



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Beethoven's Symphony No. 9

"The Ninth." To a concert-goer or musician those two words can only refer to the last of Beethoven's nine symphonies, which is a measure of its iconic stature in the world of music. Any performance of the Ninth Symphony is a major event, and we are proud to present it, with the participation of the North Shore Choral Society, in this renewed 75th anniversary season.

This was the first symphony to include words, requiring four vocal soloists in addition to a large chorus for the setting of the "Ode to Joy" by Schiller which provides the climax of the final movement. But the orchestral forces also exceed those of any previous symphony (the premiere was in 1824). The normal orchestra required for the later symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, as well as for the majority of the symphonies of Beethoven and Schubert, comprises the strings, pairs of woodwinds, horns and trumpets, and timpani. In his Fifth Symphony, Beethoven expanded the size of the orchestra with three trombones plus piccolo and contra-bassoon. Then in the Ninth, he added the bass drum, triangle, cymbals, and another pair of horns, creating the types of interpretive difficulties described by Maestro Eckerling in his "Behind the Scenes" column on the next page, as well as the most important fourth horn part in the orchestral repertoire. In addition to the size of the orchestra, the Ninth is notable for its length, approximately 70 minutes of performance duration as compared to 25–30 minutes for other symphonies of its time. In fact, it's also longer than almost any of the commonly performed symphonies of the ensuing 187 years.


But none of these historical landmarks would matter without the greatness of the music itself, with its theme of the "Brotherhood of Man" and with its universally

SUNDAY, APRIL 10

— 2:30 PM

BEETHOVEN 9

recognizable melody extolling joy. Beethoven viewed this "brotherhood" as aspirational, and current political events demonstrate the extent to which the world is falling far short of Beethoven's and Schiller's dreams.

Our opening work provides at least some indication of an enhanced "brotherhood of man," at least in the realm of classical music. This is the *Festive Overture* by William Grant Still, who was often deemed the "Dean of African-American Classical Composers." He was the first African-American composer to have a symphony performed by a professional orchestra in the U.S., the first to conduct a major symphony orchestra in the United States, and the first to have an opera performed by a major opera company. The *Festive Overture* dates from 1944 and was the winning entry from an "overture competition" sponsored by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra which drew efforts from about 40 composers. The Evanston Symphony is proud to present this dynamic work in conjunction with "The Ninth." 

—David Ellis



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1:30 PM

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For more information on ESO concerts and events, please contact David Ellis, General Manager, at (847) 864-8804.

Write us at Evanston Symphony Orchestra, PO Box 778, Evanston, IL 60204.

Email us at esomusic@evanstonsymphony.org. Visit our website at evanstonsymphony.org.



BEHIND THE SCENES



It is often mentioned that with Beethoven's 9th Symphony he pushed the envelope.

What exactly does that mean? Well, certainly he used a chorus, which had never been done before. But there are many more illuminating things.

As Beethoven progressed through his career, one of the ways he pushed the boundaries was in the complex harmonies he used. He changed keys (modulated) often, and his music got more and more chromatic (harmonically ambiguous). While a piano has every note available, as do string instruments, many other instruments do not, or at least, did not at the time of composition of the Ninth. Specifically, the trumpets, horns, and even timpani had great difficulty playing notes that were not in the pre-determined key. Horns and trumpets had different pieces of the instrument that could be swapped out to help facilitate playing in different keys, but certainly, the more frequent the changes were, the more problematic it was to write that music for the symphony.

In the case of Beethoven's 9th, his impulse to change keys and tonal regions in the music was so great that he frequently had to assign instruments "alternate notes" instead of the ones he likely wanted to use. He had to

have instruments drop out for a single measure and then come back in, because in that one measure, the pitches were not available on that instrument. And sometimes he had to have other instruments take over for this instrument for that one bar to fill in the gap. Sometimes main themes expected to be heard cannot be heard because other instruments that would normally reinforce those themes could not play that theme, being in the wrong key. These problems do not exist in a piano sonata, or a string quartet (the other two main bodies of Beethoven's output). So this problem that I am speaking of pertains only to orchestral pieces.

Many conductors set out to fix some of these problems. The trick for each conductor is to help bring out Beethoven's intentions, but without "fixing" so much that it no longer sounds like Beethoven. All conductors will arrive at different decisions as to what to do and what not to do. For this performance, I have modeled decisions based on conclusions made by the conductor Felix Weingartner, whose writings on Beethoven and German music are still highly relevant. If the decisions I have made are good ones, listeners will not notice that any changes were made at all. It will just sound "right." 🎧

—Lawrence Eckerling
Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra



Musical Insights

A free pre-concert event at The Merion
Friday, April 8, 1:30 PM

Enhance your concert experience with a sneak preview. Composers come alive and their passions take center stage when ESO General Manager, David Ellis, and ESO Maestro Lawrence Eckerling take you on an insider's tour of the history and highlights behind the music.

