



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Harmonica Meets American Classics

The second concert of the ESO's 70th season features two very well known American composers—Copland and Gershwin — plus the somewhat lesser well known Christopher Theofanidis and Evanston's own Howard Levy. Incidentally, all of these composers were born in Brooklyn except for the Dallas-born Theofanidis.

Our concert opens with the Illinois premiere of *Dreamtime Ancestors* by Christopher Theofanidis (b. 1967). This 17-minute work in three sections takes its name from Australian aboriginal creation myths in which each of us is connected to each other through our "dreamtime ancestors" in the past, present and future. *Dreamtime Ancestors* is the product of a national consortium of U.S. orchestras which commissioned the new work several years ago. Please see Maestro Eckerling's Behind the Scenes column on the next page for more about this commission.

Howard Levy, the composer and performer of the next work on the program, the Concerto for Diatonic Harmonica and Orchestra, is one of Evanston's most eminent musicians and thus needs little introduction for many music lovers. He is the world's reigning virtuoso of the diatonic harmonica, which requires its player to use their mouth to produce the equivalent of the black notes on a piano keyboard. Levy's Concerto observes the form and conventions of the standard classical concerto, thus demonstrating the versatility of a musician renowned for his work in the fields of jazz, folk, pop and rock.

Our concert continues with the suite from the film score for *The Red Pony* by Aaron Copland (1900–1990). Premiered in 1948, this suite ended Copland's "populist" Americana phase which had commenced with *El Salón México* in 1936. During this period, in addition to his iconic ballets *Rodeo*, *Billy the Kid* and *Appalachian Spring*, Copland composed a number of film scores, including *Our Town*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Heiress*, which won him an Academy Award. The six movement *Red Pony* Suite lasts about 25 minutes and is the most popular of Copland's film music.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 14, 2016 — 2:30 PM

*Harmonica Meets
American Classics*



George Gershwin (1898–1937), despite his genius for and financial success from popular melody, also wished to compose "serious" works. He went to Europe and tried unsuccessfully to pay for lessons from both Igor Stravinsky and Alban Berg. Maurice Ravel also turned Gershwin down, saying "Why should you be a second rate Ravel when you're already a first rate Gershwin?" After Gershwin moved to Beverly Hills, California he regularly allowed Arnold Schönberg to use his tennis court. The three hour "folk opera" *Porgy and Bess* is Gershwin's most important classical composition and is considered by many to deserve the title of "The Great American Opera." Its many standard songs, such as "Summertime" and "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," have led to the assembling of a number of orchestral suites from the opera. This concert will use one of the versions arranged by Robert Russell Bennett, but will also include the peerless harmonica of Howard Levy in several improvisations! 🎷

—David Ellis



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**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2016
1:30 PM**

MEET HOWARD LEVY

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 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@evanstonorchestra.org. Visit our website evanstonorchestra.org.

BEHIND THE SCENES



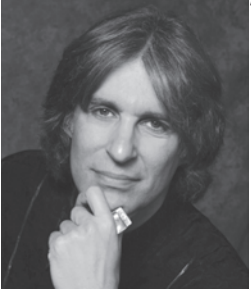
This upcoming concert has two very special aspects. The first is the Illinois premiere of a newly commissioned work by Christopher Theofanidis. And the second is our collaboration with renowned guest artist Howard Levy.

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra has twice before participated in joint commissioning projects to bring new music for the symphony orchestra to life. The first one, sponsored by Ford Made in America, resulted in Joan Tower's orchestral work also titled *Made In America*, which was performed by the ESO in February of 2006. The second commissioned piece was Joseph Schwantner's *Chasing Light...*, performed in February 2009. The idea was to have one orchestra in each of the 50 states perform the work. With most commissions, a single orchestra pays for the composition, premieres the work, and far too often the music rarely gets performed thereafter, with no exposure to the world. In the case of the joint commission (or consortium), 50 orchestras share the cost of the commission, and 50 performances of the work take place, giving it multiple performances. This is a win/win situation for orchestras (both artistically and financially), and also for the composer who gets much more exposure for his work. On this concert we will be performing Christopher Theofanidis *Dreamtime Ancestors*. I am enjoying getting to know this work. As of this writing, we have had our first rehearsal and it went extremely well. I'm really looking forward to performing it with the Evanston Symphony, and I'm certain that you will enjoy it too!

