



# KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF  
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

## Gershwin Concerto in F

The ESO's 74th season is titled "Great Composers," and our second program is an all-American concert whose title refers to what is arguably "The Great American Piano Concerto." This assertion is covered at length on the next page in Behind the Scenes.

Our concert opens with a four minute piece by the most recently born (1972) composer yet presented on an ESO concert. He is Jonathan Newman and the work is titled *Blow It Up, Start Again*, which is explained by Newman as: "If the system isn't working anymore, then do what Guy Fawkes tried and go anarchist: Blow it all up and start again." Ironically, the musical materials of this overture/encore are decidedly traditional although with elements of jazz and rock music, such as a drum kit.

This somewhat raucous opener will be followed by the beautiful *Lyric for Strings* by George Walker (1922–2018), the first African-American composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music. He enjoyed a long and distinguished career as a pianist, an educator, and most importantly as a composer. The *Lyric for Strings* is an arrangement for full string orchestra of the slow movement of Walker's String Quartet No. 1, composed in 1946. Its original title was *Lament*, an allusion to the death the previous year of Walker's grandmother, to whom he dedicated the quartet.

When George Gershwin (1898–1937) first attempted a work for piano and orchestra in 1924 he did not feel ready to write out all of the parts for the orchestra, so the orchestration was completed by a professional arranger, Ferde Grofé. Because this quasi-concerto was *Rhapsody in Blue*, probably no one other than Gershwin himself cared who orchestrated it, but Gershwin resolved to orchestrate his next effort in the form, the Piano Concerto in F (1926). Despite his great success in meeting all of the norms of "classical" structure with this concerto, Gershwin felt the need for further instruction. He was a great admirer of both Alban Berg and Maurice Ravel, so he visited Europe in 1928

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## GERSHWIN CONCERTO IN F

and met with Ravel to ask for composition lessons. There are several versions of Ravel's response to Gershwin's request; the most humorous is that when Ravel asked Gershwin what his income had been from royalties on his compositions, and Gershwin replied in the vicinity of \$100,000 (in 1928!), Ravel then said "I think I need lessons from you."

Ferdinand (Ferde) Grofé (1892-1972) was born in New York City and enjoyed a strong musical training, which allied with his facility on a variety of instruments, led to a career as an arranger, culminating in his orchestration of *Rhapsody in Blue*. Grofé also achieved success as a composer of suites celebrating the natural wonders of the U.S., the most significant of which is the *Grand Canyon Suite*. The best known of its five movements—"On the Trail"—depicts the burros which carry visitors up and down the walls of the canyon. Grofé revealed that his inspiration for the "clip-clop" rhythm was actually the sound of pile drivers at a construction site along Sheridan Road in Chicago. The *Suite* concludes with a "Cloudburst" of great realism which includes a wind machine. 

—David Ellis



### MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 2020  
1:30 PM

FREE

MEET JEFFREY BIEGEL

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# BEHIND THE SCENES

## THE GREAT AMERICAN PIANO CONCERTO

This Behind the Scenes column is a joint effort between its normal author, Music Director Lawrence Eckerling (henceforth "Larry"), and ESO General Manager David Ellis (henceforth "David"). This format, and the title above, was caused by a discussion between the two of us in which we jointly marveled at the very high quality of George Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F. After a few days this subject became set within the framework of The Great American \_\_\_\_\_.

The origin of this notion, which presumes there is, in fact, a "great American" anything, probably originated with the phrase "The Great American Novel." The most enduring musical example of the concept is "The Great American Symphony," probably because of the frequent analogies drawn between symphonies and novels, but we have expanded our horizons into several other substantial musical forms. Please bear in mind that because neither of us knows every piece of music in any form, these choices are limited to the forefront of our musical memories, and furthermore our choices may change frequently. Here, as of New Year's 2020, are our current opinions:

The Great American:	Larry	David
<b>Symphony</b>	Copland <i>Symphony 3</i> Runner Up: Wm. Schuman <i>Symphony 3</i>	John Adams <i>Harmonielehre</i> Runner Up: Copland <i>Symphony 3</i>
<b>Opera</b>	Gershwin <i>Porgy and Bess</i> Runners Up: Muhly <i>Marnie</i> ; Sondheim <i>Sweeney Todd</i>	Gershwin <i>Porgy and Bess</i> Runners Up: Glass <i>Satyagraha</i> ; Adams <i>Nixon in China</i>
<b>Ballet</b>	Copland <i>Appalachian Spring</i> Runner Up: Bernstein <i>Fancy Free</i>	Glass <i>In the Upper Room</i>
<b>Choral</b>	Bernstein <i>Chichester Psalms</i> Runner Up: Lauridsen <i>Lux Aeterna</i>	Adams <i>Harmonium</i>
<b>Violin Concerto</b>	Corigliano <i>The Red Violin</i>	Barber <i>Violin Concerto</i>
<b>Piano Concerto</b>	Gershwin <i>Concerto in F</i>	Gershwin <i>Concerto in F</i>