THE MERION

Meet Ola Rafalo, the mezzo soprano who will be singing in the upcoming performance of Beethoven's 9th symphony. Ms. Rafalo is a Polish-American who won the Maria Callas Prize in 2019. She will sing something special for this event. 🎧



In Memoriam

Ralph Wilder

The entire Evanston Symphony family mourns the untimely death of our principal clarinetist emeritus, Ralph Wilder.

A Chicagoan through and through, Ralph was born and raised on Chicago's south side. He didn't pick up a clarinet until he was in high school, but was soon hooked on the instrument, earning both his bachelor's and master's degrees in music education at Northwestern. Hired as a substitute player by a local band leader, Ralph was bitten by the band bug and went on to have a career that included conducting the Northwest Concert Band, teaching woodwinds and music appreciation at North Park University, and playing principal clarinet in the Evanston Symphony. For many years, Ralph was the leader of his own "party band,"

the Ralph Wilder Orchestra. He also performed frequently with the Maxwell Street Klezmer Band and played lead alto saxophone with a local jazz band and a Dixieland band.

In May of 2018, however, tragedy struck. During a rehearsal with the Chicago Clarinet Ensemble, a large theatre screen and its housing broke loose from its ceiling moorings and fell on Ralph, leaving him paralyzed from mid-chest down and ending his career, but not his spirit. Unfortunately, his body slowly deteriorated and he succumbed to his injuries on February 26, 2022. We miss his extraordinary musicianship, his talent as a storyteller, and his delightful sense of humor.

For more about Ralph, including some wonderful anecdotes about him, please visit the ESO's website at evanstonssymphony.org/r-wilder-oblit. 🎧

Meet the North Shore Choral Society

AN ALIGNMENT OF GIFTED AMATEURS

From its beginnings in 1936 as a choral group whose director was paid an annual salary of \$250, the 120-voice North Shore Choral Society has evolved into the pre-eminent mixed chorus on the North Shore.

In its early years, the NSCS gave two concerts each season with programs consisting of a large number of shorter works accompanied by a string quartet, piano or organ; early spring concerts were held outdoors in a garden. In 1945, the chorus grew with the influx of veterans and home front workers from WWII, a pool of talent that led also to the founding of the Evanston Symphony Orchestra that same year. In the 1950s the chorus changed from programming shorter works to presenting major choral compositions, such as Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and Brahms' *German Requiem*. In the 1960s, they initiated a three-concert season with Tuesday rehearsals and Sunday concerts, the format that they follow to this day.

A first for the North Shore Choral Society and the Evanston Symphony Orchestra came on May 19, 1978, when the chorus performed "Spring" from Haydn's *The Seasons* and Beethoven's *Fantasia in C Minor for Piano, Chorus and Orchestra* with the ESO under the baton of the legendary Frank Miller, who was also principal cellist of the Chicago Symphony. This collaboration was followed by three joint concerts with ESO conductor Lynn Schornick and NSCS's Donald Chen. Under the joint leadership of the ESO's Maestro Lawrence Eckerling with Donald Chen and his successor, Dr. Julia Davids, this relationship has blossomed into six regular season concerts over 14 years and, since 2011, ten Holiday Concerts. We posed the question "Why do you sing?" to NSCS General Manager Karen Rigotti (Alto 1), Board President Debbie Buesing (Soprano 2), and Fran Faller (Alto 2), who is also a subscriber to the Evanston Symphony. Each expressed similar thoughts in different words:

Debbie said that singing nourishes her soul. "In choral singing you get to meet a lot of terrific people; you collaborate, learn things, and are exposed to new



types of music. Bringing music to an audience is a joy!" Singing is also food for Karen's soul. "What comes out is greater than the sum of the parts. Interacting with an audience is exhilarating because they send you energy back." For Fran, singing is an expression of happiness and she enjoys the NSCS's "camaraderie in a choral setting."

Each singer has a favorite performance with the ESO. Debbie's is Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, which she "checked off [her] bucket list" after the joint ESO-NSCS performance in May of 2019. She's also looking forward to the upcoming Beethoven Ninth, as is Fran, who calls this an exciting time because she's never sung this magnificent piece before. Karen's favorite performance with the ESO was Verdi's *Requiem* in 2014. "The trumpets from the balcony rocked my world!" All three singers give high marks to Dr. Julia Davids, who was named Music Director of the North Shore Choral Society in 2009. They are especially appreciative of her efforts during the pandemic, a time when most ideas and practices of choral singing were turned upside down... "Julia gives so much to her fellow singers and kept us together during COVID. We rehearsed via Zoom, which let us feel close but safe."

