

Vol. 4 Issue 6 *Spring 2017*

# Opus Notes

OPUS 118 HARLEM SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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# Harlem Chamber Players

## New World Initiative

On Saturday, March 25th, students from all of Opus 118's After-School Program ensembles joined members of The Harlem Chamber Players for our sixth annual collaboration. As in past years, the concert took place at the historic St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Harlem, also known as the "We Are Not Afraid" church. Opus 118 faculty members Charlene Bishop and Jessica McJunkins performed as members of the Harlem Chamber Players and as mentors for the ensemble students. Also performing were violist Tia Allen and cello-prodigy Sujari Britt, who played alongside Opus 118 students in addition to contributing stunning solo pieces. It was a Saturday to remember as the students and professionals filled the chapel with glorious sound, leaving smiles on everyone's faces, including those of the largest audience we have seen for this concert in our six years of collaboration.

This year, Opus 118 and The Harlem Chamber Players participated in the New York Philharmonic's New World Initiative (NWI). The NWI was created in celebration of the Philharmonic's 175th birthday this year, and features groups from all five boroughs playing Antonin Dvorak's *New World Symphony*. We were excited to play a strings adaptation of Dvorak's "Largo" movement, particularly because of its deep ties to New York City and to the Philharmonic, which performed the world premiere of this piece in December 1893. As participants in the NWI, our performance of the movement was filmed and will be uploaded on the NWI webpage; additionally, a handful of Opus 118 students were interviewed about their experience playing the piece and will be featured. We were grateful to bring this beautiful movement to life and honored to help the Philharmonic celebrate such a landmark birthday.

*Members of Opus 118's After-School Ensembles perform alongside The Harlem Chamber Players at Saint Mary's Episcopal Church in Harlem.*



# Meet the Teacher:

## Katie von Braun

*Violinist Katie von Braun joined Opus 118 as an intern in fall of 2016 and her positive energy and enthusiasm for teaching has been inspiring! We reached out to Katie after her first year of teaching in New York City to catch her thoughts.*



**What originally inspired you to join the Teacher Training Initiative at Opus 118?**

**Katie:** As a young teenager, I watched “Music of the Heart” for the first time, and was immediately captivated and inspired by Roberta Guaspari. I knew that I had to meet this extraordinary woman who was tirelessly committed to putting a violin in the hands of any child with the desire to learn. Roberta embodied my vision of a selfless teacher. When I moved to New York City, I was looking for a challenging and fulfilling teaching environment that would equip me with the skills to become an effective educator. I also wanted to explore the more demographically diverse parts of the city, so I thought Opus 118 would be a perfect match.

**When did you begin playing the violin? What made you decide to continue to study music in college?**

**Katie:** I started playing the violin shortly after my ninth birthday, but had also been learning piano from my mother since the age of three. As a child, I remember being fascinated by the colorful and tender melodies in pieces such as Tchaikovsky’s “The Nutcracker” and Rodgers & Hammerstein’s “Sound of Music.” The nuance in the string sound captivated my imagination, and I was blessed to be given the gift of violin lessons. When the time came to choose my major as a University of Michigan undergraduate, although my interests and aspirations varied, I decided to study music because it was my deepest companion. I knew that my musical career would not follow a strictly traditional path, but I could not imagine my life driving forward without this core part of my identity. Music was my second language and clearest voice, and I had formed a strong bond with my orchestra community.

**You joined Opus 118 in the fall of this school year. What have you learned about teaching or about yourself as a teacher that you didn’t know before?**

**Katie:** The most important thing I have learned this year is that teaching is first and foremost a relationship between two people. In order to be truly effective as an educator, you must respect your students and be willing to learn from them. I have found that the magic of learning is only truly sparked when the teacher is able to validate the voice and expression of his/her students. Kids LOVE to learn when they feel like they are actively part of the teaching and learning process. I have seen first-hand the success of Opus 118 teaching practices such as peer review, core repertoire and the motivational system of the practice challenge. The latter energizes students to invest time in their music studies, inspiring not only the students but their families as well! I have also learned that it is often helpful as a teacher to unravel past experiences and relearn elements of technique from the beginning. Fundamental building blocks of violin playing such as the “thumb bump” and “stop sign” have been excellent child-friendly tools toward tension-free playing.