Now here are Larry's thoughts on why the Gershwin Concerto in F is great:

When I think of the great piano concerti, I think of specific examples such as those of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff, and of the common threads/aspects which make them "great." The first aspect is sheer musicality. The second aspect is seamless integration between orchestra and the solo piano. (In the case of Mozart, the orchestra is the perfect "accompaniment" to the solo piano when the piano is playing, and vintage orchestral Mozart in the sections when the piano is not playing.) Beethoven is similar to Mozart, but with an expanded framework so that there is much play between the solo piano and the orchestra (think of the slow movement of the 4th piano concerto for example). And in Brahms, we have total integration, where all seems to be present at once—independence from the orchestra, but somehow as one, simultaneously. This is also true in Rachmaninoff, and then some, because the orchestra is now larger, and even more dramatic. The third is pianism...the works provide the pianist with the ability to display virtuosic technique (and in some cases advance said technique) based on current standards at the time of composition.

The Gershwin Concerto in F does all of these things, and better than any other American piano concerto that I can think of. And on top of that, and perhaps even more importantly, the musical content is fresh, and unique to American music. Elements of jazz, and particularly "pre-jazz" if you will, are present throughout. The harmonies are uniquely American, and the pianistic technique required is right out of Tin Pan Alley. And the tuttis, with the full orchestra on display combined with the piano in perfect sync, are in the grand tradition of Rachmaninoff. Perhaps most important of all, Gershwin's tunes are memorable, and return often as new tunes develop from old tunes creating a continuously fresh and exciting concerto. 🎵

—Lawrence Eckerling  
Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

—David Ellis  
ESO General Manager

## In Memoriam

### Frank Heap

It is with sadness that we report the death of Frank Heap. Frank was a long time subscriber and donor to the Evanston Symphony Orchestra. He also served on

the board as Treasurer for a number of years. We send our sympathies to his family. 🎵

# The Unorthodox Musical Path of Jeffrey Biegel



Most children begin to say simple words at one, simple sentences at two, and are veritable chatterboxes at three. Not so Jeffrey Biegel, who, by age three, had not spoken a single word. Obviously concerned, his parents took Jeffrey to a doctor, who tried communicating with him, but to no avail. Finally, the doctor said his name very loudly several times. No reaction. The doctor then turned to his parents and said, "Your son is deaf."

Jeffrey was indeed 85% deaf. He could not communicate and his only sense of music was vibrations he could feel through the floor. Fortunately for Jeffrey—and the music world—his deafness could be surgically corrected and he was soon talking normally. He doesn't remember the first time he actually heard music, but, when asked what it was about music that grabbed him, said, "Music grabs *you!* It attracts *you* to it. It's a language that you understand."

When he began piano lessons at seven, it was clear he had both the talent and determination to do well. Music had indeed grabbed him and, at ten, he gave his first public performance: Chopin's *Fantaisie Impromptu*.

At 16, Jeffrey began lessons with Adele Marcus, the renowned pianist on the faculty at Juilliard and, after high school, continued his studies with Marcus as a student at Juilliard. He describes her as "tough." At one point, she said to him, "I know it's in you, but I don't know how to get it out of you." He then realized that he was using more of his other senses to compensate for his early hearing disability and was thus more inhibited than someone who had always had use of all senses. It was a break-through moment, and he credits Marcus with "opening his ears" to express himself through the piano. It wasn't until years later, however, that he realized he had never told Marcus about his deafness.

Given what he calls his "reverse-Beethoven" career, Jeffrey has had the freedom to follow a rather unorthodox path in music and says that his conception and utilization of the piano is as a language. "The piano is an extension of your voice. The fingers follow the voice and the keys are just an extension of the strings." He thus teaches his master class students to sing out the music and to play an imaginary piano to get a sense of the space the piece needs and the air around the notes. He finds this technique changes the way his students use their arms and fingers to create sound and helps them better hear what sounds are created in the inner mind.

