

Vol 6 Issue 8 Spring 2018

# Opus Notes

OPUS 118 HARLEM SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Thank you,  
**Lydia Kontos!**

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## Seventh Annual Concert The Harlem Chamber Players

For the seventh year in a row, members of Opus 118's After-School Program ensembles joined The Harlem Chamber Players for a collaborative spring concert. This concert has become a high point of our yearly performance calendar because it gives Opus 118's students the chance to perform with professional Harlem-based musicians in their own neighborhood.

Taking place on March 24th at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, this year's concert seemed to hold new meaning, as people from around the country spent much of that sunny spring morning participating in the March for our Lives, an act organized by teenagers protesting gun violence. The church had just installed a stunning painting as part of a citywide art exhibition that served as a backdrop to our violinists. The work, titled "Our Lady of Ferguson and All Those Killed by Gun Violence," is packed with symbolism that ties in closely with the movement. Opus 118 Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Performance Roberta Guaspari began the concert with "The Star Spangled Banner" and "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" - the first piece, she mentioned, in honor of how great our country can be, and the second piece for the hope that this movement will make it a safer place for young people like our talented musicians.

This year's performance brimmed with beautiful music. After our first two pieces, The Harlem Chamber Players performed works by Chevalier de Saint-Georges and W.A Mozart masterfully. Then, Opus 118 students returned to the stage and entertained the near-capacity audience with works by Bach, Shostakovich, Bartok, and Pachelbel. It was an extraordinary day all-around!

Opus 118's After-School Program ensembles and The Harlem Chamber Players perform at St. Mary's Episcopal Church. See more pictures on page 7.





## Meet the Teacher: **Helio Alves**

*Pianist Helio Alves joined the Opus 118 faculty in the fall of 2016. An acclaimed jazz pianist and teacher, Helio has revitalized our after-school piano program and has encouraged our students to practice hard and have some fun! We caught up with Helio to learn more about his musical experiences.*

**What originally inspired you to teach piano?**

**Helio:** I really enjoy helping people make progress and become inspired by music. It's a very different feeling from performing music, but one that gives me great satisfaction as well.

**When did you begin playing the piano? What made you decide to continue to study music?**

**Helio:** I started playing piano when I was 6 years old. Both of my parents play piano (not professionally), so there was always music in the house when I was growing up. My father had a great record collection, and we used to listen to a lot of different types of music. I started playing classical music, then moved into other styles like jazz, and started playing in bands when I was a teenager. One thing led to another and I went to Boston to study jazz at Berklee College of Music, and soon started working as a musician in Boston and then New York. It was a gradual decision, to continue to study music, that happened naturally. I continue to study and am inspired by music everyday.

**You joined Opus 118 last year as a faculty member; what prompted you? What has teaching taught you?**

**Helio:** I have a friend, Julie Kurtzman, that teaches at Kaufman Music Center. I was looking to do more teaching, since I only had a few private students, so she recommended me to Opus 118. I learned that teaching is about inspiring people, more than anything else.

**You perform very frequently. What is one of your favorite musical memories?**

**Helio:** I'm very thankful to being able to perform a lot, with a lot of different people. One of my favorite memories would have to be a concert that I played many years ago at Carnegie Hall. It was my first time playing there, with the great jazz saxophone player Joe Henderson. My parents even came from Brazil to see that, and it was great. My favorite styles to play are jazz and Brazilian music, but I enjoy playing all styles, especially classical. 🎵

# Creating a Legacy

## Lydia Kontos Retires

*In 2012, Opus 118 Harlem School of Music entered into a partnership with Kaufman Music Center after falling on difficult financial times. This alliance, now in its sixth year, has allowed Opus 118 to continue to operate and flourish. Lydia Kontos, Executive Director of Kaufman Music Center, spearheaded this partnership and has provided our organization with invaluable guidance and opportunity, and has led us to new sources of funding. In September 2018, Lydia will retire from Kaufman Music Center after 39 years with the Center and 32 years as its director. Opus 118 Manager of Programs and Development, Hayley Collins, had a chance to sit down with Lydia and discuss her career and legacy in celebration of all she has accomplished in her years of dedicated service to music education.*

**HC: Tell me about your career background. When and how did you first get involved with Kaufman Music Center?**

**LK:** I majored in Anthropology in college despite wanting to be a vocal major—I was too young to start my instrument, so I went in another direction. To get some music chops, I worked at the Hunter College Concert Bureau with the legendary Omus Hirshbein. In those days—late 60's into early 70's—Hunter was the most exciting place for recitals in New York. I stayed at the Concert Bureau for one year after graduation, then decided to teach and had the opportunity to do a lot of traveling. When I was ready for a change, somebody told me about a new concert hall that had opened on West 67th Street. Joyce Goodman, who was running the concert department at that time, hired me as a consultant. After two years, I became the director of the concert hall and then, when the founder retired in 1985, I became the executive director of Kaufman Music Center (which was then still called The Hebrew Arts School).

**HC: What have you found most challenging about your career? And the most rewarding?**

**LK:** What is most rewarding is the easier one to answer, which is that I am sitting where I get to see the results of my work all the time - the children, the classes, the fabulous teachers, the concerts - the positive reinforcement is all right here. The challenge is that it's never enough in this world to just do good, to do well, or to be excellent at what you're doing as an institution and following your mission. You have to be healthy financially as well. New York is a tough, competitive town when it comes to raising money. But here we are, thriving. Nonetheless, it is a challenge!





