

Kent Blossom From Bogotá to Kent Blossom: Quintet of the Americas (July 1)

by Peter Feher



Colombia may have [underperformed](#) in the 2026 FIFA World Cup, but the nation’s classical composers put on a remarkably strong showing at this year’s Kent Blossom Music Festival. Their works for woodwind quintet got prime playing time in Ludwig Recital Hall on Wednesday, July 1.

“Are you surprised?” A little bit of audience astonishment — all in good sport — was exactly what the Quintet of the Americas hoped to elicit with its Colombian-centric chamber program for Kent Blossom’s Faculty Concert Series.

The evening began with this very question, posed in the form of a pasillo titled *Te Sorprende?* by Jorge Olaya Muñoz. Far from a provocation, the spirit of the piece was instantly inviting, like an emcee asking, “How we all doing tonight?” Warming up to the acoustic of the hall, the ensemble soon found its groove in the lively step of this Latin American cousin to the European waltz.

Formal introductions would occur later, but not before the Quintet dashed off a few more dances, with rhythm always coming to the fore in a delightful way. Bassoonist Alexander Davis led a cheeky count-off (“one, two, and”) that helped ground the fluttering pulse of *El Picaflor* (The Hummingbird), a classic Colombian *porro* by José Barros.

And all five players were tapping their feet and then stomping along in unison to *Rumbaconga*, a brief detour to a couple of familiar Cuban genres by Jorge Amado.

While extroverted by nature, the ensemble could shift just as capably into cerebral mode, especially when approaching more experimental repertoire. *Puzzle-Tocas* by Mexican composer Gabriela Ortiz is essentially a self-referential game, repurposing themes from her earlier works. The score's fragmented texture requires strategic navigation, as flutist Kim O'Hare Bonacorsa demonstrated in every quick switch to piccolo.

Further exploring sonic possibilities, the entire Quintet blew whooshing air through their instruments to mimic the wind in the title of *Venteando*, a fresh piece submitted to the group's recent call for scores by National University of Colombia student César Corredor.

Commissioning has been a crucial part of the Quintet's history, as founding hornist Barbara Oldham explained by way of introduction to *Mañanita*, another miniature by Olaya Muñoz on the concert's second half. The ensemble's first regular gig, after forming in Bogotá in 1976, was a weekly radio program that had to feature at least one Colombian composer per show. This mission took root and has remained over the decades, even through changes of personnel and a move to New York City.

Not every new work will be a resounding success, as evidenced by the somewhat underdeveloped selection that followed intermission, *Cartografías* by Natalia Camargo Duarte. Meant to depict the U.S. immigration crisis, as well as the many extreme reactions that issue has sparked, the piece was simply too sedate, its four movements hardly offering enough contrast.

But everyone's energy had bounced back by the evening's finale, *Quinteto FantásTico* by Costa Rican composer Sergio Delgado (the capital "T" spelling out "Tico," a nickname for his countrymen). Here and throughout the concert, oboist Andrés Ayola and clarinetist David Valbuena were a dynamic pair of middle voices, driving the performance forward.

Tying the whole program together was a thoughtful encore: "Anda buscando de rosa en rosa" from William Grant Still's *Folk Suite No. 4*, music from south of the border as arranged by an American original.

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