Jeffrey's unorthodox path has also led to collaborations with some unorthodox classical musicians, including Neil Sedaka and Peter Tork. At Jeffrey's request, Tork, who is forever connected with The Monkees, the fictitious band in the 1960s TV series, composed a work that Jeffrey performed with Orchestra Kentucky in 2015. Sedaka is best known for his teenage hits like "Stupid Cupid" and "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" in the rock-and-roll years, but few know that he also trained as a classical pianist with Adele Marcus at Juilliard and was set to represent the USA at the 1966 Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow.

However, Sedaka never got to compete because the Soviets had outlawed rock-and-roll as "decadent" and thus disqualified him because of his "other" life. Sedaka has returned to his classical roots and, in 2008, composed his first piano concerto, "Manhattan Intermezzo," which he recorded in 2010; it contains "bells and whistles so it's more like Rachmaninoff," additions Jeffrey made to the piano part with Sedaka's encouragement and approval.

Jeffrey considers himself "a conduit between the past and the future" and says that, because of his early disability, his whole life has been based on thinking outside the box. He says that "classical composers were pop writers of their day, so why not have pop writers compose classical music?" His work with popular and younger musicians is his way of keeping classical music going and making sure it never disappears—hence his collaborations with Sedaka and Tork as well as with Josh Groban, David Foster, Peter Schickele (P.D.Q. Bach), and many others.

Since he last performed with the ESO in May of 2017, Jeffrey has continued his extraordinary musical journey. In August of 2017, he recorded "Spiritualist," Kenneth Fuchs' piano concerto inspired by works of artist Helen Frankenthaler. Jeffrey's was the first piece on the album of four of Fuchs' works, which won the 2019 Grammy for "Best Classical Compendium."

In the fall of 2017, he went to Milan to record a new concerto written for him by Italian composer Giovanni Allevi, who is both highly praised and highly criticized in Italy. (Jeffrey is in the "high-praise" camp.) For this album, the piano part was recorded alone, Allevi telling Jeffrey, "Play it the way you want it to sound." Then the orchestra parts were layered in, an example of a pianist, rather than a conductor, being truly in charge of a performance. The piece is "Piano Concerto No. 1" on Allevi's CD, "Equilibrium."

Jeffrey has also recorded under his own label, Naturally Sharp. Called "A Pianist's Journey," the four-hour all-digital recording is available on Amazon, iTunes and CD Baby, and you may soon hear it on Sirius XM or your favorite airlines!

In the works are two new commissions, one a concerto by Lake Forest composer James M. Stephenson, which Jeffrey will premiere with the Traverse Symphony at Interlochen, and the other a concerto by Pittsburgh composer Daniel Perttu called "Planet Odyssey." Jeffrey's concept is that of the pianist as a space traveler interpreting the main theme according to impressions of each planet. It starts with the Big Bang; the sound disperses into the universe, then to the sun and the planets. Jeffrey says Perttu is "up to Neptune!" (Pluto is iffy...) The work will premiere in Canton, Ohio, in November.

This past November, Jeffrey was thrilled to play Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" for piano and jazz ensemble using the restored original manuscript. The ensemble included violin, cello, winds and brass as well as banjo, drum set and soprano saxophone, the latter giving the piece "more of a klezmer sound that Gershwin intended." We look forward to welcoming this wonderfully "unorthodox" pianist back to our stage! 🎷

—Kelly Brest van Kempen



PHOTO BY STRIKE 2 PHOTOGRAPHY

All three choirs, along with the Evanston Symphony Orchestra, perform the concert finale 'Hallelujah'

## Holiday Joys in Music, Dance and Song!

Our auditorium was full of holiday joys on December 8 when the Evanston Symphony Orchestra played its annual Holiday concert. Audience members, young and old, were delighted some holiday favorites and some music that might have been new to them. The full orchestra played the ever-popular *Sleigh Ride* of Leroy Anderson, Nigel Hess' *Christmas Overture* featuring popular carols, and Robert Wendel's *A Chanukah Overture*. Evanston Dance Ensemble's wonderfully attired young dancers performed seven dances from the *Nutcracker* Suite. And there were so many singers! The ESO performed Tracey Rush's touching *Angels in the Snow* with the North Shore Choral Society and the Evanston Children's Choir. The ECC also sang "Believe" from *The Polar Express*. And our very own Gospel Choir, led by Rev. Cherry and accompanied by the full symphony, sang *Oh What A Pretty Baby* accompanied by the full orchestra.