I have been aware of this concert's guest artist Howard Levy and his amazing musicianship for about thirty-five years. During that time we met (and spoke) perhaps four times. I have performed on the same stage with him only twice before (both times never having spoken with him). But many of the musicians that I performed with over the years had performed EXTENSIVELY with him, and so I had kept up with his activities through them. Having initially only knowing him as an incredible jazz pianist, I found myself in New York around 1985 playing for a corporate event with two alternating bands from Chicago. The music was primarily country music, and in the other band was Howard Levy... playing *harmonica*! I was stunned then at how good he was. I commented to another musician who was a good friend of Howard's, and said how impressed I was with his harmonica playing. And then I muttered, "Thank God he doesn't conduct symphony orchestras!" And the friend of Howard's said, "Yes, Larry, but don't TELL him that" (implying that if I did tell him that, that he would be the next great symphony conductor). So I followed that musician's advice and refrained from saying that to Howard! But I'm thrilled to know that you will have the opportunity to be as stunned as I was in 1985 when he plays his own *Harmonica Concerto* with the ESO, and also joins the Orchestra in music from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. 🎷

—Lawrence Eckerling
Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

Howard Levy: Evanston's Own Harmonica Master



"For me, it's a dream to play this piece in the town where I live," says harmonica virtuoso Howard Levy.

The dream comes true Feb. 14 as the Evanston Symphony Orchestra performs Mr. Levy's amazing "Concerto for Diatonic Harmonica and Orchestra" with the composer as soloist.

The three-movement, 15-minute piece was composed in 2000 on a commission from the Illinois Philharmonic. "It took me six months to write," he says. "I worked on it on buses, trains and in hotel rooms while I was touring."

Each movement is written in a different church mode — Mixolydian, Dorian and Ionian — to give it a unique sound, and features improvisatory cadenzas for the soloist. Mr. Levy has recorded the piece with the Czech National Symphony and performed it more than three dozen times in Europe, Asia and North America, including at Orchestra Hall with the Chicago Sinfonietta and in specially adapted versions with the Hohner Accordion Orchestra in Germany and the Hong Kong Harmonica Orchestra.

Diatonic harmonica is the traditional single-key "mouth organ" or "blues harp" long used in classical and popular music. Mr. Levy developed a technique of "overblowing and overdrawing," bending the reeds to produce the other notes of the octave. This enables him to play every note across the entire spectrum of the instrument, like a chromatic harmonica, while retaining the soulful and hauntingly expressive quality of a blues harmonica.

The seminal moment took place in Evanston in September of 1969. After attending a rally at Northwestern University in support of the "Chicago 7" anti-Vietnam war protesters, he was inspired to express his feelings musically. "I felt like playing the 'harp.' I fished it out of my pocket, a Marine band in G... put it to my lips, and suddenly, I bent the 4 draw. I was shocked — that's what it felt like. WOW! Indescribable, an oral balancing act between vacuum, pressure, and breath that transformed the harp from a mun-

dane wood and metal object into a magical, organic vessel that vibrated, sang, and changed me in the process — forever, as it turned out. I felt like Columbus discovering a new continent."

Mr. Levy was born in Brooklyn and studied classical piano and pipe organ at the Manhattan School of Music, but his musical tastes were highly eclectic. "I grew up listening to a lot of popular music such as Hendrix, Sinatra and the Beatles. And I played sax, mandolin, harmonica and clarinet on the streets of New York for spare change." He saw Elvin Jones and Herbie Hancock at the Village Vanguard and such classical virtuosos as Itzhak Perlman, Janos Starker and Mstislav Rostropovich at Washington Irving High School, where he worked as a concert usher.

