



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Carmen & Firebird

THE FINAL CONCERT OF OUR SEASON features suites from two of the most popular works in classical music — George Bizet's *Carmen* and Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, and they surround a performance by the brilliant young violinist Nathan Amaral, recipient of the Sphinx Organization's 2024 Medal of Excellence Award.

Spain has long inspired artists with its beauty, rhythms, and heat. In this program, that spirit comes to life through two contrasting perspectives: Georges Bizet's (1838–1875) outsider fascination and Manuel de Falla's (1876–1946) insider voice.

Bizet premiered *Carmen* in 1875 without ever visiting Spain, yet he conjures Seville with startling immediacy — sensual, volatile, and theatrical. The city's operatic legacy frames a story driven by desire and power, and Carmen's refusal to submit makes her both the engine of the drama and its tragedy, as Don José kills her when she stands firm in rejection.

By contrast, Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat* grows from Spain's own traditions, drawing on Andalusian song and dance — flamenco-inflected rhythms and gestures shaped into bright orchestral color, sharp accents, and percussive energy that suggest guitars and castanets.

Both works hinge on a love triangle, but their tones could not be more different: *Carmen* ends in fatal violence, while *The Three-Cornered Hat* plays its intrigue for humor and communal celebration, as villagers outwit and embarrass the *corregidor* (magistrate).

If Bizet imagines Spain as a romantic, combustible dream from afar, Falla paints it from within. Heard together, these pieces reveal multiple Spains — seductive and theatrical, tragic and satirical, folk-rooted yet artfully transformed — an enduring artistic idea that continues to ignite performers and audiences.

Alexander Glazunov (1865–1936) was a late Romantic Russian composer, music teacher, and director of the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. Starting piano lessons at age 9 and composing at 11, he studied privately with Rimsky-Korsakov,

SUNDAY, JUNE 7


— 2:30 PM

**CARMEN &
FIREBIRD**



who later regarded him as a colleague. By 1899, Glazunov led the Conservatory, improving curriculum and student welfare; Dmitri Shostakovich was among his students. Glazunov's Violin Concerto premiered in Saint Petersburg in 1905, and the American debut took place in 1911 with Efreim Zimbalist and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Glazunov's international success enabled tours across Europe and the United States before he settled in Paris in 1929.

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) was a Russian composer whose innovative work shaped modernist music. After studying with Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky's breakthrough came when Sergei Diaghilev commissioned him to write ballets, including *The Firebird*. The ballet tells the story of Prince Ivan and the magical Firebird defeating the evil Koshchei. Its Paris premiere was a sensation, and the suite remains one of Stravinsky's most beloved works, blending Russian folk melodies, vibrant orchestration, and dramatic storytelling in music.

Don't miss this blockbuster finale of our POWER of Music season! 



MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2026

1:30 PM

FREE

MEET NATHAN AMARAL

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Behind The Scenes

Dear ESO Subscribers,

In this concert, we will be performing Stravinsky's suite from his first major ballet, *The Firebird*. This will be the 1919 version (there are at least 3 versions of the suite).

When I was growing up, there was a 31-LP recording set of the complete recordings of Stravinsky, conducted either by Stravinsky himself or by his musical assistant and collaborator, Robert Craft. After hearing these recordings in a 22-CD set as an adult, what is striking to me about them (recorded mostly in the 1960s) is the discomfort that seemed evident from the players in the orchestras and ensembles. The recordings were professionally done, of course, but often you could hear the struggle the players had in playing the rhythms and the notes correctly. In the case of *The Firebird*, the recordings were made in the 1960s, some 50 years after it was composed, but still 60 years ago!

I was interested in seeing if I could find the oldest recording I could of *The Firebird* — and I found one, with the composer conducting, from 1928. That is only 18 years after its composition. And whatever traits I heard in those recordings from the 1960s, the one from 1928 was even more illuminating. This music was still new music at that time, so it made me think about how the music felt, not only to the

audience, but also to the players and conductors when the music was new. The performances were raw. It was difficult, and it SOUNDED difficult. There were no traditions on how to play the music yet. The players hadn't been practicing the excerpts for hours and days and weeks, preparing to play them at a series of auditions while trying to get an orchestra position. Different harmonies than players were used to made them play out of tune more frequently than they normally did. The rhythms were tricky. And yes, even 18 years after conception, Stravinsky the Conductor took different tempos than Stravinsky the Composer wrote in his score. So the composer was beginning to evolve long before the players and orchestras did.

