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The Music of the Harlem String Quartet



Who Is the Harlem String Quartet?

- Created by the [Sphinx Orchestra](#) in 2006 (for more information, follow the link!)
- Named after Harlem, Manhattan in New York City
- Fun fact! Ilmar is from Cuba and Jaime is from Puerto Rico!

Musicians, left to right: Felix Umansky (cello), Melissa White (violin), Jaime Amador (viola), Ilmar Gavilán (violin),

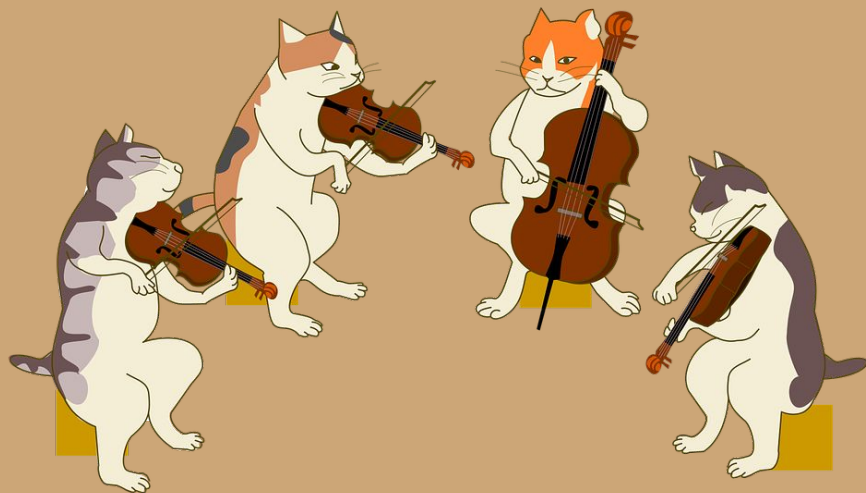


What is a string quartet?

A string **quartet** is made of **four** musicians!

The root word **quart-** means **four!** Just like it takes **four quarters** to make a dollar!

A string quartet usually has two violins, one viola, and one cello! Though, technically, a string quartet **COULD** be any four string instruments playing together!



Let's listen to some JAZZ!

The Harlem String Quartet can play just about ANY kind of music! They play classical music, like music from Mozart. They also play **JAZZ**, like music from Duke Ellington!

Listen to this tune from Duke Ellington. What instruments do you hear and see in this video? Is the music fast or slow?



Jazz played by the Harlem String Quartet

Now listen to the same tune, *Take the 'A' Train*, played by the Harlem String Quartet!

How do the two versions of the song sound the same? How do they sound different?

They're both playing **JAZZ!**



Listen to Ilmar Gavilán talk about playing Jazz as a strings player!



What makes Jazz.. JAZZ?



One main characteristic of jazz is how the musicians **swing** the eighth notes. Instead of *even* eighth notes, they are uneven. The first note is a little bit longer than the second one.

Listen to this little melody, and see if you can hear the difference between **straight** and **swung** eighth notes.

Did you hear the difference between the straight and swung eighth notes?

Swung eighth notes appear all over music, not just in Jazz! Next time you listen to the radio, see if you can find any other swung eighth notes!



The Harlem String
Quartet



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Why Harlem?

During the Harlem Renaissance (1920's - 1940's), there was a huge focus on African American arts, dance, music, and fashion, just to name a few topics! Because of this, lots of people started to learn about issues of what Black and African American people were facing.



Music from the Harlem Renaissance? It's JAZZ!



Jazz is a style of music that has become very popular over the last 100 years. In fact, Jazz is considered to be one of the first “American” styles of music that was ever created!

Jazz is often played by a jazz band. Jazz bands usually include trumpets, saxophones, guitars, basses, piano, and drums.


HOWEVER, anyone can play jazz!

If you want to listen to some jazz music, follow this [link](#)!

Listen to the Harlem String Quartet describe some of the special effects that are used in Wynton Marsalis' *At The Octoroon Ball*.

What are some of the sounds described by the Harlem String Quartet? Can you hear them in the music?





What did you notice about the
Harlem String Quartet's performance?



Does the Harlem Quartet play instruments that are usually
found in jazz? How does the jazz by the string quartet sound
the same or different than big band Jazz?

Activities for deeper understanding...

Follow this [link](#) for a few extra activities for students!