**What do you hope to pass on to your students in their lessons?**

**Katie:** If I were to write each and every student a letter, this is what I would say. Dear student: As your teacher, I hope to introduce you to a beautiful new instrument, but more importantly show you how to become an artist. Hard work and discipline are key to success, but creativity can be your best friend when you’re practicing. Listen to your body when it whispers so that you don’t have to wait until it screams. If you are relaxed and set up using good technique, you should never be in pain. Your pace and progress might be different than your friend’s, and that’s okay. If you are drawn to a particular style of playing, explore that interest. Listen to all kinds of music, whether it be Beethoven or Kendrick Lamar, because inspiration comes from many places. Work towards joining a musical ensemble so that you can have the rewarding experience of playing with others. Most importantly, do not ever let anything stand in the way of your dreams. I respect you and I believe in you. §



# Why We Need Music Education

*For 26 years, Opus 118 Harlem School of Music has been committed to providing accessible, quality music education to the children of East Harlem. These days, cuts to arts education in public schools and potential cuts to the federal budget for the arts have made our mission even more vital. Some may wonder why the fight for music education is worthwhile, and why we believe so strongly that music should be a core part of a well-rounded education for all children—those who will go on to pursue music, and those who will not.*

**Why music?** Here are just some of the benefits of music study:

**Language development:** According to the Children’s Music Workshop, musical training physically develops the part of the brain known to be involved with processing language. Scientists have observed music’s tangible impact on wiring in developing brains, and have posited that music study can strengthen a child’s ability to communicate and express him/herself.

**Science and math proficiency:** Many studies have pointed out the relationship between rhythm training—which stresses proportions, fractions, and ratios—and skills in mathematical reasoning. Moreover, reading and playing music can augment pattern recognition and spatial reasoning, skills necessary for success in both math and science, as well as many other areas.

**Coordination:** Regularly practicing a musical instrument increases coordination, muscle strength and development of motor skills.

**Academic Achievement:** Studies across the nation have shown that students who receive comprehensive music education consistently perform better on standardized tests than their non-musical counterparts: one ten-year study, which tracked the SAT performance of 25,000 students, showed that kids in music classes received, on average, sixty-three points higher on the verbal section and forty-four points higher on the math section than students who did not regularly study music. For an example even closer to home, we don’t need to look any further than our own students! Last year, through hard work and practice, Opus 118 eighth graders were accepted to some of New York

## How You Can Help The NEA

In March 2017 it was announced that the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) was facing elimination from the new federal government budget. Opus 118 has been a proud recipient of funding from the NEA regularly for over ten years and would consider this a terrible loss for the arts community. If you are looking for a chance to add your voice to the chorus of many who recognize the importance of this critical source of funding, please visit [Americans for the Arts at americansforthearts.org](http://AmericansfortheArts.org) and click on Arts Action Fund. There you can find excellent tools to support the NEA, including a form letter to be sent to your representatives and a petition you may sign.



*continued from previous*

City's finest high schools, including The Chapin School, Trinity High School, Special Music School, Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music, Art, and Performing Arts, and High School For Mathematics, Science And Engineering At City College

**Lower dropout rates:** Because music instruction increases engagement, curiosity, and an excitement around creative learning, students who receive music instruction are much more likely to stay in school.

**Discipline:** Exerting effort towards a concrete goal, like learning a difficult instrument, can be a challenging and rewarding experience. Doing so requires discipline and commitment, hours of regular practice, and it often isn't easy; hard work is foundational for music students. As students improve, overcome obstacles, and hit milestones—especially when cheered on by caring music educators—their self-confidence soars!

## How You Can Help Opus 118

**H**ave you ever wondered how you can help Opus 118 provide access to quality music education? There are more ways than you may think!

**Make a Financial Contribution** Those looking to make a monetary donation to Opus 118 can do so online at [opus118.org](https://opus118.org) by clicking "Donate," or by mail to the following address:

**Opus 118 Harlem School of Music c/o Kaufman Music Center**  
129 W. 67th St. New York, NY 10023

**Donate Instruments** Many of our students cannot afford to buy or rent an instrument, and would be grateful to inherit your gently used violin, viola, cello, or guitar. We are also always in need of violin cases in good condition for the instruments used in our In-School Program. If you are looking to donate any of these items of any size, please reach out to us by phone at 646-842-2775 or by email at [hcollins@opus118.org](mailto:hcollins@opus118.org) with more information.

