



KEYNOTES

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

LAWRENCE ECKERLING, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Here's To 80 Years Of Music-Making!

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra celebrates a remarkable achievement with its 2026–2027 season: 80 years of serving the Evanston and North Shore communities. Founded in 1945, the ESO has been a home for talented musicians, a passionate audience and dedicated donors, all of whom are involved “For the Love of Music,” the theme of this season’s subscription concerts.

The ESO begins the season with another celebration, this one of Ludwig van Beethoven on the 200th anniversary of his death in 1827. The orchestra will bring to life once again three of the master’s most well-known works: the overture to Beethoven’s lone opera, *Fidelio*; his sole Violin Concerto, featuring ESO favorite Irina Muresanu on violin; and the transcendent masterpiece of classical music, the famous Fifth Symphony, with its iconic four-note opening.

ESO Music Director Lawrence Eckerling has crafted three more stimulating and moving programs for the rest of the season. The February 14, 2027, concert includes works from Russian Romantic composers with pianist Winston Choi fronting the ESO in Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 and ESO Concertmaster Julie Fischer playing the lead violin in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade*.

The April 4, 2027, concert features Camille Saint-Saëns’ monumental Symphony No. 3, “The Organ Symphony,” with organist Stephen Alltop. The program kicks off with Ottorino Respighi’s picturesque *Fountains of Rome* and also includes the lyrical and virtuosic Violin Concerto No. 10 by Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges played by rising star Adé Williams.

For the final concert of the 2026–27 season on May 23, Maestro Eckerling has enlisted the North Shore Choral Society and soloists to help the ESO present Sir Karl Jenkins’ tragic but life-affirming *The Armed Man: A Mass For Peace*. Featuring Mezzo Soprano Tierra Whetstone, who

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18

— 2:30 PM

CELEBRATING
BEETHOVEN’S
BRILLIANCE



also serves as assistant conductor of the NSCS, and ESO principal cellist Ellen Frolichstein, the work, written in the wake of the war in the Balkans, confronts war’s horrors yet promises of peace. The program begins with Joseph Haydn’s Symphony No. 100, “The Military.” The concert is sponsored by Todd Wiener and Paul Jacobi.

If you haven’t subscribed to this year’s season, do so at evanstonsymphony.org, by calling 847-864-8804 or use the form on the back of this *KeyNotes*.

Here’s to another 80 years of the ESO and its mission, “to use the power of music to lift the human spirit, to engage and enrich the community by coming together to perform, inspire and educate.” 



MUSICAL INSIGHTS

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2026

1:30 PM

FREE

MEET IRINA MURESANU

OPEN TO
THE PUBLIC

1611 CHICAGO AVE., EVANSTON
PLEASE RSVP TO 847-570-7815

SPONSORED BY

 **THE MERION**

**Illinois
ARTS
Council**

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



**Evanston
Symphony
Orchestra**

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](mailto:esomusic@evanstonsymphony.org). Email us at esomusic@evanstonsymphony.org. Visit our website evanstonsymphony.org.

Behind The Scenes



IMAGE COURTESY OF MARC PERLUSH PHOTOGRAPHY

Beethoven 200

Our opening concert of the 2026–2027 season, entitled “For The Love of Music,” is celebrating the 200th Anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven’s death. To say that he was an important composer is a huge, almost irresponsible understatement. To say that he is one of my favorite composers, while true, doesn’t begin to convey the profundity of the moment. I view Beethoven as the foundation, the center, the essentialness of music. When I conduct music of Mozart, Haydn, or Bach, in my mind it’s “the music before Beethoven.” When I conduct Mahler, Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky, or even music composed today, in my mind it’s all “the music after Beethoven.”

I would argue that there are three essential bodies of his work: his nine symphonies, his 32 piano sonatas, and his 16 string quartets. Each of these groups begins with an early period that grows out of Haydn and Mozart, but Beethoven then pushes music further — harmonically, rhythmically, melodically, and emotionally. He expands length and scope, stretches what instruments and voices can do, and eventually moves beyond the boundaries of anyone’s imagination, especially in the late string quartets.

There are three additional important groups of works as well: the ten violin sonatas, the five piano concertos, and the seven trios for piano, violin, and cello. They too show this same evolution from classical inheritance to something larger, more daring, and more personal.

It is almost as if there are three different composers, not just one. Beethoven writes first just beyond the inherited language of Mozart and Haydn, then pushes further, and finally transforms the music into something unmistakably his own. He asks more of harmony, more of rhythm, more of emotion, and more of the musicians themselves. In one breath he can drive rhythm with ferocious energy; in the next, he can be serene, delicate, and deep with feeling.

His music was more revolutionary than what came before him, and nothing that came after him would be what it was without him. That is the definition of a consequential composer: important to humanity, and an essential figure in the entire spectrum of music.

I feel that importance personally, too. As a pianist, I remember when I was assigned his first, and then his second, piano sonatas. As a conductor wannabe, my score-reading teacher had me learn and play on the piano the last movement of his First Symphony. These were the building blocks for everything that followed.

In this Beethoven celebration concert, we are performing works from his middle period. Yet the difference in sensibility between Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and his Violin Concerto is striking: they reveal two opposite sides of the same composer.

We are honored to celebrate his genius, his relevance, and his continuing power to remind us why music matters, and why we love music so much. 🎵

—Lawrence Eckerling

Music Director, Evanston Symphony Orchestra

Save the Date!

Friday, October 23, 7:00 pm

AKAR Auditorium — 2715 Hurd Ave., Evanston

You can enjoy another side of the delightful musical talents of ESO’s maestro, Lawrence Eckerling, and our principal trumpeter, Don Cagen, as they showcase keyboard and trumpet virtuosity in a special jazz performance on Friday, October 23, 2026 at 7:00 pm. Get tickets early for this fundraising event which will be held at the AKAR Auditorium, 2715 Hurd Ave., Evanston, to support outreach programs of the Evanston Symphony. **ESO & All That Jazz** features Larry and Don leading a jazz quartet in a concert of jazz favorites,



followed by a reception featuring some specialties of popular Evanston restaurants and time to mingle with musicians and friends of the ESO. Tickets for this benefit concert and reception are \$50 and may be purchased online through our website or by calling 847-864-8804. 🎵



Musical Insights

A free pre-concert event at The Merion
Friday, October 16, 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. Irina Muresanu will also be featured. In addition, Irina and Larry will be performing the first movement from Beethoven’s Spring Sonata No. 5. 🎵



Merion’s Crystal Ballroom at
1611 Chicago Ave. at Davis St., Evanston.
FREE and open to the public.
Please RSVP to 847-570-7815.

Irina Muresanu: Back by Musical Demand for Another Great Performance!

What a joy it is to welcome Irina Muresanu back to our stage for the seventh time — and each time finds her involved in something new and exciting! She first appeared with the ESO in 2007, performing Brahms' Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Major before an enthusiastic audience. At the same time, she was teaching at Boston Conservatory, New England Conservatory and MIT, was part of three ensembles-in-residence, was traveling for concert appearances, recorded an album, *and* was working on her doctorate.

Maestro Eckerling was extremely impressed by Irina's performance and promised himself he'd invite her back. He's kept that promise. In 2010, she returned to perform Tchaikovsky's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Major. (Still teaching in Boston, traveling to perform, and welcomed son Victor. Naps became a luxury.) In 2013, Dvořák's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in A Minor. (More of same plus faculty at prominent music festivals and programs.) In 2016, she performed Brahms' Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra in A minor and Dvořák's Slavonic Dance No. 2 in E minor with another ESO favorite, cellist Wendy Warner. (Newly appointed Assistant Professor of Violin and Chamber Music at the University of Maryland. More of everything. Performing everywhere.)

Three seasons later, Irina came to Evanston to perform Prokofiev's Concerto for Violin in G minor and had rehearsed with the orchestra on Tuesday evening. A pleasant walk on Thursday was interrupted by a phone call. Maestro Eckerling. Sunday's concert was canceled. It seems a pandemic was rising... Irina and her family packed for three weeks and retreated to Maine; they stayed for six months. No live concerts, but regular, innovative performances online. She taught her students remotely and also recorded all of

the standard *études*, the exercises all violinists must learn to make the basics part of their bones. This led to an idea: an AI platform to give students more support when practicing the *études* on their own. In July 2021, Irina and a colleague received the prestigious Maryland Innovation Initiative Award for their collaborative research in developing AI technology for use in violin pedagogy. They called the platform "vAlolin."

Post-pandemic, 2023 brought Irina back to the ESO for Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2. Another stellar performance. (Now an Associate Professor. More teaching. More travel. More collaborations. Fewer naps.)

