

Spring 2016

Opus Notes

OPUS 118 HARLEM SCHOOL OF MUSIC



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Opus 118: 25 Years in Photos

It has been 25 amazing years since Opus 118 became an organization in 1991. Celebrate with us by taking a photographic journey through many of the exciting accomplishments of our faculty and students since our founding.

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Opus 118's Growing Cello Studio



Opus 118 cello teacher Nelly Rocha

Since its inception in 2002, Opus 118's After-School Program has offered cello in addition to violin and viola. The cello program began as one of the smallest of our studios, but growing interest and increased participation in recent years has transformed cello into

a vibrant studio with a deep impact on Opus 118's programming.

This exciting momentum can be attributed in large part to our enthusiastic and talented cello teacher, Nelly Rocha, who came to Opus 118 in 2015 with an extensive performance background. She has played with groups such as Camerata New York, the National Lyric Opera, Reading Symphony Orchestra, Rhode Island Philharmonic, and the Miami Symphony Orchestra.

Nelly was drawn to the cello's deep, beautiful sound from an early age,

and had the opportunity to study and play with Mexico's national youth orchestra. "Music opened the world for me," says Nelly of her access to music education as a child. Now that she has cello students of her own, Nelly hopes to pass on the foundations of her cello studies, which include discipline, focus, and the value of hard work. Even more importantly, Nelly is working to impart "never-ending curiosity, a continuous desire to learn, and the joy of making music" to her Opus 118 cello students.

Opus 118 founder Roberta Guaspari, whose son is a professional cellist with the Shanghai Quartet, is looking forward to a broad and bright future for our cello program, in which many more students will take after school cello lessons. This fall, we plan to offer an Intro to Cello group class aimed at engaging beginners. Additionally, as cello students advance and their studies deepen, Opus 118 hopes to involve them in our established violin performance ensembles. Such integration of sounds and collaboration across instruments fits with Nelly's view of music as a non-verbal means of communication and expression for young people. While attending music camp in Texas as a child, she found that language barriers could be overcome through musical collaboration. "At the time," she noted, "my English was very basic, so I couldn't fully communicate with some of the other kids, but we played in string quartets and orchestra together. That's when I realized music is a language." Providing more options for cello students and bolstering our growing cello studio is a great way to amplify Opus 118's musical conversation.

Meet The Teacher: *Jessica McJunkins*

Violinist *Jessica McJunkins* has been teaching with *Opus 118* for three years while balancing an impressive performance career. We spoke to *Jessica* to learn more about her passion for music.



Opus 118: *You have been teaching in Opus 118's After-School Program for almost three years now. What is the best part about being a teacher?*

Jessica: The obvious answer is that I enjoy seeing the progress of each individual student, but I really do enjoy getting to know the kids as well. Being able to really mold their development in a hands-on way is actually super inspiring. Some teachers say that they learn as much from their students as their students learn from them, and I think that is absolutely true. The more time I spend with my students, the better I get at what is most important to me both as a teacher and as a violinist: efficient practice and teaching techniques. My students will tell you, I don't like to waste time! Every skill we gain in the lesson builds on a previous skill, and tailoring that progression to the needs of each individual child means that I get to retain efficient practicing techniques as well. It's a win win!

Opus 118: *Growing up, how did you wind up playing the violin? What made you keep going?*

Jessica: When I was eight years old, I saw a little boy playing on Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. The most exciting part for me was that his skin was brown, like mine! I had never seen that before. I informed my mom that I was 'better than him', which she found to be hilarious because I'd never touched a violin before in my life. She told me that I needed to have lessons before I started trash talking other kids. From there, I haven't stopped playing. The thing that kept me going, even when things were difficult, is the thrill of performing, of the ability to communicate so powerfully without words. I also was one of the few

classical musicians of color in my hometown, and I knew I had to keep going to inspire other kids who looked like me but felt isolated wherever they were. That is still a deep passion for me.

Opus 118: *What drew you to Opus 118's program?*

Jessica: One of my closest friends and colleagues, Dima Dimitrova, asked me to sub for her, and I lingered that day to attend an Opus 118 recital. I loved the diversity, and was especially drawn to the great technique that I saw consistent in Opus 118 students. Of course, I had seen the movie *Music of the Heart*, and was thrilled to see Roberta in action.

Opus 118: *You are also a popular performer in New York City and all over the world. What have been some of your favorite performances? How do you prepare for a concert?*

Jessica: One of my favorite things about being a violinist in New York City is the opportunity to perform in so many different types of settings, with so many varied types of performers. I perform many different genres, from classical to jazz, hip-hop to rock. In 2014, I played on the Sydney Opera House stage with the composer Max Richter. It was one of the best nights of my life. In the fall, I performed with Stevie Wonder in my hometown of Charlotte, NC, and this year I was blessed enough to sit concertmaster for the Soulful Symphony, an incredible orchestra that was created to celebrate the legacy of the music of people of color; we had the honor of being featured at the opening of the Smithsonian Museum of African American Culture. Music has enabled me to be a part of so many personally and culturally iconic moments in history, and I'm very grateful. To prepare for a concert, I usually deconstruct the music I'll be performing, setting aside the technically hardest parts to practice first, and very carefully. I make a practice plan for the days leading up to the concert; this helps me focus my thoughts. On the day of the concert, I make sure to get enough rest, and I stretch before I take the stage. I run through the music slowly to calm my breathing and nerves. The more prepared I am, the calmer I am, and the same goes for my students. 🎻

Opus 118 Celebrates 25 Years

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“This is truly a full-circle moment, and demonstrates how the small seed planted by Roberta and Opus 118 has prospered into an enormous tree with far-reaching branches.”