## 2018 End of Year Concert

Please join us for our 27th Annual End-of-Year Concert taking place at The Academy of Arts and Letters (entrance on West 156th Street between Broadway and Riverside Drive). We have been fortunate to be one of the few groups to hold concerts on their stage in Harlem for twenty years now and are excited to return 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. We look forward to seeing you there!

### **HC: What do you wish people understood about music education?**

**LK:** People need to go back to looking at music as a core subject – since the 70’s in this country, it has been seen as a frill, something that helps people to learn other subjects better. All subjects are complementary – language, math, history, science – but music has become marginalized, and that leaves a learning gap in our culture. I wish more people understood that.

### **HC: Opus 118 and Kaufman Music Center have been partners for six years now. How did you hear about Opus 118? Why did you want to help Opus 118?**

**LK:** I heard about Opus 118 around the time of the first Fiddlefest, in the early ‘90’s. A friend of mine, Allan Miller, was directing the documentary about Opus 118 and through Allan I got to know Roberta. I thought that the way Roberta was able to teach kids in a group setting on such a high level was amazing. Roberta and I would get together from time-to-time, and I remember we talked about her philosophy that restricting music education to gifted kids is not a good thing and that every child should learn to play music. I loved that because that’s exactly how I feel. We were on the same page, but following different professional paths. I felt like what Opus 118 was doing for kids in East Harlem had to continue, so when I was first approached about Opus 118 possibly going out of business, I talked to my board and we all agreed that it was something that we should try to prevent. It’s hard for us at Kaufman Music Center to serve kids in need outside of our neighborhood, in places where music education is really lacking, so Opus 118 is helping us work vicariously to do that!

### **HC: What do you see for the future of Opus 118?**

**LK:** I’m not big on the idea of expansion just for the sake of it, but I do see Opus serving more schools; I see training more teachers in Roberta’s methodology; and I see an interesting model of being a localized community music school where kids have private lessons on-site at their own schools. Of course, this depends on the ability and cooperation of the individual schools and it takes a lot of teachers, but I think that’s where Opus 118 should go to make even more of a difference than it does now.

### **HC: Heading into retirement, what are you hoping to spend more time on?**

**LK:** I may just spend a little more time helping Opus 118! I’m going to spend more time with my family, especially my husband and my grandson. I’m dying to get back to doing more cooking. I believe in clean eating and I like food that I’ve prepared. It’s been a long time since I’ve been able to do that regularly. A little bit more travel. I’m afraid to say this one, because some people in this room are far off from this, but I’m looking forward to that feeling of waking up in the morning and saying, “What do I really want to do today?” at least for a while. I do think there will be a novelty to it at first, but when I am bored with that, I will start accepting some of the invitations to get involved in organizations where I can make a difference.

### **HC: What are you hoping your legacy will be upon retirement? What is one of your proudest achievements?**

**LK:** My best legacy will be Kaufman Music Center’s success in the future. I’m proud of how much it has grown, particularly in pre-college education and in the many ways that Kaufman Music Center educates kids of all backgrounds. When I became director, it was a very, very small program. The most beautiful thing is seeing kids go through Lucy Moses School and then be able to attend Special Music School or vice versa. We have such a broad spectrum of levels here and I’m so proud of that.



## Student Spotlight:

### Keanu Almeida

Every year Opus 118 After-School Program students are invited to participate in a 100-Day Practice Challenge, where students are encouraged to practice nearly every day for a third of the year. Those who practice 80 days or more are invited to play in a celebration recital where they receive prizes based on how many days they practiced in total, as well as a pizza party with their peers.

While this may sound challenging enough on one instrument to many of us, just imagine being responsible for 100 days of practice on two! Yet, Central Park East II second grader Keanu Almeida did it with ease. Keanu started violin in our Intro to Violin class just last year and added piano lessons for the first time this September after being inspired to learn more instruments by the music in Star Wars. He practiced all 100 days on violin, and 90 days on piano with pride. That shows quite the dedication!

After 100 days of practicing, Keanu learned three things: “First, if I practice regularly, I progress. Second, I can master each piece of music and become better. Lastly, I found my most frequent mistakes and focused my practice to correct them. For example, I found that I tend to play too fast, so I started focusing on tempo while practicing.”

We congratulate Keanu and all students who completed this challenge and look forward to hearing them perform in our 100-Day Practice Challenge Celebration Recital on Friday, April 27, 2018 at 6:00pm!

*Opus 118 violin and piano student Keanu Almeida works with his violin teacher Katherine Lim.*



# Recent Photos & Upcoming Performances

**W**e would love to invite you to hear our wonderful students perform. Below are the remaining 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 Central Park East II Middle School (1615 Madison Avenue) beginning at 7PM, unless otherwise stated.

## Opus 118 Recital Hours

Wednesday, May 23

### Practice Challenge Celebration Recital

Friday, April 27, 6PM

### End of Year Concert

The American Academy of Arts and Letters

Wednesday, June 5th 6:30PM

### Honors Recital

Friday, June 8, 6:30PM



*Our Favorite Photos:* Scenes from the seventh annual concert with The Harlem Chamber Players at St. Mary's Church in Manhattanville.  
*On the Front Cover:* Lydia Kontos visits with first graders at Special Music School.

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# Opus118

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