



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

German Favorites

Our second concert of the ESO's 69th season, with its theme of the enduring appeal of Romanticism for composers well into the 20th century, features three canonical composers of German Romanticism: Brahms, Strauss, and Wagner.

Our concert opens with the Third Symphony of Johannes Brahms (1833–1897). Please read Maestro Eckerling's *Behind the Scenes* column on the next page for an explanation of why a major symphony begins the concert rather than concluding it. This 35 minute masterpiece was one of Brahms' greatest triumphs at its 1883 premiere and it has remained a concert staple ever since. The opening three notes represent a "motto" (FAF) which pervades the work, reaching its ultimate resolution at the beautiful end of the fourth and final movement. This motto had a personal meaning for Brahms, who never married, because FAF is an acronym for the German "Frei, Aber Frohlich," or "free, but happy." By contrast, Brahms' close friend, the great violinist Joseph Joachim, had a personal motto of FAE, which stands for "Frei, Aber Einsam," or "free, but lonely."

When Richard Strauss died in 1949 aged 85 he might have been called the "last of the romantic composers." One of his final remarks, given to his daughter-in-law, was "Dying is just as I composed it in *Death and Transfiguration*." This reference to one of his most popular tone poems (dating from 60 years earlier), is particularly appropriate for our concert because Strauss quotes its "transfiguration" theme opposite the last word of his *Four Last Songs* — "death." The *Four Last Songs* are Strauss' final work and with a premiere date of 1950 may be thought of as a farewell to German Romanticism. The words are taken from three poems by Herman Hesse and one by Joseph von Eichendorff and mirror the elegiac tones of the music with such lines as "Summer smiles, astonished and feeble, at his

2:30 PM ON
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German Favorites

dying dream of a garden" and "We have through sorrow and joy gone hand in hand; From our wanderings, let's now rest in this quiet land."

Our third German Romantic composer, Richard Wagner (1813–1883), ranks with Bach and Beethoven for significance in the history of music. He devoted his compositional energies to opera, creating 13, of which 10 are staples of the operatic repertoire. He greatly expanded the use of the orchestra, by increasing the number of instruments as well as by increasing the importance of the music played by the orchestra to a level equal to that of the singers. Excerpts from his operas have been staples of the symphonic repertoire since their operatic premieres, and allow one to experience the magnificence of his orchestra in a shorter time frame than in his normal four hours of operatic performance time. Our concert concludes with the 15 minute Overture to *Tannhäuser* (1845), one of his most popular and exciting orchestral pieces. 

—David Ellis



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MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2015
1:30 PM

MEET MICHELLE AREYZAGA

1611 CHICAGO AVE., EVANSTON

 THE MERION



THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA IS AN ILLINOIS NOT-FOR-PROFIT COMMUNITY ORCHESTRA PROVIDING DIVERSE, ENJOYABLE AND ACCESSIBLE MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT THAT ENRICHES THE ORCHESTRA, THE AUDIENCE AND THE COMMUNITY. For more information on ESO concerts and events, please contact David Ellis, General Manager, at (847) 864-8804. Write us at Evanston Symphony Orchestra, PO Box 778, Evanston, IL 60204. Email us at esomusic@evanstonsymphony.org. Visit our website evanstonsymphony.org.

BEHIND THE SCENES



Program Order

The next ESO concert will feature three superb works. But I have decided to do something a little different with the concert order. Brahms' amazing 3rd Symphony comprises the entire first half. After the intermission, we will perform the Strauss *Four Last Songs*, and conclude with Wagner's Overture to *Tannhäuser*.

The typical symphony orchestra program of at least the last 40 years or so has three works on it, and is approximately 2 hours long. The concert usually starts with an overture (approximately 5–12 minutes in length), followed by a solo concerto (typically 20–35 minutes). Then there is an intermission, followed by a symphony (or some major symphonic work) lasting 30–45 minutes. This has sometimes been referred to as the orchestral sandwich... an overture and a symphony on the outside, with a concerto in the middle. So you may wonder why I am doing this "backwards." But it didn't always used to be this way. Looking back at concert programs for major orchestras from the 1940s and 1950s, it was not uncommon to see a major symphony such as Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony taking up the entire first half, with a second half of lighter fare, such as Rossini overtures or Strauss waltzes!

Here are two 1947 concerts from a particular orchestra's first season:

- I. Mozart Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*
Beethoven – Symphony #7
Intermission
Debussy – *Three Nocturnes*
Strauss – *Emperor Waltzes*
- II. Bach – Fugue in G Minor
Franck – Symphony in D minor
Intermission
Lalo – Cello Concerto
Weinberger – Polka and Fugue from *Schwanda*

Maybe you guessed that these concerts were from the Evanston Symphony Orchestra's first season. And out of seven concerts in the first two seasons, only two of them resemble what we would consider "normal" today.

When you look at some of the programs of the virtuoso pianist Vladimir Horowitz, he often started with the "heavier," serious, or longer works on the first half, and the second half was filled with shorter pieces.

And in Beethoven's time, his "mammoth" concerts were legendary. Here is the program for Beethoven's most famous concert, in December 1808:

- Symphony #6
- Ah Perfido* (concert aria)
- Gloria from his Mass in C
- Piano Concerto #4
- Intermission
- Symphony #5
- Sanctus and Benedictus from his Mass in C
- Piano Solo Improvisation by Beethoven
- Choral Fantasy

So what we consider a "typical" concert today is only a relatively recent phenomenon.

