



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Mahler 1

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra opens its February concert with the Overture from *The Marriage of Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791). Adapted from a stage comedy by Pierre Beaumarchais, the opera was banned by the Emperor of the Habsburgs for its frank treatment of class conflict. Two years later, Mozart's librettist managed to get approval from the emperor for an operatic version. But to do so, he replaced Figaro's climactic speech against inherited nobility with an equally angry aria against unfaithful wives. Apparently, anger at women was more acceptable than anger at the ruling class!

The opera premiered in Vienna in May 1786 and achieved great success. Mozart conducted the premiere from the keyboard, and it became an instant hit. The overture, written just two days before the Vienna premiere, is an exuberant beginning to Mozart's opera.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953) was an accomplished pianist and conductor. He left his homeland during the Russian Revolution in 1917, traveling to various locations in the United States and Europe where he made a living composing and performing.

His Violin Concerto No. 2 was inspired by his travels. The first movement of the piece was written in Paris; the first theme of the second movement in Voronezh, Russia; and the instrumentation was completed in Baku, Azerbaijan. The piece premiered in 1935 in Madrid.

In contrast, Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) wrote his ambitious first symphony from his homeland while conductor of the Leipzig Opera in Germany in 1888. On the piece's first page, Mahler wrote *wie ein Naturlaut*, which loosely translates to "as if spoken by nature."

In the first two movements Mahler includes themes from *Songs of a Wayfarer*. One of these wayfarer songs—*ging heut morgen über's feld*—translates to "this morning I walked across the field." The nature theme continues in the third movement, but as a funeral march inspired by

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12

— 2:30 PM

MAHLER 1



an old Austrian folk story called *The Hunter's Funeral*.

The finale starts with "the outcry of a wounded heart" in the opening measures. There is a real struggle to overcome darkness in this movement. Mahler summons a victorious and heroic ending that has the ESO's wonderful brass section standing as they play the theme "and he shall reign" in a moment of pure jubilation.

We dedicate this concert to the memory of our longtime General Manager and dear friend David Ellis. Mahler was one of his favorite composers, and we play this concert to honor David's memory.

A few quick administrative notes: In line with current recommendations, we will continue to require patrons to show an ID and up-to-date vaccination card upon entering Pick-Staiger Concert Hall and to wear a mask. Children 5 and over are welcome at the concert if they have a current vaccination card and wear a mask. As always, our free Musical Insights program will feature Maestro Eckerling and soloist Irina Muresanu for an insider's tour of the history and highlights behind the music on Friday, Feb 10, at 1:30 at The Merion's Crystal Ballroom. 📶



FREE

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MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2023
1:30 PM

MEET IRINA MURESANU

1611 CHICAGO AVE., EVANSTON
PLEASE RSVP TO 847-570-7815

THE MERION



This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.



THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA USES THE POWER OF MUSIC TO LIFT THE HUMAN SPIRIT. WE ENGAGE AND ENRICH THE COMMUNITY BY COMING TOGETHER TO PERFORM, INSPIRE AND EDUCATE. For more information on ESO concerts and events, please contact Fiona Queen, Interim 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 evanstonsymphony.org.

BEHIND THE SCENES



At our opening concert in October, a very interesting thing happened. After the beautiful slow movement of Florence Price's Symphony No. 3, there was spontaneous applause, which abruptly seemed to stop. It wasn't the usual smooth taper that applause usually ends with. It was tentative and abrupt. I turned to the audience, and said, "It's okay!," and then people applauded even louder.

In the time of Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, people routinely applauded between movements. They showed their appreciation, sometimes so vigorously that they demanded a repeat of that movement before proceeding. Late in the 19th century, some conductors began demanding (for the "sanctity" of the great works) that audiences refrain from applause until the end of a complete work. This spread like wildfire. And many audience members copied those conductors' demands as a way to set themselves above others. "I know the rules, and you aren't supposed to applaud between movements." They began policing other audience members. (What a way to make someone feel uncomfortable!)

The whole point of a musical composition is to elicit an emotional response from the music. The job of a musical performer is to take that music and, being moved with an emotional response, transmit those feelings to an audience so that each person hearing the performance also has an emotional response to the music. That's the whole ballgame. One of our orchestra members, after reading

my post on Facebook about this said (paraphrased), "If the whole point of musical performance is to elicit an emotional response, then we are doing a disservice to the audience if we try to micromanage their emotional response through stifling them." I wholeheartedly agree.

Some pieces of music demand applause...such as after the third (but not final) movement of Tchaikovsky's 6th Symphony. After being roused with such excitement, audiences should not, and cannot be stifled.

Stifling audience members makes them uncomfortable, and some people would rather not go to the symphony only to be made uncomfortable. That is the last thing we want. What we DO want is people to come and be emotionally touched. And if they want to express their enthusiasm after a movement, it should be encouraged, not discouraged. Not from a conductor and not from another audience member.

"Don't applaud between movements" is one of the silliest (and potentially damaging) "rules" of our artform.