The finale of the concert was a performance of 'Hallelujah' from Quincy Jones 'Handel's Messiah: A Soulful Celebration' with the three choirs and full orchestra that brought the audience to its feet. What a great way to showcase the immense diversity and creativity that Evanston has!

The ESO would like to thank everyone who came, and those individuals who supported this concert, for making this concert the best start to the holiday season. 🎵



PHOTO BY STRIKE 2 PHOTOGRAPHY

Santa walking through the audience, checking to see if they have been naughty or nice.



PHOTO BY STRIKE 2 PHOTOGRAPHY

EDE danced Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite accompanied by the ESO

## Many Lucky Raffle Winners!

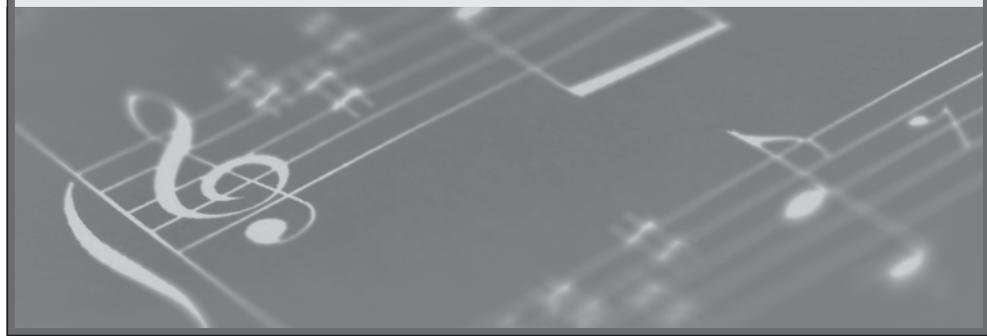
Evanston Symphony Orchestra would like to thank Christopher Duquet Fine Jewelry, Caroline Dehnert-Moyer, and many Evanston businesses and residents for generous donations to our raffle. Proceeds from the raffle help fund our free music education programs in Head Start. 🎵



## EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

### Crescendo Circle

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra is delighted to welcome members to our new Crescendo Circle. Members have been loyal supporters of the Evanston Symphony Orchestra and have made donations consistently over multiple years. Crescendo Circle members will be recognized in our program books beginning with the November 10 concert. The Board of the ESO would like to thank these valued members for their contributions to help keep classical music live and affordable to all in our community.



## Two Big Thank Yous

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### Hyatt Hotel



On behalf of The Evanston Symphony Orchestra, the ESO Board would like to thank Hyatt House Chicago/Evanston for graciously hosting our talented guest artists. Hyatt House is located at 1515 Chicago Avenue, Evanston, and their hospitality is deeply appreciated. 📶

### Musical Insights — The WIN-WIN becomes a Trifecta!

Whether you attend Musical Insights to get a glimpse of the concert to come, or to enjoy the perspective of gifted musicians (even though you may be unable to attend the full performance two days later) you are the lucky winner of a great mid-day interlude! ESO Maestro Lawrence Eckerling shares his fantastic gifts as conductor and interpreter of musical masterworks, discussing the various themes and structure of the selection, and highlights of different movements. He demonstrates many of his points using his terrific talent as a pianist.

ESO General Manager David Ellis shares the depth and breadth of his vast knowledge of musical history and historic performances, providing social context, composer background, composition insights, then illustrating all this with brief clips of outstanding performances of the featured opus. Our featured soloist, Jeffrey Biegel, will provide a preview of Gershwin's Concerto in F, and will also play a solo work exclusively for the Musical Insights audience. He is keeping the piece a surprise until then! It's a chance to see and hear the soloist in a more intimate setting, reminiscent of a salon performance. A brief Q & A allows the Musical Insights audience to engage in the discussion; light refreshments after the presentation provide the opportunity to continue the conversation one-on-one with these very knowledgeable and talented musical inspirations!

**Truly a WIN-WIN** — It all adds up to an interesting and enjoyable way to enhance your appreciation of the concert to come, or an informative presentation and demonstration of some of the great masterpieces of the symphonic library. **Friday, January 31st at 1:30 pm in the Crystal Ballroom at The Merion (1611 Chicago Avenue)** offers you the chance to be a part the next WIN-WIN Musical Insights! 📶