

# La Gran Bomba: Modern Puertorrican Music for guitar quartet

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# La Gran Bomba

- This presentation is an accompanying guide to the video “FourteGuitar: La Gran Bomba” which is available at <https://youtu.be/LJni4nQMtSQ>
- This piece was written by Puertorrican composer and classical guitarist Alberto Rodriguez Ortiz for the FourteGuitar Quartet (which I am proud to be a member of!)
- It has an introduction, theme and variations on elements of Puerto Rican Bomba.
- It combines the techniques of modern classical music composition with elements from the native Afro-Puertorrican Bomba to create a new language for guitar quartet.

# Bomba: Definition

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- Bomba is one of the native Afro-Puertorrican styles of music and dance that developed in Puerto Rico over the centuries.
- The music and dance are almost inseparable in this style.
- Two of the main elements of the music are:
  - ‘sing and response’ phrases where a soloist (one singer) sings a verse and the chorus of singers respond to it.
  - Rhythms of percussion: different rhythms and drum styles differentiate the Bomba more than anything. Improvisation on the drums or the many different styles of Bomba rhythm patterns are at the core of this music.

# La Gran Bomba: What to listen for

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- For this piece, the composer chose to use the *holandé* Bomba rhythm. This style is known for its fast pace and difficult rhythmic improvisations.
- Introduction, theme, and variation 1 ('0:00-3:14) – Listen to how the composer builds an atmosphere. Try to identify how he incorporates Bomba rhythms. From early on, you will start to notice interesting rhythms in the guitars. (Hint: those moments are probably infused with Bomba)
- One of the big things to listen for is: the dialogue between the 4 guitars. Try to see how things pass from one guitar to another and make it seem (or sound) like one huge 24 string-guitar.

# La Gran Bomba: What to listen for

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- Variation 2 ('3:15) – Here you will be able to hear a more traditional bomba approach. The 'sing and response' style is in full effect as the composer evokes the traditional Bomba setting, and the guitars act as soloist and choir.
- Variation 3 ('5:15) – is written in the Opera style of 'Recitative' and is more mysterious and lyrical (singing quality).
- Variation 4 ('7:25) – is an explosion of rhythmic themes for the entire group and is a display of virtuoso playing for guitar quartet.
- Variation 5 ('8:16) – is a 'bass' solo for the 4<sup>th</sup> guitar (that's me!) that acts like the solo singer in Bomba.
- Variation 6 and finale ('9:13) – is a 'fireworks' finale for the piece, that incorporates many of the elements used before in a fast paced, intense, and difficult song and dance between the four guitars. (hint: watch for the intense chords at the very end and how they pass between the guitars)

# La Gran Bomba: Composer

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- Alberto Rodriguez Ortiz is a composer and classical guitarist from San Juan, Puerto Rico. His music is characterized by successfully bringing new aesthetic trends to the most demanding public, demonstrating that music is still an art in constant transformation and development.
- This combination of technique, musicality and stage presence has led him to participate in important concert series and festivals in the Caribbean, North America, Central America and Europe. In 1997 was composer in residence for Rome Festival (Rome, Italy).
- His compositions have been performed in major international music halls and festivals by prestigious artists.
- He has written extensively for the classical guitar but has also written for orchestra, chamber ensembles, piano, violin and various other instruments. He has also written music for theater and documentary films.

# La Gran Bomba: Meet FourteGuitar

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- FourteGuitar is a guitar quartet founded in 2012 in San Juan, Puerto Rico by Jorge Calaf (me), Lemuel Lugo, Felix Del Valle and Jehu Otero.
- We met while studying at the Puerto Rico Conservatory and playing in the Conservatory Guitar Orchestra.
- Decided to form a group to stimulate group playing in classical guitar and bring new Puertorrican music to the world of guitar quartet.
- In January 2021 the group released their first album “Puerto Rico a Cuatro Guitarras” that combines traditional (19<sup>th</sup> century) Puertorrican music with new music written for guitar quartet. It is available on all digital platforms!