

Biography The Sarahbanda

The Sarahbanda is a unique ensemble born out of an equally unusual and successful musical idea by Sarah Willis – horn player with the Berlin Philharmonic and passionate salsa dancer. The band has its roots in *Mozart y Mambo*, a project Willis developed together with the Havana Lyceum Orchestra, bringing the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart together with Cuban rhythms and sound worlds. This collaboration not only resulted in acclaimed recordings of Mozart's horn concertos, but also sparked the idea of making the classical horn a permanent part of a Cuban band for the first time.

The enthusiasm Sarah Willis experienced while making music with her Cuban colleagues ultimately led to the founding of the Sarahbanda. Together with outstanding Cuban musicians, she combines the distinctive sound of the horn with the rhythmic and stylistic diversity of Cuban music, creating an ensemble in which different musical traditions come together naturally.

Individual tracks by the Sarahbanda had already appeared on the *Mozart y Mambo* albums before the ensemble released its debut album in September 2024. On the album, the Sarahbanda explores the rich variety of popular Cuban dance rhythms, incorporating the horn into new arrangements created by members of the band and closely associated musicians such as Jorge Aragón and Edgar Olivero. Cuban classics including *Chan Chan*, *Sandunguera* and *Contigo en la Distancia* are heard alongside original compositions by members of the ensemble, revealing a band deeply rooted in Cuban musical tradition while developing a distinctive sound of its own.

In 2025, the Sarahbanda released its second album, *Cuban Christmas*, on Deutsche Grammophon. Joined by singer Carlos Calunga and a string quartet, the ensemble combines international Christmas classics and works from the classical repertoire with Cuban rhythms and arrangements created especially for the project. For *Cuban Christmas*, Sarah Willis was awarded the 2026 OPUS KLASSIK as "Instrumentalist of the Year".

The Sarahbanda is now a regular guest at major European concert halls and renowned festivals. Past and upcoming appearances include the Lucerne Festival, Rheingau Musik Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Berlin Philharmonie, Cologne Philharmonie, Isarphilharmonie Munich, Tonhalle Düsseldorf and Schloss Elmau.

With virtuosity, infectious energy and great stylistic openness, the Sarahbanda has developed a musical language all its own: the horn becomes a Cuban voice, while classical traditions meet son, salsa, bolero and other rhythms of the island. More than simply bringing two musical worlds together, the Sarahbanda's music has grown out of the long-standing collaboration and friendship between Sarah Willis and her Cuban colleagues.

Line-up:

Sarah Willis – horn; Yuniet Lombida – saxophone; Harold Madrigal – trumpet; Amelia Febles – violin; Edgar Olivero – piano; Carlos Garcia – double bass; Alejandro Aguiar – percussion; Adel González – percussion