Both composer and concerto have strong local ties. He first came to Evanston in 1969 to study music at Northwestern. After returning to New York briefly in 1970, he moved back to Evanston and has been here ever since. His two children were born here and went to local schools. Before pursuing music full-time he did a lot of odd jobs in and around Evanston, including house painter, punch press operator, welder and plumber's assistant. Gradually he became active in the local music scene, playing jazz, folk, rock and Latin music on piano and harmonica. He started two bands, the Balkan Rhythm Band and the jazz ensemble NBV Quartet. From there his musical accomplishments have become even richer and more varied. He has played with such iconic artists as Steve Goodman, John Prine, Paul Simon, Kenny Loggins and Dolly Parton. He has written hundreds of compositions — "long, medium, short, in just about every style that I play in," appeared on more than 200 CDs and played on several movie soundtracks. In 1988 he co-founded the breakthrough jazz/bluegrass ensemble Bela Fleck and the Flecktones. Their reunion album "Rocket Science," released in 2011, earned him his second Grammy award.

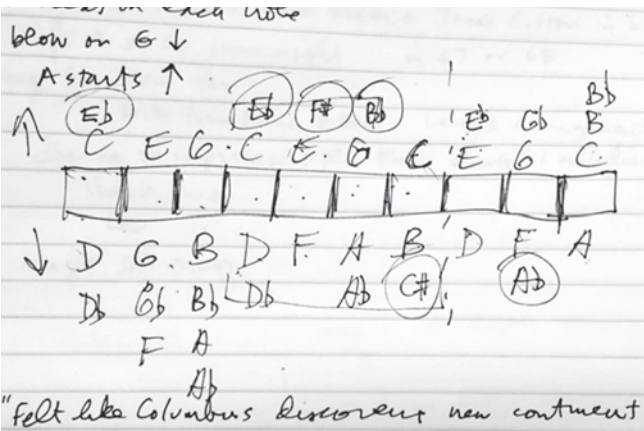
Mr. Levy's association with the Evanston Symphony goes back decades, indirectly, when he first met ESO Music Director Lawrence Eckerling. They played their first (and until now only) gig together, a corporate event of jazz and

R&B music, at Pick-Staiger Hall in 2003. "We've been talking a long time about playing this piece together," says Mr. Levy, "but our schedules never meshed. Now finally it's happening, and I'm thrilled!"

Adds Mr. Eckerling: "I'm absolutely delighted that it was able to work out this time, and am so looking forward to collaborating with him!"

Two great local musical institutions — the Evanston Symphony and Howard Levy — together for the first time! 🎶

—Les Jacobson



Howard Levy's diagram (in his own hand) showing how he can play a chromatic scale from a C Major diatonic harmonica, using a technique he first developed in Evanston in 1969.

Joyful Collaboration in Evanston — Worth the Work for All Involved

This article first appeared in Jennifer Lasik's blog "Evanston Creates (Fine and Performing Arts Blog!)" on December 8.

Sunday marked the third year that I have attended the Evanston Symphony Orchestra Holiday Concert. Each year it has been a treat, with multiple local groups participating, doing the best-of-the-best holiday music, which I can personally never get enough of until January 1st when I abolish all things old and welcome the New Year, shifting my focus to my many, many, many, many, *many resolutions*.

But this year ... this year trumped everything. It wasn't just "the best yet" ... something exploded and the concert seemed like the shortest in the history of Evanston and left all us wanting more and a little shocked that it was "over already" even though the length remained the same as previous years.

It was, in a word, glorious.

In fact, I was so moved by the whole production that I feel a profound sadness for every single person who didn't get to experience those couple of hours with me.

This admiration seems over-the-top, even for me, I know. And yet, it's not. It is not. Since exiting ETHS late Sunday afternoon, I have been thinking about what made the event so effective.

