

Gavilán Brothers and a World Premiere

SATURDAY | JULY 9 | 8 PM
THE BREAKERS



This concert is dedicated to **Cynthia A. Sinclair** in recognition of her generous support of Newport Classical and in loving memory of Marilyn J. Woloohojian.

Aldo López-Gavilán, piano | **Ilmar Gavilán**, violin

SHAWN E. OKPEBHOLO *Crooked Shanks* [world premiere]

(Approximate duration 11 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Eclipse*

(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Caipiriñame*

(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Hermanos*

(Approximate duration 7 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Momo's Tale*

(Approximate duration 3 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Epilogo*

(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

INTERMISSION

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Arboles en el aire*

(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Waltz*

(Approximate duration 3 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Quick Tune*

(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Viernes de Ciudad*

(Approximate duration 10 minutes)

ALDO LÓPEZ-GAVILÁN *Pan con Timba*

(Approximate duration 7 minutes)

Shawn E. Okpebholo (b. 1981): *Crooked Shanks* [world premiere]

Crooked Shanks is a work for solo piano commissioned by the Newport Classical Music Festival in Rhode Island. The commissioner wanted a piece that reflected the region. Not familiar with Rhode Island, I began researching various aspects of the state's and the city of Newport's history and came across a fascinating historical figure called Occramer Marycoo, an enslaved African who was ultimately sold to Caleb Garder in Newport, RI. Marycoo's was given the name Newport Gardner, after his involuntary home and his enslaver—a name he would keep. Gardner was remarkable because he became quite educated, spoke multiple languages, and became a trained classical musician and composer despite his enslavement. He is credited with being the first African American person to have a composition published in the Western-style. The work was called *Crooked Shanks*, a whistle-worthy happy tune. After decades of enslavement, he won the lottery, bought his freedom, and became a prosperous man. A beautiful bookend to his life, Gardner did something that relatively few enslaved Africans did: re-cross the Atlantic and return home to Africa, where, soon after, he would leave this Earth. This work is composed for Cuban pianist Aldo López-Gavilán and inspired by Gardner's tune, *Crooked Shanks*. This composition is also loosely influenced by African and Latin sensibilities, reflecting Gardner's and my, and López-Gavilán's cultural heritage, respectively. In getting to know Gardner's journey, I kept gravitating to the notion of traveling, which, along with the perils of the enslaved, the hope of freedom, and the return home, is the extra-musical core of this work.

Crooked Shanks was commissioned by Newport Classical for Aldo López-Gavilán's July 2022 performance in Newport, RI in loving memory of Marilyn J. Woloohojian for her extraordinary generosity, commitment to the future of classical music, and in honor of her thirty years as a member of the Board of Directors. "Do not let the music die." - Marilyn J. Woloohojian

Eclipse, originally for violin and piano, is a very personal piece written for Aldo's brother Ilmar. It addresses vulnerability and the emotional toll taken by the two brothers' involuntary separation due to outside political circumstances as Ilmar went to the United States while Aldo remained in Cuba.

Caipiriñame Like a mojito in Rio, this refreshing piece infuses Cuban musical traditions with the flavor of Brazilian samba. It reflects a symbiosis between African and European influences that have enlivened the music of Cuba and Brazil while capturing the cultural idiosyncrasies of both countries.

Hermanos / Brothers is the title of both a documentary film about the Gavilán brothers and of their debut album as a duet. Intimate and soulful, this piece has a beautiful theme that starts with a descending interval on the low end of the violin. It's a huge "sigh of relief" for finally being together in a recording studio, and it also poses a question: "What if we could have done this much earlier?"

Momo's Tale is inspired by the little girl who brought the stolen time back to the people in Michael Ende's Fantasy Novel. Aldo is celebrating childhood, and the youthful feeling of having "all the time in the world" to explore one's own imagination and find inspiration.

Epilogo was originally written for piano, clarinet, and orchestra. The central theme, lyrical and highly modulatory, explores a dream and makes a triumphant musical gesture reminiscent of "Nueva Trova," a style pioneered and made world-famous by troubadour singers Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés.

The development section showcases Aldo López-Gavilán's take on a characteristic canon, with kaleidoscopic rhythms staggered across both instruments.

Arboles en el aire / Trees in the Sky is about protecting the planet, and about the vibrancy and wholeness that comes with feeling at one with nature.

Waltz, originally a song without lyrics for voice and piano, is a whisper of the subconscious mind. Ghostly harmonies set on a soft rocking waltz rhythm capture the intimate, yearning qualities of the author's inner dialogue.

Quick Tune is a very virtuosic piece, co-written by the two brothers. It starts with an insanely fast unison that challenges the violinist's ability to keep up with the pianistic arpeggios. The piece concludes with spectacular solos from both instruments.

Viernes de Ciudad is meant to depict the course of a day from dawn to dusk in London, a metropolitan city with diverse cultures and neighborhoods. It starts in a Middle Eastern part of town in early morning, cruises through an Irish area, and ends at a late-night pub where people from different cultures are having a good time together, symbolizing our shared humanity. It features an impassioned violin solo and employs a complex, exhilarating counterpoint that gradually increases in energy as the piece progresses.

Pan con Timba, whose title means "bread with unknown something," is consistently joyful and contagiously optimistic. It reflects the classic mood of post-revolutionary Cuba: the younger generation, faced with scarcity and economic hardship, refused to indulge in self-pity and instead embraced humor as a psychological lifting device. This form of humor has become an essential part of the current Cuban identity. Pan con Timba features such rhythmic characteristics as the quintessentially Cuban form of ostinato known as "tumbao," and intertwines elements of various dance styles popular in contemporary Cuba.

