



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

The American-French Connection

Our June 8 concert celebrates Maurice Ravel's 150th birthday and explores the links between French and American composers since the late 19th century until today.

George Gershwin (1898–1937) began his career as a song plugger and then wrote Broadway musicals with his brother Ira. While visiting Havana in 1932, he was inspired by the distinctive Cuban rhythms. *Cuban Overture* was originally entitled *Rumba* and is a rich and exciting symphonic overture that embodies the essence of Cuban music and dance.

William Grant Still (1895–1978) is known as the "Dean of African American Classical Composers." In 1931, his Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American" was performed by the Rochester Philharmonic, the first time a complete score by an African American composer was performed by a major orchestra. *Mother and Child* was inspired by three African American works of art including a chalk drawing by Sargent Claude Johnson's "Mother & Child." He expanded and intensified a movement from his *Suite for Violin and Piano*, and it became one of his favorite compositions.

Joseph Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) studied at the famous Paris Conservatoire but found his own musical style, including elements of modernism, neoclassicism, and jazz. He met George Gershwin during his first and only visit to America, and they spent several nights together taking in live jazz performances. In 1932, his Piano Concerto in G Major premiered in Paris. The jazz-tinged outer movements bookend a slow, serene movement that further confirms Ravel's status as a master of melody.

Jonathan Bailey Holland (b. 1974) is the dean of Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music and the Kay Davis Professor of Music. His *Motor City Dance Mix* was commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra to celebrate the grand reopening of Detroit's historic Orchestra Hall and the addition of the Max M.

SUNDAY, JUNE 8

— 2:30 PM

THE AMERICAN-
FRENCH CONNECTION


CONCERT SPONSORED BY:

Truilee
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Fisher Music Center in October 2003. The piece is a nod to the rhythm and joy found in the city's soul and pop heritage, blending these influences with the colors and textures of the orchestra.

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) originally studied piano, but his career was in composition. *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* is one of Debussy's most well-known works. This 10-minute piece was inspired by the poem "L'après-midi d'un faune" by Stéphane Mallarmé and later became the basis for the ballet, *Afternoon of a Faun*.

Aaron Copland (1900–1990) studied piano in Manhattan at 16, when his interest in classical music flourished as he attended New York Symphony and Brooklyn Academy of Music concerts. In 1938, *Billy the Kid* premiered in Chicago and is instantly recognizable for its wide-open harmonies and incorporation of American folk tunes, techniques that earned Copland his reputation as the composer who captured the spirit of the American heartland. 



MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 2025

1:30 PM

FREE

MEET KO-EUN YI

OPEN TO THE
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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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 Michelle Pranger, General Manager, at (847) 864-8804. Write us at Evanston Symphony Orchestra, 1555 Sherman Avenue, Suite 318, Evanston, IL 60201. Email us at esomusic@evanstonsymphony.org. Visit our website evanstonsymphony.org.

BEHIND THE SCENES



IMAGE COURTESY OF MARC FERLISH PHOTOGRAPHY

The final concert of our Soul & Inspiration Season is entitled “The American-French Connection,” and has six compositions by six composers on the program.

Lineage is an important part of music history. In the case of the music being performed on this concert, it seems that French Master musician Nadia Boulanger, a prominent conductor, composer and teacher, is an important figure through much of it.

The most clear-cut relationship was the fact that Aaron Copland studied with Nadia Boulanger. It was there through her French influence that Copland inherited an almost “French sensibility,” or at least a sense of calmness, which is present in much of his music. (As a sidebar, when I was an undergraduate student, I was studying with a doctoral student who had just come from studying with Boulanger, so I got all of her routines, teachings, painfully difficult exercises, and rigorous ear training second hand. It was SO difficult, but I understand the significance of what it was like to study with her.)