It absolutely was the collaborative effort of the groups involved. Not one of the groups —gorgeous, brilliant and talented though they are — could have singularly had the same effect. Collaboration can be difficult, time-consuming, compromising, uncomfortable and inconvenient. But it can also be inspiring, rewarding and successful. The ESO Holiday Concert, in conjunction with the Evanston Children's Choir, the Evanston Dance Ensemble, the North Shore Choral Society, the ETHS high school a cappella group and the Evanston Symphony Orchestra Holiday Gospel Choir, is a model for when it works — really works.

These are some of the reasons it worked, and something to take into the New Year.

1. Common Project Goal.

All partners clearly understood and contributed to the goal, to execute an arts performance that celebrated and ushered in the 2015 holiday season and showcased their

respective and collective talent and skill. They also shared an interest in expanding and diversifying their program, performers and audience members.

2. Care in Selecting Project Partners.

The orchestra was able to select partners who complemented what they offer without forcing compromise or mission-creep. Each group added a genre, a visual impact, an age variance or some other piece to add to the broad appeal and interest without losing quality.

3. True Integration of Artists.

Sometimes what we call collaboration is actually just sharing a venue and audience and doing our own separate pieces. In this case, the partners performed with one another, sharing the spotlight, the leadership, the creative energy and the outcome. ESO played the music for the dance ensemble and choral groups. The choral groups performed together for the finale, with all musicians accompanying. The groups were at times directed by each other's directors (which is not an easy thing to manage!) These were not partners-on-paper. It was total integration and it worked beautifully.

4. Attention to Logistics.

The performance was extremely organized. Each group knew precisely when and where it was entering and exiting the program, and movement between set-ups had clearly been practiced so that downtime was kept to an absolute minimum. The groups were strategic about where to place the intermission to make stage management easier as well. The program moved from one part to another with seamless transitions that did not drain the attention span of the viewers.

As an arts administrator, I looked at an amazing experience and gave a lot of thought to the planning, organization, communication and TIME it must have taken to put it all together. Most people in the audience just knew they had been gifted with "inspirational," "joyful," "exciting," "fun" and "wonder." Hopefully that makes it worth the extra work for all organizations involved.

Cheers to a job well done, Evanston arts. May your successful event give other arts organizations the courage and desire to pool resources and talent to the benefit of our entire community.

Thank you for making the season #joyful. 🎵

—Jennifer Lasik

*Cultural Arts Coordinator
for the City of Evanston*



PHOTO/STRIKE 2 PHOTOGRAPHY

*Evanston Dance Ensemble dance to Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite
with the Evanston Symphony Orchestra*

Celebrate the Evanston Symphony Orchestra in its 70th Season with your gift to the 2016 Annual Fund!

The ESO is recognized as one of the premier cultural assets of Evanston and the North Shore because of its musical excellence and community engagement. Our October 2015 concert featured orchestral showpieces by Tchaikovsky and Rossini plus *Scheherazade* of Rimsky-Korsakov. Our Holiday concert was the largest performing arts collaboration on the North Shore, bringing together over 300 performers from six Evanston organizations, including the newly formed Evanston Symphony Holiday Gospel Choir, to celebrate the season!

Of course, the ESO does much more than perform concerts. We bring music into the lives of Evanston preschoolers in HeadStart and Pre-K At Risk programs with *Music In Your World*. This special program was developed by the ESO at the request of School District 65, which was seeking arts-based education for its most vulnerable students. Through it, the ESO helps to enrich children's lives and strengthen educational outcomes. *Music In Your World* uses the power of music to teach critical concepts like opposites and sequencing, plus school readiness skills including listening, following instructions and taking turns. To quote Shinichi Suzuki, "Teaching music isn't my main purpose. I want to make good citizens. If children hear fine music from the day of their birth and learn to play it, they develop sensitivity, discipline and endurance. They get a beautiful heart." What greater gift can we give to our children and community!

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 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 2016 Annual Fund. Thank you!

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