Canadian-born Julia Davids holds degrees in Education, Conducting, and Voice Performance from the University of Western Ontario, the University of Michigan, and Northwestern University. In addition to her post with the NSCS, she has been Artistic Director of the Canadian Chamber Choir, Canada's award-winning national professional chamber ensemble, since 2004 and is in demand as an adjudicator, clinician, and guest conductor.

When asked what makes the NSCS work, Julia replied that the people are always more important than the music. Each singer has a story and something in that story draws them to the chorus, a "community of people who genuinely care for one another.

When you sing together, you get to know their stories and see what they bring to each other; in learning from one another and together, you get to like each other more."

Julia says that the ESO-NSCS collaboration is a "really great thing for the chorus because there are a lot of philosophical things that align. The chorus has a desire to be as good as we can be within our means, but hiring a professional orchestra is expensive. The collaboration with the ESO means working with gifted amateurs who have the same spirit as the NSCS." Julia's favorite concerts with the ESO to date have been the Verdi *Requiem* in 2014 and the ten Holiday Concerts because of the variety of the music. She appreciates the directness of communication with ESO Music Director Lawrence Eckerling. "It's refreshing. We call one another for advice and can be direct. We're aligned in wishing a rewarding musical experience for members and audience alike and hope to do something big every few years." Larry Eckerling is equally complimentary: "Over the years, Julia has been an outstanding collaborating partner. I have great respect for her knowledge and ability to prepare her choirs." Because Julia rehearses the choirs for the concerts, but Larry directs the actual performance, he goes on to note that "there is another level required to prepare the choir for a different conductor, because it is not always known what that conductor is going to want to do. And the choir has to be flexible enough to make last minute adjustments. Julia prepares them extremely well for that."

All of the ESO musicians and NSCS singers are truly "gifted amateurs" in the true sense of the word: "Amateur" comes from Middle French and means *lover, one who engages in an activity for pleasure rather than financial gain*. Indeed a wonderful alignment of harmonious spirits. ☀


—Kelly Brest van Kempen

Celebrate the Evanston Symphony Orchestra in its Renewed 75th Season with your gift to the 2022 Annual Fund!

The ESO is proud of its commitment to quality performances, engagement with community partners and outreach to Evanston's youngest, most vulnerable students and also seniors. We make live classical concerts accessible to all and enrich people's lives with music! The ESO is excited to be back performing live. We performed a free outdoor concert at The Wallace Bowl in Gillson Park last August and returned to a stage indoors in November playing Wagner, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. Our Holiday Concert in December was a glorious celebration of community with six diverse arts groups performing with an audience of 1,000.

Of course, the ESO does much more than perform concerts. We are proud of our free music education program, *Music In Your World*, which you can read about inside *KeyNotes*. We reach out to our audience with Musical Insights, our free pre-concert programs on Friday afternoons in downtown Evanston. Musical Insights expands patrons' musical understanding and enriches their concert experience. When the pandemic hit, we partnered with the Evanston Care network, a community taskforce convened by Evanston's mayor working to ensure the health and wellbeing of low-income seniors isolated by the pandemic. Over 3,000 seniors received a free monthly packet of "brain activities," including ESO's *HighNotes*, a 24-page booklet of musical articles, puzzles, jokes, reminiscences, and links to online performances. This amazing booklet, produced by an ESO board member, was so popular that several upscale senior facilities requested copies for their residents. At concerts we are happy to hand out special large-type programs, as well as *KidNotes*, program notes designed specifically for our younger audience members.

The ESO is a true community orchestra that touches the hearts and minds of people from 2 to 102! We hope that you share our pride in the many contributions our orchestra has made to our community. Please consider a tax-deductible gift to the Evanston Symphony Orchestra's 2022 Annual Fund.

Thank you! 

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Bringing music to vulnerable pre-schoolers

Since 2003, the ESO has brought free *Music In Your World* enrichment classes to School District 65 Head Start, Pre-K, Early Head Start and Early Start students. These classes are highly valued and loved and have measurable impact on children's kindergarten readiness. During the pandemic, we were unable to reach students in person but worked with D65 staff to reach families at home online through Zoom. D65's Early Start program supports 80 vulnerable families with children to age 3. We continued our weekly online music lessons using songs to teach important pre-literacy skills, encourage parent/child bonding, and raise spirits through singing together. Our teacher also made videos of songs so families could sing together anytime and peppered these videos with suggestions for parents on how to use music in their daily lives as teaching moments.



For Head Start and Pre-K families, we provided monthly Zoom sessions on Friday evenings. Our family evenings engaged parents, particularly dads, in their children's education through singing, dancing and other shared activities. All lessons involve singing to improve everyone's mood and engage children and parents through the joy of music. We regularly reached over 50 families through these classes.

We are now heading back to the classroom to bring music in person to these young students. The smiles on everyone's faces will be a delight to see. 🌈