George Gershwin wanted to study with Boulanger too, but she declined to teach him. She felt she had little to offer him, as Gershwin was already an accomplished and distinctive composer. She reportedly told him, “I can teach you nothing,” reflecting her concern that rigorous instruction could disrupt his jazz-influenced style and originality. So then Gershwin tried to study with Maurice Ravel. Ravel

also declined to teach Gershwin. He reportedly said, “Why should you be a second-rate Ravel when you can be a first-rate Gershwin?” But he admired Gershwin’s natural talent and originality, particularly his ability to blend jazz, popular melodies, and symphonic traditions. In fact, Ravel loved Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* so much that, in his G major piano concerto, he wrote a motive very similar to a theme in *Rhapsody in Blue* that he repeatedly quotes in the first movement of his concerto. You can’t miss it!

The younger Ravel was also clearly influenced by Claude Debussy. Comparing their sounds is like comparing the sounds of Mozart with those of Haydn. The less you know their music, the more similar they sound, and the more you get to know their music, the more distinctive they sound.

William Grant Still’s *Mother and Child*, to me, obviously has influences of both Gershwin and Ravel, and so it is fitting that this piece sits between Gershwin’s *Cuban Overture* and Ravel’s Piano Concerto on our program.

And I have no doubt that there MUST be some sort of stylistic lineage that passes from both Gershwin and William Grant Still to Jonathan Bailey Holland’s *Motor City Dance Mix*. *Motor City* was to be performed at our February concert until I suddenly became ill, and so we are performing it in this June concert instead.

We all look forward to seeing you at this final concert of the Evanston Symphony’s 2024–2025 Season. 🎵

—Lawrence Eckerling
Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

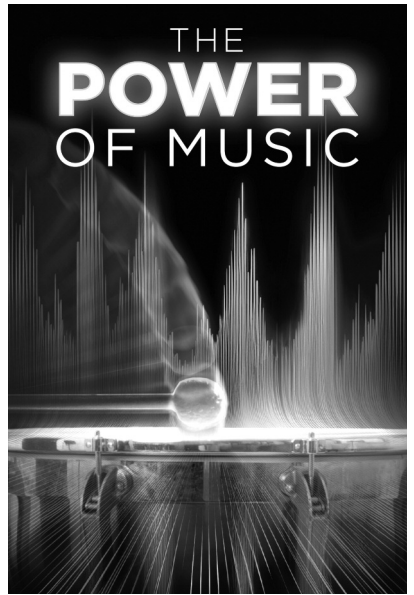
Experience “The POWER of Music” at ESO’s 2025–2026 Season

Music Director Lawrence Eckerling has programmed a powerful and provocative selection of works for the Evanston Symphony Orchestra’s 2025–2026 subscription concerts. The ESO’s 79th season, themed “The Power of Music,” features deservedly popular masterworks including Tchaikovsky’s “Pathétique” Symphony, Beethoven’s “Emperor” piano concerto and Rimsky-Korsakov’s tour-de-force *Scheherazade*.

The season also showcases pieces by Mozart, Schumann, Glazunov, Wagner and works by Coleridge-Taylor, Bernstein, de Falla and local composer Stacy Garrop.

An April 2026 concert heralds the return of ESO favorite Jeffrey Biegel playing both Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* and a newly commissioned piano concerto by contemporary composer Peter Boyle — *Rhapsody in Red, White and Blue* — inspired by the 100th anniversary of the Gershwin piece. Other soloists include the renowned principal clarinetist of the Chicago Symphony Stephen Williamson playing Mozart’s clarinet concerto, rising star pianist Albert Cano Smit at the keyboard for the Beethoven, and Sphinx Organization 2024 Medal of Excellence Award-winning violinist Nathan Amaral featured on Glazunov’s violin concerto.

You won’t want to miss a single concert of the 2025–2026 season. See the concert dates and programs — and an order form — elsewhere in this issue or on the ESO’s website at evanstonsymphony.org. Subscribe today to the ESO’s 2025–2026 concert season to experience “the power of music.” 🎵



LAKESIDE POPS CONCERT
TUESDAY, AUGUST 19 • 7:00–8:00 PM
WALLACE BOWL • GILLSON PARK • WILMETTE
RAIN DATE: AUGUST 20, 7:00 PM

Meet Ko-Eun Yi!