Aldo López-Gavilán

Cuban pianist and composer Aldo López-Gavilán was born in Havana to a family of internationally acclaimed classical musicians. Praised for his "dazzling technique and rhythmic fire" in the *Seattle Times* and dubbed a "formidable virtuoso" by *The Times* (London), he excels in both the classical and jazz worlds as a recitalist, concerto soloist, chamber-music collaborator, recording artist, and performer of his own electrifying jazz compositions. He has appeared in such prestigious U.S. concert halls as New York's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, Boston's Jordan Hall, Seattle's Benaroya Hall, Washington's Kennedy Center, and Miami's Adrienne Arsht Center, as well as at major venues in Europe, the U.K., Cuba, Mexico, South America, and Canada. Aldo and his brother Ilmar Gavilán, first violinist of New York-based Harlem Quartet, are featured in the new documentary *Los Hermanos / The Brothers*, which tells the story of their shared childhood, their momentous first performances together, and their parallel lives as musicians. Aldo's U.S. concert activity in the 2020-21 season included a recital sponsored by Detroit's CameraMusic, in which he performed his own works in partnership with his violinist brother Ilmar, and two performances sponsored by the West Michigan Symphony: a solo recital at The Block and a return engagement with the orchestra for a performance of his piano concerto Emporium. Aldo's 2021-22 season includes an appearance with Ilmar at Cal Performances (Berkeley, CA) and two U.S. tours with Harlem Quartet.

Ilmar Gavilán

Violinist Ilmar Gavilán, a native of Havana, Cuba, has had a remarkable career that has taken him all over the world. He has performed for Queen Sofia of Spain, and, as a

founding member and first violinist of Harlem Quartet, for President Barack Obama at the White House and in concerts and community engagement activities throughout the U.S. and abroad. Ilmar has collaborated with such noted musicians as Itzhak Perlman, Ida Kavafian, Carter Brey, Paul Katz, Fred Sherry, Anthony McGill, Misha Dichter, Chick Corea, Paquito D’Rivera, and his brother, Cuban pianist-composer Aldo López-Gavilán. As a chamber musician Ilmar has participated in the Tanglewood, Ravinia, and Angel Fire music festivals, and as a soloist has played with the Atlanta, New Jersey, Baltimore, Detroit, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Hartford, Nashville, Phoenix, and Mexico City symphonies, among others. His U.S. solo debut recording, *Aires y Leyendas*, and his album *Por el mar de las Antillas anda un violín*—which comprises music by his father, Guido López-Gavilán, including a violin concerto dedicated to him—are available on Amazon and iTunes. Ilmar and Aldo are featured in the new documentary *Los Hermanos / The Brothers*, which tells the story of their shared childhood, their momentous first performances together, and their parallel lives as musicians; it includes a genre-bending score composed by Aldo, concert footage of him performing with Harlem Quartet, and guest appearances by such legendary musicians as Joshua Bell. A Patchwork Films production by Marcia Jarmel and Ken Schneider, *Los Hermanos* is screening at film festivals worldwide and will be nationally broadcast on PBS in the fall of 2021. Ilmar is a first-place laureate in the Sphinx Competition and a prizewinner in the Lipinski-Wieniawski and Henryk Szeryng international violin competitions. He received his training at Havana’s Manuel Saumell Conservatory, the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, the Reina Sofia School of Music in Spain, Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory, and Rutgers University, where he earned a D.M.A. degree as a student of Arnold Steinhardt.

Shawn E. Okpebholo

Shawn E. Okpebholo maintains a dynamic career as a composer, including performances on five continents, over forty states, almost every major U.S. city, at some of the nation's most prestigious performance spaces. His music has been featured on Lyric Opera of Chicago recital series, Washington National Opera Inauguration Day Concert; Festival of New American Music; Ravinia Music Festival; and performances with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; Fifth House Ensemble, Lincoln Trio, MusicX Contemporary Music Festival, among others. Solo artists include vocalists J’Nai Bridges, Will Liverman, Michael Mayes, Ryan McKinney; pianists Paul Sánchez, Mark Markham, Craig Terry, and Robert Ainsley; and euphonium virtuoso Steven Mead, among others.

Okpebholo regularly receives commissions from noted soloists, universities, and organizations, including UrbanArias (co-commissioned by Minnesota Opera, Colorado Opera, Dallas Opera, and Opera); Cincinnati Opera, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Fifth House Ensemble, United States Airforce Strings, International Tuba and Euphonium Association, The Meir Rimon Commissioning Program of the International Horn Society, Lincoln Trio, among others. His compositions have been featured on six commercially released albums, including his first album solely devoted to his music, *Steal Away*, a collection of re-imagined Negro spirituals.

He earned his masters and doctoral degrees in composition from the College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) at the University of Cincinnati, where he also studied music theory. He completed a bachelor's degree in composition and music history from Asbury College. He had additional studies in film scoring from New York University through the Buddy Baker Film Scoring Program. He’s also the Composer-in-Residence of the renowned Fifth House Ensemble and was awarded a residency with the Chicago Opera Theater (2021-2023 seasons), culminating with an opera commission with librettist Mark Campbell, librettist for the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Silent Night*.