Today, in 2026, the music is still difficult, but not nearly as difficult or as uncomfortable to play as it was then. And it reminds me that all music — ALL music — was brand new once. And then it has its own life, its own journey. And it evolves. And conductors and players evolve right along with it. And when the Evanston Symphony plays this music this June, the music will have had 116 years to evolve and to become part of the fabric of the “standard repertoire” for orchestra. 🎧

—Lawrence Eckerling
Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

Celebrate ESO’s 80th Anniversary Season “For the Love of Music”

Join us in celebrating the Evanston Symphony Orchestra’s 80 years of artistry, tradition and community connection by subscribing to the 2026–2027 season. Music Director Lawrence Eckerling and the ESO, winners of the 2026 “Programming of the Year Award” from the Illinois Council of Orchestras, have scheduled four “must-hear” programs filled with powerful masterpieces and compositions you’ll want to know. Every program reflects the 2026–2027 season theme, “For the Love of Music.”

Among the highlights are Beethoven’s iconic Symphony No. 5 in an all-Beethoven season-opening program honoring the 250th anniversary of the composer’s death and Sir Karl Jenkins’ tragic and life-affirming monumental choral work *The Armed Man: A Mass For Peace*. Other featured works include Saint-Saëns’ “Organ Symphony,” the Piano Concerto No. 2 of Rachmaninoff, Rimsky-Korsakoff’s *Sheherazade*, as well as compositions by Shostakovich, Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de St. George, Respighi and Haydn.



The North Shore Choral Society and guest soloists will join the ESO for *The Armed Man*. Featured soloists include ESO favorite Irina Mursanu playing Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, pianist Winston Choi interpreting the Rachmaninoff, and violinist Adé Williams on Boulogne’s Violin Concerto No. 10. Concertmaster Julie Fischer will be featured in Rimsky-Korsakoff’s *Sheherazade*.

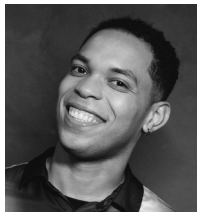
You won’t want to miss a single concert of the 2026–27 80th anniversary season. See the concert dates and programs — and an order form — in this issue or on the ESO’s website at evanstonsymphony.org. Subscribe today to the ESO’s 2026–2027 concert season “For the Love of Music.” 🎧

Evanston Symphony Orchestra wins Programming of the Year from Illinois Council of Orchestras.

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra, led by Music Director Lawrence Eckerling, is honored to announce that it has received the “2026 Programming of the Year Award” from the Illinois Council of Orchestras. 🎧

PROGRAM CHANGE for our June 7th concert: Please note that *Sheherazade*, originally scheduled for our upcoming concert has been replaced with Bizet’s Suite from *Carmen* (from Suites 1 & 2) and Stravinsky’s Suite from *The Firebird* (1919). *Sheherazade* has been rescheduled to be performed in the 2026–2027 season. Tickets for June 7, 2026, although titled “Scherazade” are, indeed, the correct tickets for this concert. 🎧

Violinist Nathan Amaral: From *Favela* to World Stage



Nathan Amaral was born in Rio de Janeiro and raised in the *favela* of Mangueira, a neighborhood where there was a high risk of criminality and drug abuse. “I was very lucky,” Nathan said. “One day a random guy knocked on the door of our house and asked if I would like to play the violin. He explained that they started a social project and they wanted to take the kids out from the streets to give them something to do with their spare time. So I immediately said no because I didn’t know what it was about. In fact, I didn’t even know what a violin was! And then my mother said, ‘Well, you should try; you never tried a musical instrument.’ That advice has served him well. At 12, Nathan took his first steps to becoming a classical violinist.

Nathan describes the program as “very chaotic. There were about 50 kids with very few violins and we had to learn for two minutes and then pass on to the next kid...” Then the teacher saw that he could easily remember what had been previously taught and suggested he could become a violinist. Nathan said that in the beginning it was mostly about the craft of playing the violin. “I found it very interesting and was curious to understand how such a nice sound comes from a piece of wood. Then I tried and sounded awful! ‘Wait! How is this possible it sounds so bad?!’ But the key curiosity of trying to make it sound good was what motivated me.”

There was never a precise moment when Nathan decided to make music his career. “I think that was my escape route from my reality back in the *favelas*, and then people always kept pushing me, saying that I was going to go far if I practiced really hard. So, when I realized I’m here now, it wasn’t really a choice. I think music choose me, first as a way of getting out of the *favela* and then as a way of staying out of the *favela*.”

