



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Tchaikovsky 4

The ESO's 74th season is titled "Great Composers," and our third program is an all-Russian/Armenian concert whose title refers to what is arguably the greatest symphony of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Also, each of the three works has a relationship to dance and ballet as will be described below.

Our concert opens with four excerpts from an actual ballet—*Gayane* by Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978). Armenia lays claim to Khachaturian as its greatest composer, although: he was actually born and raised in Tiflis (now Tbilisi) Georgia, he moved to Moscow at age 18, and he always spoke Russian. But Khachaturian was true to the Armenian heritage of his parents; his music incorporates Armenian folk elements and dance forms along with vivid orchestral color emphasizing percussion. Khachaturian created three suites drawn from *Gayane* and our concert opens with four of these dances, including the "Sabre Dance," his "greatest hit."

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953) left Russia for the West in 1917 to seek his fortune, working primarily in France and the U. S. But unlike his compatriots Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff, he returned to the Soviet Union for good, in 1935–36. Prokofiev had received a commission from the Kirov/Mariinsky Ballet to compose the score for his first Soviet stage work—*Romeo and Juliet*, which he completed very rapidly in the summer of 1935. At the same time he completed his final European commission, that of the Violin Concerto No. 2, which was premiered in Madrid in December 1935. Research into Prokofiev's sketchbooks has shown the extent to which these two works are inter-related, even though no specific themes are explicitly shared. It is in its lyrical elements, particularly the second movement, that the Concerto shows its closeness to the ballet's love music. The concerto's finale is more in a motoric virtuosic vein, with the part for castanets a possible allusion to its Madrid premiere.

SUNDAY, MARCH 15 — 2:30 PM

TCHAIKOVSKY 4

The Symphony No. 4 of Tchaikovsky (1840–1893) has been acknowledged one of his greatest works since its 1878 premiere. Yet one of Tchaikovsky's former students (Sergei Taneyev) complained shortly thereafter that "the Symphony has one defect to which I shall never be reconciled: in every movement there are phrases that sound like ballet music..." Tchaikovsky had completed his *Swan Lake* ballet only months previously, and replied that ballet music was not inherently inferior. He went on to reveal "In reality my work is a reflection of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. I have not of course copied Beethoven's musical content, only borrowed the central idea." The opening F Minor brass fanfare of the Fourth Symphony represents "fate," the malign force which must be overcome for happiness. The long first movement is a battle between this brass "motto," in a polonaise rhythm, and the first theme, which is in a waltz rhythm, and fate wins. The battle resumes in the fourth movement (F Major), a joyous folk festival until the return of the "fate" fanfare. But the rejoicing of "the people" (and F Major) ultimately wins out in an exhilarating conclusion. 🎧

—David Ellis



MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2020
1:30 PM

FREE

MEET IRINA MURESANU

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BEHIND THE SCENES



GUEST SOLOISTS

Here is a true “behind the scenes” look at the relationship between guest artists and conductors. I have probably worked with in the neighborhood of 200 guest artists over the last 35 years, and during that time I have enjoyed many different kinds of relationships with those soloists. In every case the goal is to present a cohesive performance to the audience. On a few occasions, soloists were injured, or ill. Occasionally they were unprepared. But setting aside these fortunately infrequent occurrences, normally one of the following circumstances is present:

Once in a great while, the soloist has a definite point of view, yet that conception is incompatible with that of the conductor. There is the famous instance in 1962 when Glenn Gould’s tempo choice for Brahms’ First Piano Concerto was so much slower than Leonard Bernstein’s that Bernstein had to make a speech from the podium about how incompatible his tempi were with those of Gould*. But what often gets lost in this story was that the speech concluded by saying that he could not pass off the performance to an assistant conductor because he had such great respect for Gould as an artist that it was a point of view that should be heard. And indeed, sometimes we conductors just have to bite the bullet, and do it the soloist’s way, because there is no way to truly collaborate, so we become merely “accompanists.” (And people who know me know that I HATE the word “accompanist,” because we are playing music “together,” not “accompanying.”)

**Historical irony: this 1962 performance with the “too slow” tempi was 52 minutes in length; in 1984 Bernstein recorded this concerto using “his” tempi and it took 55 minutes!*

The next type of relationship is that of a phenomenal guest artist, with a strong point of view that is SO compelling, that the conductor is seduced by the soloist’s point of view, even if it is not the way the conductor usually thinks about a piece. In this instance there is not even a hint of struggle, because the soloist is SO compelling, with every ritard, every dynamic thrust, that the conductor has “no choice” but to go along with it. These performances can be very satisfying in the end, but they can also be challenging for both the conductor and soloist because the conductor innately thinks differently about the piece. The conductor defers to the soloist, but the soloist has to maintain their conception in order to persuade the conductor throughout the performance.