And here we are in 2026, for Irina's performance of Beethoven's lyrical Violin Concerto. She's now a full Professor at Maryland and Affiliate Faculty at both Maryland's Institute for Advanced Computer Studies and its Artificial Intelligence Interdisciplinary Institute. She's still teaching, traveling, performing, mentoring, innovating, and has also been conducting. And during all this time, she's created an impressive discography, with her 2018 solo album, *Four Strings Around the World*, receiving critical acclaim. In addition, there's a long list of awards, including one from the University of Maryland for "Infinite Strings," a platform designed to promote violin music by Romanian composers.

There's so much more to tell about this fabulous musician, yet not enough space! A more detailed article about Irina is posted on our website. 📶

—Kelly Brest van Kempen



Summer Pops Concert

Despite on and off torrential rain this summer, the weather cooperated and gave us a beautiful evening for our outdoor concert at Gillson Park. Maestro Eckerling led the orchestra in a fun-filled evening celebrating American composers. Tim Rhoze from Fleetwood-Jourdain Theater thrillingly narrated Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* and LeFrak's *American Promise*. And our very own timpanist, Brian Kabat, soloed on a typewriter in Anderson's *The Typewriter*. The audience packed the seats and brought along their own chairs and picnics. A big thank you to all our players, to Joel Berger for bringing a collection of his typewriters for the audience to play on, and to our wonderful sponsor, Optima Lumina.

See you all next summer! 📶



POPS PHOTOS BY YANCEY HUGHES PHOTOGRAPHY



The Evanston Symphony Orchestra, along with Tim Rhoze, performing Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*



HOLIDAY CONCERT PHOTOS BY YANCER HUGHES

Dancers from Evanston Dance Ensemble and ede2 performing in selections from The Nutcracker accompanied by the ESO

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra Holiday Concert Sunday December 13, 3:00 pm at Evanston Township High School

This most wonderful afternoon of music brings you many of your holiday favorites in song, dance, and music. Our full orchestra will be joined by Evanston Dance Ensemble, Chicago Ballet Arts, Evanston Children's Choir, North Shore Choral Society, TLC Choral Group, our gospel choir, led by Tina Jenkins, and, of course, Santa with his reindeer and elves.

Share this magical concert with friends and family. Reserve your tickets early. This concert sells out! Order your tickets by calling 847-864-8804 or online at our website. 🎵



A visit from the big man himself, Santa!



Santa looks on as the North Shore Choral Society and the ESO perform "Ring Out, Ye Bells!"

A Very Special 'Special Concert'

Sunday, December 13, 12:30–1:15 pm
Evanston Township High School Auditorium

Join the ESO for an inclusive celebration of holiday music where we welcome those with special needs. Our shortened holiday concert welcomes those who vocalize, move, and have diverse ways of experiencing music. We invite you to a barrier-free concert of classical holiday music, song, and dance, where everyone can express their love of music authentically for a magical holiday experience.

More information about seat reservations will be released soon. Everyone will need a reservation prior to the concert. This concert will have live music and dance, ASL interpretation, and a separate room with a calm space for retreat. Wheelchair spaces are limited and advanced ticketing is required. Free parking on Dodge Ave. Evanston Township High School is fully accessible. 🎵





EVANSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Lawrence Eckerling, Music Director

2026–2027

— 80th Anniversary — CONCERT SERIES

*For
the*
Love
of
Music

OCTOBER 18, 2026

CELEBRATING
BEETHOVEN'S
BRILLIANCE

BEETHOVEN

- *Fidelio* Overture
- Violin Concerto
Irina Muresanu, *violin*
- Symphony No. 5

CONCERT SPONSORED BY
ANONYMOUS

FEBRUARY 14, 2027

GREAT
ROMANTICS

SHOSTAKOVICH

Festive Overture

RACHMANINOFF

Piano Concerto No. 2
Winston Choi, *piano*

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Scheherazade

APRIL 4, 2027

SAINT-SAËNS
ORGAN SYMPHONY

RESPIGHI

Fountains of Rome

**JOSEPH BOULOGNE,
CHEVALIER DE SAINT-GEORGES**

Violin Concerto No. 10
Adé Williams, *violin*

SAINT-SAËNS

"Organ Symphony"
Symphony No. 3
Stephen Alltop, *organ*

MAY 23, 2027

A MASS
FOR PEACE

HAYDN

Symphony No. 100 "Military"

KARL JENKINS

*The Armed Man:
A Mass for Peace*

North Shore Choral Society
Tierra Whetstone, Mezzo Soprano
Ellen Frolichstein, *cello*

CONCERT SPONSORED BY

TODD WIENER AND PAULA JACOBI

To subscribe, please call Michelle at 847-864-8804 or visit our website at www.evanstonsymphony.org.

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.