In my mind, here are the only "rules." Come to our concerts. Expect to be emotionally touched. If your appreciation of the music moves you to applaud, go for it. The *only* caveat would be to try not to disturb others around you while the music is actually being played. When the musicians have stopped playing, any response is acceptable. We love getting the feedback, and we especially love knowing the music has reached you emotionally.

Happy concert-going! 🎵

—Lawrence Eckerling

Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra



In Memoriam: David B. Ellis

The Evanston Symphony's February 12th concert honors the memory of our beloved General Manager, David Ellis, who passed away on July 26th.

David was the ESO's General Manager for 14 years. He knew all of our musicians and all of our subscribers (including their seat numbers!) He had an encyclopedic knowledge of classical music and a head filled with a galaxy of facts ranging from every Mozart Köchel number to which recording of a Mahler symphony was the best—he had them all—to funny anecdotes about eccentric conductors. He knew which conductors emphasize strings and which favor the brass. He talked about how the brightness of sound changes if you tune the orchestra a few hertz higher (a 445 Hz makes a brighter sound than 440 Hz), and he easily compared the sound quality of music venues ranging from Orchestra Hall to the ETHS Auditorium.

David came to the ESO Board in 2003, the same year that Lawrence Eckerling became Music Director. He was invited by ESO Board friends who knew his background as a finance professional who loved and supported classical music: Assistant Treasurer at Sara Lee, on the

Civic Orchestra of Chicago Board, on the Visiting Committee for the University of Chicago's music department, and a former member of the Junior Governing Board of the Chicago Symphony. This background made him a perfect fit for the ESO, and he was appointed General Manager in 2008.

Over the next decade, David put the ESO on firm financial footing, which helped us survive the pandemic when other orchestras did not. He also used the breadth and depth of his musical knowledge to collaborate with Music Director Eckerling in lively presentations at our Musical Insights pre-concert lectures. David once said that all of his knowledge was based on his love of music and was mostly self-taught; according to Larry Eckerling, David was "more knowledgeable about music than any non-musician I have ever met."

David's loss to the ESO is immeasurable and we miss his competence, collegiality and quirky sense of humor. Our sympathy and caring go out to his wife, Marcia, and sons Michael, Matthew, and Peter and their families for the depth of their loss. It is thus both in the sadness of that loss and the joy of having known him that we dedicate this concert in honor of the memory of David B. Ellis, our respected colleague and dear friend. 🎵

Irina Muresanu: Silver Linings

Thursday, March 12, 2020. Violinist Irina Muresanu was taking a walk in Evanston, a town she dearly loves. She had arrived here on Tuesday and rehearsed with the ESO that evening in anticipation of her performance of Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2 on Sunday, March 15. Then her phone rang. Larry Eckerling. The concert was canceled. A virus had taken control of our lives.

With the onset of the pandemic, Irina's husband, a physician, insisted that she and their son, Victor, then 11, retreat to a farmhouse the family owns in Maine. "We packed for three weeks," Irina said. "We stayed for six months!" They had no sooner arrived in Maine than the University of Maryland, where Irina is Associate Professor of Violin, announced that all classes were moving online; Victor's school soon followed suit. Irina says that both she and Victor managed to adapt, albeit with some trials and errors. During her first two months of virtual teaching, however, she discovered that she could actually give her students more time online than she could were she there in person. One small silver lining!

The pandemic had a gradual, but inexorable, impact on Irina's 2020–21 performance schedule. March concerts were canceled with the thought that they could perhaps be rescheduled for June; then June concerts were canceled, then entire seasons, including the ESO's. Summer festivals, recitals and master classes were scrubbed. Irina was able to record some performances, but their presentations were online.

On a positive note, the pandemic gave Irina the opportunity to work on a project that aligns with her passions for education, performance and technology: recording the standard *études*, the exercises all violinists must learn to

make the basics, such as fingering and bowings, become "part of their bones." Some *études* are on video, but most are only on paper. Irina has been working with a colleague at Maryland's Institute for Advanced Computer Studies to develop an artificial intelligence application—called VALolin—to make these *études* more accessible and give more feedback to students practicing at home. The app will analyze different factors in a student's playing, including posture, motor skills and sound. The idea for the app originated during the pandemic, Irina said in a 2021 interview with *The Diamondback*, Maryland's student newspaper. "I realized that we need to move traditional violin pedagogy into the virtual world." Violin students typically have one private lesson a week, which means that, for the next six days, they are practicing on their own with no guidance from a teacher. VALolin will serve as an at-home teaching assistant between lessons. When fully developed, the app will use a camera to analyze the student's posture (essential for producing a good sound) and will also give feedback on the motor skills the *études* are meant to develop.

In addition to its purpose as an AI teaching assistant, VALolin will also help make learning the violin more accessible, Irina said. "There are places in the world where... there are people that might not have the luxury of having a teacher nearby, or they don't have the financial means to have a private lesson." VALolin aims to fill those gaps.

In July 2021, Irina and her colleague received the prestigious Maryland Innovation Initiative Award for their collaborative research on developing AI technology for use in violin pedagogy. Another silver lining!

Barriers to international travel were lifting in late spring 2021, so Irina took

a sabbatical from Maryland and went to France to work on a research project. "However, the second I landed my phone started ringing!" Word of her arrival had preceded her; she soon had a full schedule. She gave numerous performances in France and her native Romania and also judged international competitions in both countries. A highlight was judging diploma exams in Paris and Lyon. "This was not one of those vacations where you sit in a cafe and eat croissants!" Irina said, although she admitted that she did have a bit of time for café-sitting during her year in France. A sabbatical with multiple silver linings!

Now back teaching at Maryland, Irina is still performing quite a bit, but primarily in the U.S. She did, however, have a week-long residency giving master classes in the Cayman Islands and in the fall went back to Europe for several concerts and to edit a recording she had made there in the summer. And now she is coming to Evanston.

On February 12th, Irina Muresanu will play Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, marking her sixth scheduled appearance with the ESO. Given her stellar concert and recording career, we asked what it is that keeps bringing her back to this community orchestra in the Chicago suburbs. "Two things," she said. "First is this incredible musical relationship with Larry Eckerling, an outstanding conductor. Second is my admiration of the commitment of the orchestra musicians to producing quality music. This is not your ordinary community orchestra!" Thank you, Irina—and welcome back!



—Kelly Brest van Kempen



Musical Insights

A free pre-concert event at The Merion
Friday, February 10, 1:30 PM

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

Meet Irina Muresanu, who will be playing the Prokofiev Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor in our concert on February 12. Ms. Muresanu was originally scheduled to perform this concerto at our March, 2020 concert when the pandemic shut-down two days before canceled the performance.

THE MERION



PHOTO BY LAURA BENNETT

Chicago Ballet Arts danced "The Skaters Waltz" accompanied by the ESO

A sold-out audience for our Holiday Concert

1,400 people packed the ETHS Auditorium on December 11th for our festive Holiday Concert. Our full orchestra was joined by young dancers from Evanston Dance Ensemble and Chicago Ballet Arts, and also singers from North Shore Choral Society, Evanston Children's Choir, and our very own Evanston Symphony Gospel Choir, led by the Reverend Ken Cherry. Colorful poinsettias outlined the stage, and the audience applauded enthusiastically for all the music from Tchaikovsky to the Charleston to Hannukah. Santa and his elves visited the show, handing out candy. Santa pulled 11 winning raffle tickets including the grand prize of a \$1,000 gift certificate from Christopher Duquet Fine Jewelry.

This show is loved as much by the orchestra musicians, singers, and dancers, as well as the audience. Maliwen Diemer, the Artistic Director of Chicago Ballet Arts, wrote afterwards: 'I cannot thank you enough for including us and providing our students with such an incredible experience. I told the dancers this weekend that there are people who dream their whole lives of getting to dance on stage with a live orchestra and never get to. That the ESO has included us and given our students this opportunity, graciously allowing us to include even some of our youngest dancers, is something I will be forever grateful for. They will take away wonderful memories and a deeper appreciation of music.'

This concert finished with *Hallelujah* from Quincy Jones' *Handel's Messiah*, a *Soulful Celebration*, sung by all three choirs along with the orchestra, electric bass, and a full percussion section. What a glorious way to celebrate the holidays in Evanston fashion! 🎶



PHOTO BY LAURA BENNETT

Evanston Symphony Holiday Gospel Choir with soloist Jamie Harris, sing "Jesus, Oh, What a Wonderful Child"



PHOTO BY LAURA BENNETT

Santa and all three choirs, along with the Evanston Symphony Orchestra, celebrate a rousing concert finale

Support for the ESO

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra is proud to be a financially sound, well-managed organization with an active working board. Grants from state and local governments contribute to this success: for the 2022–23 fiscal year we have received grants from the Illinois Arts Council Agency, the City of Evanston Arts Council Cultural Arts Fund, and the City of Evanston American Rescue Plan (ARP). The ARP grant was funded through the federal National Endowment for the Arts to support organizations in the arts sector impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. All these funds ensure that we can keep ticket prices low and support our community programs like *Music In Your World*, our free music education classes for D65's Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Start programs as well as *KidNotes*, our program notes for younger audience members, and *HighNotes*, our outreach to isolated seniors in our community. We are grateful for this support and also the support of people like you who buy tickets to our concerts and further our mission with generous individual donations. 📶



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The ESO thanks you for your support. All contributions are tax deductible and will be listed in the concert program.

For more information on ESO concerts and events, please contact us, at (847) 864-8804 or visit evanstonsymphony.org.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12 • 2:30 PM

MAHLER 1

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, CONDUCTOR

PICK-STAIGER CONCERT HALL

50 Arts Circle Dr., Evanston

MOZART

Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*

PROKOFIEV

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor

Irina Muresanu, violin

MAHLER

Symphony No. 1 in D Major



*Irina Muresanu,
violin*

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