Ko-Eun Yi was born and raised in Seoul, Korea. While no one in her family is a musician — her father is a consultant for start-up businesses and her mother spends significant time as a volunteer — her parents love music and there was always a lot of it in their home. When Ko-Eun's brother, who is four years older, began piano lessons, three-year-old Ko-Eun was drawn to the piano, very curious about the "sound box" and amazed by the magic coming out of it. She said that even at that young age she could feel how the sound transformed the atmosphere of the room.

Ko-Eun's parents encouraged this interest in their younger child and were very supportive, with her mother taking her to concerts and helping her listen to lots of music. She notes that there were no iPads so music was the main thing to feel and experience! At five, Ko-Eun began lessons with her brother's teacher, whom she describes as patient and encouraging, and who helped her to enjoy learning. She also credits this teacher with instilling in her the "important stuff," such as the correct way to hold her fingers, from the very beginning, and says that without this teacher's early guidance she would not have been able to proceed. For her part, Ko-Eun enjoyed the progress she made for each lesson. By age seven she was winning competitions.

After five years with her first teacher, Ko-Eun entered the Korean National University of the Arts Preparatory School, where she progressed very well. At ten she won her first competition in the U.S. and at 13 won a competition at the Aspen Festival. Then, at 14, she came to the U.S. and enrolled at the Walnut Hill School for the Arts in Natick, Massachusetts, which describes its music department as "the only high

school program linking a major conservatory, New England Conservatory, with an independent school." Ko-Eun spent grades 9–12 at Walnut Hill and had lessons at NEC once a week. However, she says that the most difficult part of her studies was learning English, which is quite different from Korean! After graduation from Walnut Hill, Ko-Eun earned her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees at Juilliard and completed her Professional Studies degree at Manhattan School of Music. She then earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Stony Brook University. She has won a number of prestigious prizes and maintains a busy schedule of concerts, recitals and teaching in this country and around the world, all of which you can read more about at koeunyi.com.

Ko-Eun and her husband live in Leonia, NJ, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. She says there are a lot of Koreans in the community, which means there are also a lot of good Korean restaurants! But they also count Italian, Japanese and Turkish food among their favorites. They enjoy going to the gym and listening to all kinds of music, although Ko-Eun sticks to classical when at the piano. Watching action movies in English and Korean movies on Netflix is a favorite pastime, as is traveling to explore all the U.S. has to offer.

Ko-Eun describes Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major from 1930 as a piece very influenced by jazz rhythms with a host of different emotions that can change very quickly. The first movement is "full of surprises between sections, with a cadenza leading up to a very exciting end," the second movement is "more peaceful and dreamy, like watching stars in the sky," and the third movement is fast and exhilarating, "a rollercoaster to the end!" Come hear the surprises, watch the stars, and ride the rollercoaster with this very exciting pianist at our concert on June 8! 🎵

Jonathan Bailey Holland, Dean and Composer

Jonathan Bailey Holland, Dean and Professor of Music at Northwestern's Bienen School of Music, was raised in Flint, Michigan, by parents who worked for the Flint schools. Music was always playing on the radio or from his father's extensive record collection of everything from jazz to classical. Jonathan says that all styles excited him from an early age and he reacted to "any kind of music that made you move!" Jonathan began piano at ten and added trumpet a year later, inspired by his dad's recordings of Miles Davis and other jazz greats. Then an excellent band teacher encouraged him to take music seriously. When he was in eighth grade, a poster for Interlochen Arts Academy piqued his interest, so he sent away a postcard for a catalogue. The very idea of Interlochen excited him, a place where everyone was focused on music and the arts. He convinced his parents that Interlochen was the best high school for him.