- Jairus Steed, Opus 118 Alumnus



Opus 118's history in photos: (1.) Students perform in FiddleFest at Carnegie Hall in 1993; (2.) Roberta's original program drawing; (3.) performing the National Anthem at Yankee Stadium; (4.) performing at the Manhattan Borough Arts Festival; (5.) Roberta and students in the early days at CPE I; (6, 7, 8.) students line up and then perform at the Inauguration of Barack Obama in Washington, DC; (9.) taking a bow at the 2015 annual End-of-Year Concert; (10, 11.) students perform at ASCAP Awards honoring Quincy Jones in 2010; (12.) Roberta helps a young student; (13.) performing in Carnegie Hall's small hall in 2011; (14.) students take a bow in Central Park with the New York Philharmonic in 2008.

We rely on the generosity of people like you to help keep music education affordable in East Harlem. We hope you will consider taking a moment to fill out the enclosed envelope to make a donation in support of our work. If you prefer to make your donation online, visit the new Opus118.org and click "Donate."

Five years with Harlem Chamber Players: Making Beautiful Music



Clockwise from the top; Opus 118 ensemble students waiting for showtime; Liz Player of Harlem Chamber Players welcomes the audience; Roberta Guaspari says hello; Sujari Britt performs; Opus 118 ensemble members perform; Opus 118 faculty Jessica McJunkins and Charlene Bishop perform with HCP

On Saturday, March 12th, students from Opus 118's Junior and Chamber Ensembles joined together with members of the Harlem Chamber Players for our fifth annual collaboration. The concert took place at the historic St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Harlem, also known as the "We Are Not Afraid" church, which has been the home of the Harlem Chamber Players since their founding in 2008.

Opus 118 faculty members Charlene Bishop and Jessica McJunkins performed as members of the Harlem

Chamber Players and as mentors for the ensemble students. The program also included 15-year-old cello prodigy Sujari Britt, whose performances of works by Bach and Messiaen dazzled listeners. Opus 118 ensemble students performed both popular and classical pieces - from Bach's *Minuet No. 1* to The Beatles' *Eleanor Rigby*.

In a speech to the crowd, founder Roberta Guaspari thanked the Harlem Chamber Players for this ongoing collaboration, not only because it provides our students with valuable performance opportunities, but also because the professional members of HCP serve as inspirations for our young musicians. By working alongside the Harlem Chamber Players, Opus 118 students are exposed to the rewards of hard work and dedication; moreover, they get a glimpse into the world of professional musicians who live and work in our community. We look forward to continuing our relationship with The Harlem Chamber Players for many years to come!

Opus 118 Success Stories: 100 Days of Practice

Opus 118 After-School Program students are now in the final days of our annual 100-Day Practice Challenge. Opus 118 faculty and staff challenge all participants to practice a total of 100 days in a given period for the chance to play at a special celebration recital with pizza and prizes! This tradition started three years ago as a way to inspire students to practice more regularly and with more direction. Here's how it works:

- Students take home a weekly practice chart with personalized assignments from their teachers
- Students return their weekly practice charts to their teachers signed by their parents to verify how many days they practiced that week

- Teachers file the weekly practice charts and tally how many days the students have practiced

The practice challenge has been very successful, with parents reporting that their children become more inspired to practice regularly. This year, Opus 118 split the 100 days into two sections – one of 30 days to get students warmed up and one of 70 days for a bigger challenge. Over 30 students successfully completed the first challenge and we cannot wait to see the results of the second!

You can attend the challenge celebration recital on Friday, May 6th at 5:30 PM at Central Park East II Middle School.

Did You Know?

At this time every year in New York City, eighth graders finalize their high school choices for the coming school year. We would like to congratulate our eighth graders who have reported their exciting high school decisions to us:

- Mia Cuk, Trinity High School
- Shiann Ivey, Special Music School (a branch of our affiliate organization, Kaufman Music Center)
- Pleiades Jarvis, Repertory Company High School for Theater Arts
- Camila John-Melendez, High School for Mathematics, Science, and Engineering at City College
- Zach Lee-Whitfield, Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts
- Joseph and Jeffrey Santana, Cardinal Hayes High School
- Katherine Yun, The Chapin School

Congratulations to all of our eighth grade students. We are so proud of you!

Something big is coming! Check out our website, Facebook, and Twitter on Monday, June 20th for an exciting opportunity for Opus 118!

Recent Photos & Upcoming Performances

Experience our programs first-hand! Below are student performances scheduled for this year. Dates are subject to change; visit www.opus118.org or call (646) 842-2775 for the most up-to-date information.

Opus 118 Recital Hours

Friday April 22, 7:15pm
(Piano Recital Hour,
19 East 103rd Street)

Friday May 6, 6:30pm
(70-Day Practice Challenge Celebration,
1615 Madison Avenue)

Wednesday June 1, 7pm
(Honors Recital,
1615 Madison Avenue)

End-of-Year Concert

Thursday June 16, 6:30pm
The American Academy
of Arts and Letters
633 West 155th Street

Please join us for our 25th Annual End-of-Year Concert taking place at The Academy of Arts and Letters (entrance on 156th Street). This will be Roberta's 36th school-year ending concert as a teacher, and the 25th since our founding in 1991. Opus 118 has been holding this celebration at the stunning Academy of Arts and Letters since 1998, and we are lucky to be one of the few organizations that is able to utilize the space each year. Nearly 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 from the Heart**. Come and see what the excitement is all about!





HARLEM SCHOOL OF MUSIC



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Nelly Rocha, *cello*
Laura Sacks, *violin*
Aleks Savitski, *piano*
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