After studies in Germany, Nathan completed post-graduate work at the New England Conservatory on full scholarship. He has performed with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Brazilian Symphony Orchestra, among others. In 2021, to give back to his community, he

founded his own festival to support and teach young musicians from difficult backgrounds in Brazil.

Nathan has recently relocated to London, where his husband, George Rowley, is a concert pianist. “What I love about London is the diversity! You can find everything!” Nathan said. “I can find the best Brazilian food supermarket with big things that I miss, and they’re just around the corner!”

Nathan loves cooking Brazilian food, especially *feijoada*, the famous Brazilian black bean stew. “Brazilian food is... as we say, we take other cuisines and upgrade them! We even have fried sushi!” (An idea we love!)

Nathan says that the Glazunov Violin Concerto, which he will perform with the ESO on June 7, “is very fun, first of all because it’s very technically challenging, but also never compromising the depth of the music. It’s so beautiful! The opening is just absolutely gorgeous and then all the folk songs in the last movement and the variations on them makes it super fun.”

Nathan says he changed his approach to music when a mentor told him that “going on stage is actually offering a gift to the audience. Being able to prepare that gift in the best way and work really hard on it, and then sharing it with the audience is a privilege. When I understood that, my approach to music changed. When we are young, we always think of the nerves and or the fun of playing on stage, but it’s a lot of pressure and there’s a lot of work. Then, when I realized that, actually, this is a privilege, this is a gift that I’m going to be able to share with the audience, that really changed how I play the music and how I see that work. It’s very humbling to have that mentality when you walk on stage, and then people can feel it.”

Legendary cellist Yo-Yo Ma describes Nathan Amaral as “...one of the rare musicians who not only possesses the gift of ample technical ability but uses it to transcend technique, getting to the heart and soul of musical expression... he draws his audiences in with a great range of color and emotion...” To that lovely accolade we can add “with humbleness — and fun!” 🎻

—Kelly Brest van Kempen

(See the ESO website for a longer version of this interview.)

The View from the Lower Left Balcony



Ellen Feldman thinks that her lower left balcony seats are the best in the house — and they came about quite by accident! Ellen and her husband, Matt, had sat in various seats in other concert venues until they attended a Northwestern concert series performance at Pick-Staiger that landed them in the lower left balcony. “I was looking down on Daniel Barenboim playing piano and I thought, ‘Oh my God! The view from up here is so good!’ I just find it much more entertaining while listening to the music to watch all of the various musicians and the instruments that they play.”

Ellen is a former alto in several local choral groups and a pianist who still takes lessons. When she retired from her position as a grants administrator at Northwestern, she wanted more time to give back to the community and to get

her “music fix.” A friend introduced her to ESO violist and board member Penelope Sachs, and Penelope immediately introduced Ellen to the ESO. When Ellen and her husband decided to become ESO subscribers nine years ago, these lower left balcony seats were of course their first choice. They think the ESO is “really good” and have persuaded two sets of friends to come to ESO concerts — and the friends have also become ESO fans!

Ellen has recently become a Lifetime Trustee of The People’s Music School, a program that offers free music lessons to underserved youth in the Chicago area. She has been a board member for many years and often provides TPMS students with tickets to ESO concerts.

Thank you, Ellen, for helping introduce young people to the world of music and for supporting the ESO from the lower left balcony! 🎻

—Kelly Brest van Kempen



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EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Lawrence Eckerling, Music Director

2026–2027

— 80th Anniversary —

CONCERT SERIES

*For
the
Love
of
Music*

OCTOBER 18, 2026

CELEBRATING
BEETHOVEN'S
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BEETHOVEN

Fidelio Overture

BEETHOVEN

Violin Concerto

Irina Muresanu, *violin*

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 5

FEBRUARY 14, 2027

GREAT
ROMANTICS

SHOSTAKOVICH

Festive Overture

RACHMANINOFF

Piano Concerto No. 2

Winston Choi, *piano*

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Scheherazade

APRIL 4, 2027

SAINT-SAËNS
ORGAN SYMPHONY

RESPIGHI

Fountains of Rome

**JOSEPH BOULOGNE,
CHEVALIER DE SAINT-GEORGES**

Violin Concerto No. 10

Adé Williams, *violin*

SAINT-SAËNS

“Organ Symphony”

Symphony No. 3

MAY 23, 2027

A MASS
FOR PEACE

HAYDN

Symphony No. 100 “Military”

KARL JENKINS

The Armed Man:

A Mass for Peace

North Shore Choral Society

Soloists (TBA)

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Concert Venue

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