Jonathan played the trumpet seriously during his four years at Interlochen and began to focus more on composition, winning a school-wide award for his very first piece. He recalls an assignment to compose a solo violin piece. When he sat down to write, however, he'd just had an argument with a friend; that argument found its way into his work!

Interlochen prepared Jonathan well for the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he earned his Bachelor of Music degree, and Curtis prepared him well for Harvard, where he earned his PhD in composition. And composing is one of his passions. He often sits down at the piano to try out ideas for a new piece and, when it's partially formed, will transfer what he's written to his computer, where a notation program plays back his draft and lets him make changes.

Once a piece is ready for public performance, it's "always interesting to hear someone else play your music. It's a bit humbling and amazing to watch someone spend so much of their time and energy on something you've composed!" We asked how he reacts if a performance doesn't quite hit it. "Someone will do something that's not quite what I wrote," he said, "but that can be okay, even interesting. Other times a conductor may make changes. You have to let the current performance happen and wait for another one in the future. If something isn't quite what you'd like it to be, you can't do anything about it!"

We hope the ESO's performance of *Motor City Dance Mix* lives up to Jonathan Bailey Holland's expectations! 🎵

—Kelly Brest van Kempen

See evanstonstymphony.org for a longer version of these interviews with Jonathan Bailey Holland and Ko-Eun Yi.



EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Lawrence Eckerling, Music Director

2025–2026 CONCERT SERIES

THE POWER OF MUSIC

OCTOBER 19, 2025

TCHAIKOVSKY & MOZART

GARROP
Song of Orpheus

MOZART
Clarinet Concerto
Stephen Williamson, *clarinet*

TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphony No. 6 “Pathétique”

FEBRUARY 8, 2026

LIFE, LOVE & DEATH

WAGNER
Prelude and Liebestod,
Tristan und Isolde

BEETHOVEN
Piano Concerto No. 5 “Emperor”
Albert Cano Smit, *piano*

SCHUMANN
Symphony No. 4

APRIL 19, 2026

RHAPSODIES IN RED, WHITE, AND BLUE

HOSTED BY LAROB K. RAFAEL

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR
Petite Suite de Concert

GERSHWIN
Promenade (Walking The Dog)

BOYER
Rhapsody in Red, White and Blue
Jeffrey Biegel, *piano*

BERNSTEIN
On The Waterfront Suite

GERSHWIN
Rhapsody in Blue
Jeffrey Biegel, *piano*

CONCERT SPONSORED BY
PAULA JACOBI AND
TODD WIENER

JUNE 7, 2026

SCHEHERAZADE

FALLA
Three-Cornered Hat
(Suite No. 2)

GLAZUNOV
Violin Concerto
Nathan Amaral, *violin*

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
Scheherazade



Concert Venue

Subscription Series Concerts take place on Sundays at 2:30 p.m. in Pick-Staiger Concert Hall,
50 Arts Circle Dr., Evanston (just off of Sheridan Rd.).
Free, convenient parking. Box office opens at 1:30 p.m.



EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

presents our

2025–2026 CONCERT SERIES

4-CONCERT SERIES SUBSCRIPTIONS

Assigned seating, tickets mailed in September

RENEWING ESO SUBSCRIBER

NEW ESO SUBSCRIBER

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Change my seats to: _____

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Balcony

Note: All credit/debit card ticket subscription purchases after August 1 incur a \$5 service fee.

Save with EARLY BIRD, purchase or postmark by July 11!

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_____ **Early Bird** Senior Concert Series Subscriptions @ \$120 each... = \$ _____

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_____ Senior Concert Series Subscriptions @ \$132 each (After 7/11)... = \$ _____

For children's tickets or special seating call 847.864.8804

INDIVIDUAL CONCERT TICKETS

Will be available September 1.

Purchase tickets in advance and save.

Prices: \$42 in advance, \$47 at door.

Seniors: \$36 in advance, \$41 at door.

Full-time students with ID are \$5.

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Mail form to: Evanston Symphony Orchestra, 1555 Sherman Avenue, Suite 318, Evanston, IL 60201

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