**Shop** Did you know that you can make a contribution to Opus 118 just by shopping at Amazon? By visiting [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and searching for Opus 118 Harlem School of Music before you shop, a percentage of all qualifying purchases will be given to Opus 118. Want to shop even more? We also have a searchable Amazon Wishlist, where we will post supplies that we really need.

**Volunteer** We are always looking for volunteers for events, mailings, and more! Please reach out to our registrar by phone at 646-842-2775 if you are interested in joining in on the fun!

Making regular, monthly donations in varying amounts can help Opus 118 greatly! For instance: \$18 a month could help us purchase a brand new instrument for a student in our In-School Program, while \$118 a month would pay for a student to take private lessons for an entire year! To set up a monthly donation to Opus 118 by phone, please call 646-842-2775.



## Student Spotlight:

### Kove Mekonen

#### **K**ove Mekonen used to have stage fright.

Hearing him play now, we'd never have guessed it! The current Mott Hall II sixth grader began learning music with Opus 118 as a second grader in the In-School Program at CPEI, and soon progressed into the after-school program, where private lessons allowed him to dive more deeply into the study of violin.

"I have learned how to play the violin at my own pace," Kove said of his individualized instruction. "The teachers, who are amazing violinists and great teachers, really know their students."

When he joined group ensemble, the expanded opportunities to perform onstage helped him to confront his stage fright head-on. "Being able to talk with [my teachers] about it...pushing myself to perform at the various recitals and concerts, has really helped me to overcome this fear and enjoy performances," he said. "I still get a little nervous, but I think about the music and that helps me." In so many ways, Kove has found Opus 118 to be a place for learning and growth. The ensemble has been a particularly supportive environment for him, where he feels that students are truly "in it together," from the hard work required every week to the triumph of performing as a group. When asked about his favorite Opus memory, Kove looked fondly back on his first End of Year Concert, at which hundreds of students, family and community members convene in the beautiful Academy of Arts and Letters to hear our students play. "I remember walking into the big hall and seeing the big stage, chandeliers, and all the students," Kove recalled. It was an opportunity for him to exhibit his accomplishments from a school year's worth of hard work, for audience members who were excited to applaud. He thinks that's a pretty special way to end a school year, and we couldn't agree more!

*Opus 118 student Kove Mekonen performing at with the Performance Ensemble at the annual Harlem Chamber Players concert.*

**L**ast year, you helped us match donations 4:1 during our first Charidy.com event, which helped us earn \$28,108 for scholarships in just 24 hours. This year, we are hoping to beat it! Check out our website, Facebook, and Twitter on Wednesday, June 14th for more information on this exciting opportunity for Opus 118!

# Recent Photos & Upcoming Performances

Experience our programs first-hand! Below is a list of student performances scheduled for this year. Dates are subject to change; visit [www.opus118.org](http://www.opus118.org) or call (646) 842-2775 for the most up-to-date information. All recitals are held at 1615 Madison Avenue beginning at 7PM, unless otherwise stated.

## Opus 118 Recital Hours

Wednesday, May 24

Friday, June 2 (Honors Recital)

## End of Year Concert

The American Academy  
of Arts and Letters

Wednesday, June 7th 6:30pm



Please join us for our 26th Annual End-of-Year Concert taking place at The Academy of Arts and Letters (entrance on 156th Street). We have been fortunate to be one of the few groups to hold concerts on their stage in Harlem since 1998 and are glad to join them again this year. Roughly 200 students from our in-school partners and our after-school ensembles will join together to perform and show the audience all that they have learned this year. This event is so meaningful to Opus 118's history and to participants, faculty, staff, friends, alumni, families and fans and has been immortalized in the two films inspired by our program, *Small Wonders* and *Music of the Heart*. Come and see what the excitement is all about!

**Our Favorite Photos:** On December 15, 2016 Opus 118's Performance Ensemble played at Symphony Space; (clockwise from top) students focus intently during the pre-show sound check; students lined up to go on stage; performing on stage; Roberta prepares to take a bow at Symphony Space. **On the Front Cover:** a view from backstage as students perform during the annual Symphony Space show.

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# Opus118

HARLEM SCHOOL OF MUSIC



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