



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Brahms' *German Requiem*

The North Shore Choral Society (Julia Davids, Music Director) joins us on April 6 to present Johannes Brahms' (1833–1897) *German Requiem*. The *Requiem* is paired with two vocal compositions by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791): *Exsultate Jubilate*, a signature work for soprano Josefien Stoppelenburg, and a duet from *Don Giovanni*, in which Stoppelenburg is joined by bass-baritone Evan Bravos.

The *German Requiem* is based on verses from the Lutheran Bible, rather than the traditional Latin Mass. Following his mentor Robert Schumann's death in 1856, Brahms felt the need to write a musical memorial to his mentor but struggled to make headway on the composition. Brahms' career flourished following his 1862 move to Vienna, so he felt little urgency to complete the *Requiem*. But that all changed following the death of his mother in 1865, to whom the piece is dedicated.

The *Requiem* premiered on April 10, 1868, and was an overwhelming success, requiring an encore performance later that month. Still, Brahms thought the piece needed further revision. He added another movement — and a soprano soloist — to the work. This would be the *Requiem's* fifth movement (out of a total of seven) with its central text from Isaiah, "as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

The play between light and dark is crucial for much of the *German Requiem*. Throughout, Brahms contrasts the transience of human existence with the eternity of God. Gentle and lyrical expressions early in the piece help balance the more somber moods of a later funeral march. The beautiful soprano solo in the fifth movement is both moving and personal. Brahms' imagery is full of life and movement throughout. The words "death" and "dead" do not even appear until the sixth movement where a stirring and powerful chorus represent souls awaiting

SUNDAY, APRIL 6

— 2:30 PM

BRAHMS'
GERMAN REQUIEM

CONCERT SPONSORED BY: LINDA AND TOM KELLER

GUEST ARTIST APPEARANCES SPONSORED BY:
TODD WIENER AND PAULA JACOBI



resurrection. The tranquil closure ends with the same word with which the piece began: "blessed."

A teenaged Mozart was inspired to write *Exsultate Jubilate* ("rejoice, resound with joy") while staying in Milan during the production of his opera *Lucio Silla*. *Exsultate Jubilate* is a vocal composition based on sacred Latin text that premiered in 1773 but went through several revisions after that.

His *Don Giovanni* premiered on October 29, 1787. Don Giovanni, an unrepentant hedonist and womanizing nobleman, targets the peasant girl, Zerlina, attempting to woo her in front of her betrothed, Masetto. "La ci darem la mano" begins after Masetto is successfully ushered away from Zerlina when Don Giovanni offers to host the wedding at his castle, leaving the two alone.

Join us on April 6 to hear these powerful vocal masterworks. 🎧



MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2025

1:30 PM

FREE

MEET JOSEFIEN STOPPELENBURG

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PUBLIC

1611 CHICAGO AVE., EVANSTON
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This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council through federal funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.



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BEHIND THE SCENES

A Musician's Obsession In Music



IMAGE COURTESY OF MARC PERLESH PHOTOGRAPHY

Here's a secret about musicians most people probably don't know: It's very hard, if not impossible, to completely turn off music in our heads. Whether we're at the dinner table, on vacation, in a grocery store, or even having an important conversation that needs our undivided attention — and it will be MOSTLY undivided attention, because... you guessed it — music is always going on! We just can't help it. It's in our DNA. Probably the only time the internal music gets turned off is either when you're at a concert listening to *OTHER* music or you're in some place where they're piping in *UNWANTED* music; in either case, you are unable to think about the music you really want to think about. And the music you want to think about is the music you're currently obsessed with. You might be learning a new piece, or you might have heard something that goes on, over and over again in your mind, and becomes the next new piece you're going to learn.

But it wasn't always like that for me. As a child, I loved music, loved playing the piano — first a toy piano and then a real one. I'd listen to records, take piano lessons, occasionally practice, play baseball. All the things normal kids do. But then there is the moment where a piece of music grabs you and your musical obsession kicks in for the first time, ever. I had just entered high school and joined the Freshman Choir. In the period either after us or before us, the Concert Choir rehearsed; they were working on this piece that I could hear through the closed doors. And this

piece of music grabbed me. I didn't know what it was, but I stayed and listened to it through the doors. I would routinely come and listen. Almost every day. And I would hear fragments of what I had heard in my head throughout the school day, and when I went home, too. Eventually, a music teacher who noticed me listening through the closed doors asked me if I wanted to come in and listen. And I jumped at the chance. Because it was my very first musical obsession. The kind of obsession that would change my life as I knew it. The name of the piece (in English) was "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place" by Johannes Brahms, the fourth movement from his *German Requiem*. Eventually, the teacher invited me to join the bass section and sing in that choir too, which put me in ecstasy!

Given that history, it's remarkable that I have never before conducted Brahms' *German Requiem*. But that's about to change, and I couldn't be more thrilled than to do it with the North Shore Choral Society and the Evanston Symphony Orchestra.

On a different note, many of you know that I couldn't conduct the February concert due to a bout with Covid. That marked the first time in my career that I have had to miss a conducting performance due to illness. But it is a testament to the Evanston Symphony Orchestra that, on little more than 24 hours notice, they could step up and give an excellent performance under a different conductor. Congratulations to them and to Jim Setapen, my excellent stand-in. I missed the orchestra terribly, but knew they were also in great hands. 🎵

—Lawrence Eckerling

Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

Musical Insights is generously sponsored by The Merion.

We appreciate their continuing support. Please read about what The Merion has to offer.



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Josefien Stoppelenburg, a Multi-Talented Artist

Josefien Stoppelenburg grew up in a very musical family in Meppel, a small city in the north of The Netherlands. Her father, Willem, is a conductor of choruses, particularly oratorio choirs, and is also a well-known Dutch composer with a boxed set of CDs to his credit. Her mother, Paula, is a pianist and a music educator who was very involved in her children's education. Josefien played the violin, which she loved and still enjoys playing in various orchestras, while her younger sister, Charlotte, played the clarinet, although she wasn't particularly enamored of it. However, Josefien and Charlotte, who developed into a mezzo-soprano, always sang from childhood on. The sisters sang with choirs and performed on stage, giving concerts as young teens before formal music studies, which Josefien started at 14. They were part of the Dutch National Children's Choir and also won first prize in the Princess Christina competition as teenagers. Their performance for the Dutch royal family was broadcast live on Dutch national TV. They still perform together as the vocal duo Charlotte and Josefien Stoppelenburg and have appeared in nearly every Dutch concert hall.

Josefien studied voice in Utrecht and graduated from the Amsterdam Conservatory. She has been singing major oratorios since she was 16 and noted that oratorios are more popular than opera in Holland but the opposite is true in Germany. For this reason, Josefien spent two years as part of the Young Opera Ensemble in Cologne, Germany. While she enjoyed that experience, she prefers performing oratorios. There the emphasis is on the music and she can be more expressive on stage, showing her interpretation of

the music and letting her emotions come solely from within. In opera, however, there's always a director and a stage manager who may have different ideas on interpretation.



Since relocating to Chicago from Holland some 15 years ago, Josefien has continued her stellar solo career, performing in various venues around the globe, and has added teaching to her repertoire. In addition to giving private vocal lessons, she has taught master classes at major U.S. universities well as in Korea, China, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere.

For most singers, that would be enough. But wait! There's more! From Josefien's art website: Josefien has also "garnered international praise and attention for her colorful and imaginative paintings. A keen admirer of Marc Chagall, Paul Gauguin and Odilon Redon, Josefien... has presented exhibitions in the Netherlands and the USA. [Her] work was used as opera sets, as CD covers, as post cards, in magazines, and her personalized paintings are in many private homes. She has exhibited her work in galleries, hospitals and art fairs." She has also been Artist-in-Residence at the Evanston Art Center and has just finished illustrating a children's book. And, mixing her two careers, she has created artwork for several major U.S. music festivals.

We welcome this multi-talented artist to our stage, where she will be exhibiting her expertise with her voice, not a paintbrush! 🎨

Evan Bravos, Baritone Extraordinaire



Evan Bravos was raised in St. Charles but has deep roots in Chicago's Greek community and even boasts a great-grandmother who was a seamstress at Marshall Field's. When asked whether he came from a musical family, his answer was "yes — and no!" His mother was a news anchor in DeKalb and also did voiceover work, which meant that there was often recording going on in their basement studio. Evan, however, was the first to pursue music as a career. He started out as part of a dance troupe and choirs at church and then became the church organist. He also has fond memories of sitting down at a piano with his grandfather and belting out Rodgers and Hammerstein show tunes.

Evan has three younger siblings and they have together formed a studio called the BravoStudio. (Note the shared "S"!) Sister Kalli has a marketing degree and works for a marketing organization; brother Tom is with the business side of the Chicago Symphony and is also a pop singer with a band; and brother Alex is a conductor with Uniting Voices Chicago. Since Evan is Artist Faculty and Associate Program Director of Opera at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts, he's fond of saying that all four of them work on Michigan Avenue!

While Evan has sung many styles of music, his first love is opera. When he was in grade school, his great aunt took him to his first opera, a performance of Humperdinck's

Hansel and Gretel, he left the theater absolutely enamored of the production. Ten years later he saw Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at Lyric Opera and was hooked for good. With the encouragement of a high school voice teacher, who said to him, "You can do this!" Evan graduated from Lawrence University Conservatory in Appleton, WI, then earned his master's degree at Northwestern's Bienen School of Music in 2013 and completed his doctorate at Northwestern last spring.

Evan has received critical acclaim for his "lovely lyric baritone" (*Opera News*), was marked by Howard Reich of the *Chicago Tribune* as "a young talent to watch," and has developed into an outstanding interpreter of opera with strong singing and acting skills. Among his most interesting productions: the role of Inman in the West Coast premiere of Jennifer Higdon's *Cold Mountain* at the Music Academy of the West (2019); his role as Kenny Kincaid in *The Cook-Off* with Chicago Opera Theater (2023), which he will reprise later this year with New Orleans Opera; and the 2024 production of Shostakovich's *The Nose* at Chicago Opera Theater.

When we asked Evan why he accepted the invitation to perform with the Evanston Symphony, he said that Maestro Eckerling and the ESO have an excellent reputation, then paused and added with a grin, "and after all, my name is Evan...!" Bravo, Evan Bravos! Bravo! 🎨

—Kelly Brest van Kempen

Two Outstanding Music Groups; One Longstanding Collaboration

On May 19, 1978, legendary Evanston Symphony Music Director Frank Miller conducted "Spring" from Haydn's *The Seasons* and Beethoven's *Fantasia* in C Minor, marking the first appearance of the North Shore Choral Society with the ESO. From all reports, the concert was a rousing success, but it was another eight years before the ESO and the NSCS again appeared together, this time on November 7, 1986, and featuring Mendelssohn's *Hymn of Praise (Lobgesang)* under the baton of Maestro Lynn Schornick. Four years later, Maestro Schornick conducted both groups in the Verdi *Requiem* and just a year afterward celebrated his retirement by conducting the Brahms *Requiem*.

Music Director Lawrence Eckerling picked up the ESO baton in 2002 and cemented the collaboration between these

two outstanding musical groups with a joint concert every three years since 2008, including: the Poulenc *Gloria* (2008); Beethoven's Ninth (2011); the Verdi *Requiem* (2014); Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* (2017); Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and Orff's *Carmina Burana* (2019); Beethoven's Ninth again (2022); and now the Brahms *Requiem*. And in between the concerts with all of these glorious classical works, the North Shore Choral Society has added to the joy in every ESO Holiday Concert since 2011. The Evanston Symphony is deeply appreciative of this collaboration with the North Shore Choral Society and their director, Dr. Julia Davids, and is delighted to welcome them yet again to our stage. 🎵

Illinois Council of Orchestras' Awards

At our February concert, Christina Salerno, the Treasurer of the ICO, presented two awards from the Illinois Council of Orchestras. The ICO advocates for and promotes the development and success of Illinois orchestras. Ms. Salerno presented Margaret Gergen with the Board President of the Year 2024 award, and she presented Suzanne Nelson with the Community Orchestra of the Year 2024 award. We are very proud to be the recipient of these two awards. 🎵



Margaret Gergen with the Board President of the Year 2024 award



Suzanne Nelson, current board president of the ESO, receiving the Community Orchestra of the Year 2024 award

PHOTOS BY YANCEY HUGHES PHOTOGRAPHY

Our Thanks to April Concert Sponsors

We would like to thank **Tom and Linda Keller** for sponsoring this concert. Linda played Principal Clarinet with the ESO for many years and Tom sang with North Shore Choral Society. They are both looking forward to hearing Brahms' *Requiem* with the ESO and NSCS. Also we would like to thank **Todd Wiener and Paula Jacobi** for their sponsorship of the soloists, Josefien Stoppelenburg, soprano, and Evan Bravos, bass-baritone. 🎵

*The ESO uses
the power of music
to lift the
human spirit.*



M **Musical Insights**
A free pre-concert event at The Merion
Friday, April 4, 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 Josefien Stoppelenburg, who will be singing *Exsultate Jubilate* and more in our concert on April 6. 🎵

THE MERION

Celebrate the Evanston Symphony Orchestra with a gift to the 2025 Annual Fund

Music is the language of the soul and can express feelings beyond words — from joy and triumph to fear and deepest sorrow. Music has the power to reach deep inside us, grounding us, inspiring us, even helping us discover our truest selves. The Evanston Symphony Orchestra lifts the human spirit and unites our community through the power of music.

Each concert is a testament to our commitment to the arts and a unique and unrepeatable experience shared between musicians and audience members. That's what makes live performances irreplaceable. We perform works that span centuries and genres and bring a wide range of artists and experiences to our community.

We keep ESO ticket prices low so concerts are accessible to everyone, consequently ticket sales cover only 40% of our operating costs. It's the generosity of music lovers like you that makes this possible!

Today, we're excited to announce a \$10,000 matching gift challenge from two orchestra members and two board members. Every contribution to our Annual Fund, including monthly Sustaining Donor gifts, will be doubled! Make your gift to the ESO today to keep music alive in our community through concerts and so much more! 🎵

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