I’ve saved the best scenario for last. It is where the soloist is phenomenal, and where the conductor and soloist are naturally “in sync” from start to finish. It doesn’t feel like work, it just feels like a musical interaction, a musical “one-ness” with complete trust in each other. It’s when both the soloist and conductor are anticipating each other’s every move, in the best sense. Those relationships are not all that common. When they do exist, you want to perform together often. I do share such a relationship with violinist Irina Muresanu, who will be appearing with the ESO for the fifth time, more than any other ESO soloist during my tenure as Music Director. It is always a pleasure to work with her, and promises to be an exciting performance of the Prokofiev Second Violin Concerto. 🎻

—Lawrence Eckerling

Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

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Welcome back, Irina Muresanu!



When she was a little girl in Romania, Irina Muresanu wanted to play the piano. Then her mother quite sensibly pointed out that you rarely see a piano in an orchestra, but there are many violins. Irina thus took up the violin at the ripe old age of six and a half, “old by nowadays standards for becoming a serious violinist,” she says. Irina had obvious talent and a year later auditioned for a place in a school for children gifted in music. She passed the exercises in pitch, rhythm, singing in tune, and all of the other tests designed to determine her musical ability, but failed the physical because she was “too small and skinny.” Fortunately, her teacher intervened and Irina was able to prove to the school authorities that even a small, skinny girl could make great music.

At age 12, Irina and her classmates had to decide whether to continue in music. Half the students left the school, but Irina chose to stay and pursue her goal of becoming a professional musician. After college in Bucharest, Irina came to the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign for her master’s degree and then earned her doctorate at the New England Conservatory.

Irina has been an active part of the Boston music scene for a number of years, first as a member of the faculties at the Boston Conservatory, then at Harvard and MIT. She is also a founding member of the Boston Trio, an ensemble about which *The Boston Globe* raved, “Whenever this trio plays, drop everything and go hear them!” Recent highlights include a performance at Carnegie’s Weill Recital Hall, a tour of Florida featuring a performance at the Flagler Museum and a return to the Sanibel Music Festival, performances at UCLA, Maui Classical Music Festival, Rockport Chamber Music Festival, Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival, Virtuosi Concerts in Winnipeg, and performances of Beethoven’s Triple Concerto with the Boston Philharmonic. Irina’s current duo collaborations include “Rorem, Ravel and Ragtime” with Italian pianist Roberto Plano. It’s an intriguing program highlighting the fascinating confluence of French and American music in the years after World War I, when France became “the” place to study abroad for young American composers, as well as an avid market for original American music. Irina also performs with pianist Inna Faliks (who, like Jeffrey Biegel in February and Irina for this concert, is an ESO return soloist this season.) Irina manages to maintain a full concert schedule and is also Associate Professor of Violin and Chamber Music at the University of Maryland. You can read more about her stellar career and numerous awards on her website at www.irinamuresanu.com and follow her on her Facebook page at [irinamuresanuviolin](https://www.facebook.com/irinamuresanuviolin).

Since she last performed with the ESO in 2017, Irina has “done a lot of playing” and has made several recordings. Her last major project, “Four Strings Around the World,” was inspired by folk music, but with a twist. Irina didn’t collect actual folk songs. Rather, she looked for works by composers who drew inspiration from folk music. “Four

Strings” features music of composers inspired by the folklore of Romania, Ireland, Persia, India, China, and Argentina as well as Gypsy, Native-American and Bluegrass music. In the latter category is *The Cricket Dance*, a piece by famous fiddler Mark O’Connor, who was an ESO guest soloist in 2009. The album also includes such renowned works as Paganini’s Caprice No. 24 and Bach’s Chaconne in D minor, plus new commissioned works by Indian composer Shirish Korde, whose piece is based on ragas, and Native American composer Jerod ‘Impichchaachaaha’ Tate of the Chickasaw Nation. The works demand various styles of playing (classical, fiddle, Arabic, Asian, tango).

Irina’s concert career continues to take her to many parts of the world. She has performed in Oregon with the Boston Trio, California, Hawaii, and the Newport, Rockport and Green Mountain Music Festivals, to name a few, and “just about every community orchestra in the Boston area!” She has also given concerts in Washington, DC, Texas, New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland, and Illinois as well as in The Netherlands, Belgium, France, and the French Caribbean. Her most interesting concert arrangement was in Saint-Emilion (pop. 1,938), France, where she was paid in wine! One of her more memorable performances also happened in France, but payment was not in wine this time. Irina was set to play her “Four Strings Around the World” at a music festival in Sancerre (pop. 1,393). People lined up an hour before the performance was to start and at 7:00 pm, Irina began to play. She took a 20-minute break at about 9:00 pm, then played for another two hours. During that entire time, not a single person left the concert venue—such is the power of her music!

The Prokofiev Second Violin Concerto is one of the top three or four most popular in the violin repertoire; Irina describes it as a “war horse” and one of her favorites, adding that “Such great music never gets old—there’s always something new to discover.” As the first winner of the Allentown (PA) Symphony Orchestra’s Schadt String Competition, Irina will return to perform the Prokofiev again with that orchestra in April.

In her spare time, Irina enjoys spending time with her husband and her son, Victor, a delightful ten-and-a-half-year-old who speaks both English and Romanian attends an international school. Victor is playing the piano because, as Irina says, “it’s good for his brain.” He is also playing the violin and “threatens to burn it, but is making progress in spite of himself. When he learns how to play, he can quit.” In response to Victor’s question as to how long that would take, Irina gave a very musical mother answer: “If you’re lucky—20 years!”

As a child, Irina fell in love with music because of the way it tells a story by expressing emotions. As she grew, so did her understanding of music and her ability to express those emotions with her violin. Now this talented woman once thought “too small and skinny” to become a musician is among the best violinists of her generation, and we are delighted to welcome her back to our stage! 🎻

—Kelly Brest van Kempen



Introducing violins to preschoolers

Evanston Symphony Orchestra is committed to bringing music to all in our community and that starts with the very young. For twelve years ESO has brought an excellent music education program called *Music In Your World* to low income preschoolers at Head Start and Pre-K. The students sing songs and learn musical language. This program also includes one week a year when members of the orchestra introduce the children to violins, to listen to them being played, and to play the violins themselves. ESO is grateful to Seman Violins for the loan of 1/4 and 1/8 sized violins for this special week and to Byline Bank for financial support of this program.



The ESO also brings *Music In Your World* classes to Evanston's Early Head Start program. Children in Early Head Start and also families in the home-visiting program come together three times a month to learn to sing songs and to handle musical instruments—little percussion instruments, shakers, drums and more. Parents love to sing with their children and singing together builds bonds as well as teaching language and pre-literacy skills. ESO thanks Evanston Community Foundation, Kiwanis Club of Evanston, and the North End Mothers Club for their financial support of these classes in Early Head Start. 📶



Celebrate the Evanston Symphony Orchestra in its 74th Season with your gift to the 2020 Annual Fund!

The ESO is proud of its commitment to quality performance, engagement with community partners and outreach to Evanston's youngest, most vulnerable students and seniors. We make live classical concerts accessible to all and enrich people's lives with music! The ESO continues to perform exciting concerts like the one in February with Jeffrey Biegel playing Gershwin's Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra. We welcome another returning star soloist this concert—Irina Muresanu playing Prokofiev's lyrical Violin Concerto No. 2. Our Holiday concert is a glorious celebration of community with six diverse arts groups on stage joyously uniting 350 performers and an audience of 1,000.

Of course, the ESO does much more than perform concerts. We bring music into the lives of Evanston's youngest residents right from 6 months of age in Early Head Start, and on into HeadStart and Pre-K At Risk programs with *Music In Your World*. This special free program, developed by the ESO at the request of School District 65 and now in its fifteenth year, uses the power of music to teach critical concepts like opposites and sequencing, plus school readiness skills, including taking turns and following instructions. Singing and clapping helps language develop early, increasing vocabulary and learning letters, colors and numbers through repeated songs. We also reach the parents of these students with weekly music classes for Early Start families and special evening classes for parents of Head Start and Pre-K students.

The ESO is a true community orchestra that touches the hearts and minds of people from 2 to 102! We reach out to our audience with *Musical Insights*, our free pre-concert programs on Friday afternoons before each concert that are free to all. Musical Insights expands patrons' musical understanding and enriches their concert experience. 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 2020 Annual Fund. Thank you! 🎵

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