makes a huge difference. Again, thank you to all who have contributed!

Enjoy the Harlem Quartet this afternoon. What a wonderful way to spend a fall afternoon!

“Music is a world within itself with a language we all understand.” – Stevie Wonder

Laurel Rogers, Board Vice-President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurel Rogers". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laurel" and last name "Rogers" clearly distinguishable.

The Valley Classical Concerts 2025-2026 Season

The Valley Classical Concerts 2025-2026 Season

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The Harlem Quartet

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Jiayan Sun, piano

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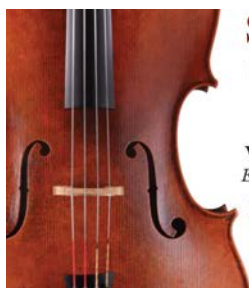
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