There are several reasons for the order of our February 1 concert. First, the Brahms 3rd Symphony is a big, profound work, and in the spirit of pianist Vladimir Horowitz, people will be able to contemplate this reflective and lengthy work more easily at the beginning of the concert. Next, music that is fast, or loud, or both, is exciting. And the Wagner Overture is both of those things. It ends loudly with a lot of brass, and so it will send the audience away excited. And finally, the rapturous Strauss Four Last Songs provides a beautiful contrast as the centerpiece of the program.

I truly hope you enjoy our symphony-soloist-overture format. And after reading this article, you probably won't find it so radical after all! 🎧

—Lawrence Eckerling

Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

Meet Michelle Areyzaga

Michelle Areyzaga didn't set out to be a professional singer. In fact, she never had a formal voice lesson until she was 23!

Michelle was born and raised in Chicago. Her parents loved music and met when they were members of a choir at the Moody Bible Institute. When the choir director asked people representing other countries to stand up, Michelle's father stood up to represent Mexico and her mother stood up for Bolivia. Some might say it was a match made in musical heaven!

When she was a child, Michelle, her parents and her brother would sing their favorite hymns in four-part harmony for church services or just for themselves. Michelle started playing piano when she was 3 and in high school was a choir accompanist. She then earned a scholarship to major in accounting at Southern Illinois University, where she joined the choir and minored in music. When a professor told her that she should consider majoring in voice, Michelle realized that accounting might not be the right career for her after all. She also realized that she didn't like being so far from home, so she left SIU and came back to Chicago.

Michelle started investigating the various voice programs in the Chicago area and was offered scholarships at Northwestern and Northern Illinois. However, a friend strongly suggested she study with renowned Chicago soprano Maria Lagios, then teaching at Roosevelt University — which is how Michelle, at the ripe old age of 23, came to have her first formal voice lesson.



After receiving her B.A. in vocal music with honors

from Roosevelt, Michelle made her opera debut with the Chicago Opera Theatre as The Girl in Viktor Ullmann's *The Kaiser of Atlantis*. Her performance was hailed by one critic as "stunning." Since then she has sung with opera companies and orchestras all over the U.S. and abroad to standing ovations.



SOPRANO MICHELLE AREYZAGA (CENTER) IS SURROUNDED BY ESO MUSICIANS (FROM LEFT) RICK HOLBROOK, CHERYL HAACK, LES JACOBSON AND GUS BREST VAN KEMPEN ON DEC. 21 ON STAGE AT THE HARRIS THEATER, WHERE THEY PERFORMED IN THE 39TH ANNUAL DO-IT-YOURSELF MESSIAH.

Michelle brings to the stage not only her gorgeous voice, but also her ability to interpret the composer's lyrics. Michelle first appeared with the ESO in 2008, delighting audience and orchestra alike with her interpretations of Canteloube's *Songs of the Auvergne*. Even though she was singing in Langue d'Oc, a romance language spoken in the Occitan regions of France, Italy and Spain, there was absolutely no mistaking which work was which, especially Canteloube's tongue-in-cheek song about a lazy girl who did not want to get up! Michelle has also performed selections from "Bernstein on Broadway" to audiences all over the country. One reviewer said of her performance, "Areyzaga's rendition of "Glitter and Be Gay" was easily the highlight of the set. Her sense of comic irony brought laughter as she pulled baubles from her bosom, and her spectacular coloratura singing shone brightly in this devilishly difficult number."

Her acting talents are not limited to the comic, however. Michelle last appeared with the ESO in January of 2011 in the premiere of Gwyneth Walker's *The Promised Land*. Walker wrote this work specifically for Michelle, whose performance brought many in the audience to tears. Such is the power of her voice. She had previously premiered another Walker work, *La Tenura*, in Vermont and also released a recording of Walker's *The Sun is Love*. It is a tribute to Michelle's voice and dramatic talents that Dr. Walker is drawn to composing works for this versatile soprano.

Michelle's most recent interaction with ESO musicians came this past December when she was the soprano soloist for the International Music Foundation's perennial favorite, the "Do-It-Yourself" presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. ESO violists Les Jacobson and Rick Holbrook and violinists Cheryl Haack and Gus Brest van Kempen were members of the DIYM orchestra.

Engaged to be married just before the *Messiah* performances, Michelle lives in Naperville with her son, Will, who is 10. Michelle describes Will as "shy, but with a good singing voice. He's just selective about whom he share it with!" The ESO is delighted to welcome back one of our favorite artists to our stage! 🎧

—Kelly Brest van Kempen

The Evanston Symphony Holiday Concert was the best start to the holidays



A VISIT FROM SANTA, ALONG WITH THE EVANSTON CHILDREN'S CHOIR

So what was your favorite part of our wonderful holiday concert? For many people, it was the brand new *Magnificat* by local composer James Stephenson. With 120 singers from the North Shore Choral Society and the large 90 member orchestra playing, this vibrant piece is an instant classic for the season. The Evanston Children's Choir joined the NSCS in *O Holy Night* and provided essential children's voices to the "Waltz of the Snowflakes" from *The Nutcracker*. Members of Elements Contemporary Ballet danced to an orchestral suite from Handel's *Messiah* and the ede2 dancers interpreted the "Sleigh Ride" by Mozart. Santa and his elves rounded off the afternoon with the audience Sing-a-long and the "Hallelujah Chorus."

See you next year! 🎧



ede2 DANCES TO SLEIGH RIDE WITH THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA