



Highland Park Strings

*With Pride in the Past
We Embrace the Future*

45th Season

Dr. Allan Dennis, Principal Conductor
FREE Community Concerts | 2023-2024



With Pride in the Past We Embrace the Future Our 45th Season

FOUR COMMUNITY CONCERTS

Sundays at 3:00 pm

As we prepare to embark on our 45th season, we take pride in all we have achieved. We regret to announce the departure of DR. ROBERT G. HASTY, our conductor for the past six years, who has accepted a position at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. We thank him for his great musicianship, hard work, patience, and for all that we have learned. Embracing the future, we are very pleased to announce the engagement of **DR. ALLAN DENNIS** as our new Principal Conductor. Dr. Dennis is the founder and President of the MIDWEST YOUNG ARTISTS CONSERVATORY located in Fort Sheridan and we look forward to sharing our joint visions with MYAC. The mission of the Strings remains the same—to provide community concerts free of charge where families, friends, and north shore neighbors can gather together for an afternoon of music enjoyment at the highest level. With MYAC and Dr. Dennis as our new partners, the future is bright indeed!

The opening concert on October 15 will feature our brilliant friend and neighbor, **DESIREE RUHSTRAT**, returning for her record setting SEVENTH appearance with the Strings. She will perform the Violin Concerto in D Major by William Bolcom, contemporary American composer. Written for the violinist Sergiu Luca, a classical musician reveling in a newly-acquired jazz technique, inspired by the playing of the great jazz violinist Joe Venuti, the work is a true hybrid. The Program begins with a piece by Jean Milew entitled: "A New America-Highland Park Strong – Response to July 4" and includes the great Symphony No. 2 of Brahms.

For our "Holiday" Concert on December 3, we welcome back another dear friend and neighbor, American Steinway Artist, **SUSAN MERDINGER**, Performing her sold-out recital debut in Carnegie Recital Hall at age twenty-four, Merdinger has been internationally acclaimed for her virtuosic concert performances and recordings and made a triumphant Chicago Orchestral Debut in 2013 at Harris Theater with the Chicago Philharmonic. Over the past several years, she has been a Visiting Artist of the Chicago Symphony Chamber Music Series. Susan will perform Concerto No. 25 in C Major of Mozart (conducting from the piano) and the Strings will add the Christmas Concerto of Correlli and the Symphony No. 40 in G minor of Mozart.

Our Gala Benefit Concert in the acoustically perfect Bennett-Gordon Hall at Ravinia on February 4 brings back the exciting cellist **ALEXANDER HERSH** who earned an immediate return invitation after his smashing performance of the Herbert Cello Concerto last season. Hersh, who has quickly established himself as one of the most creative talents of his generation, will perform the iconic Cello Concerto of Dvorak which is believed to have been inspired by the Herbert Concerto. On this all Dvorak Concert, the Strings will add his triumphant Symphony No. 8 in G Major.

The final concert on May 5 will present the return engagement of **KIMBERLY HAN**, a 22-year-old pianist from Lake Forest. Having performed brilliantly with the Strings in 2016 at age 15, she has been awarded the "Young Steinway Artist" since 2019 and was chosen to be a 2016-2018 Lang Lang Scholar. Kimberly will perform the Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat and the Strings will present the magnificent Symphony No. 1 ("Titanic") of Gustav Mahler.



Lawrence Block
Founder and General Manager



"Congratulations and thank you to Larry Block and the incredibly talented members of the Highland Park Strings! May they continue to provide a cultural focal point for our city and beyond."

– Nancy Rotering
Mayor of Highland Park



Dr. Allan Dennis, Principal Conductor



Dr Dennis is the founder and President of the Midwest Young Artists Conservatory which has just celebrated its 30th Anniversary. He is also the Conductor of the MYA Concert and Symphony Orchestras.

He brings a rich heritage of experience and energy to the Midwest Young Artists Conservatory programs, with decades of experience motivating, rehearsing and teaching young people. He is also the Music Director of the Kankakee Valley Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Dennis was recognized as the 2001 Music Director of the Year by the Illinois Council of Orchestras, as well as awarded

the 2001 Heidi Caistleman Award by Chamber Music America, given in recognition for "excellence in chamber music teaching." He studied at the internationally renowned Tanglewood Institute in Lennox, MA, in 2000. In 1996, he was also chosen as both an Active Conductor at the Festival at Sandpoint, ID, and a Fellow at the Conductors' Institute in South Carolina. Dr. Dennis also has extensive experience conducting musical shows, operas and ballets, and is highly sought after as a guest conductor for festivals and all-state orchestras. His conducting teachers have included Gunther Schuller, Harold Farbermann, and David Efron. Dr. Dennis received his doctorate, with distinction, from Indiana University in Bloomington, and bachelor's and master's degrees from the State University of New York at Fredonia. He studied at the Eastman School of Music and received a Performer's Certificate from the Royal Flemish Conservatory of Music in Antwerp, Belgium. In 2017, he was awarded the Cultural Leadership Award by the Illinois Council of Orchestras, one of only seven Illinois arts leaders in the past 25 years to be recognized.



The Highland Park Strings, 1979-1980 Season

"The Highland Park Strings is loved as much as it was...when a group of musicians first played classical string music for the community."

– Hilary Anderson,
Highland Park Landmark

"Many many thanks to ...the Strings for all the years of truly wonderful concerts. The Strings are a real gem and true asset to the area. Every single concert has always been...of downtown caliber."

– Philip Bechen

OCTOBER 15

Bolcom and Brahms

3pm | Free Admission | Highland Park High School | 433 Vine Avenue

JEAN MILEW

A New America: Highland Park Strong-Response to July 4

WILLIAM BOLCOM

Concerto for Violin in D Major
Desiree Ruhstrat, Violin

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 2 in D Major

We are honored to have **DESIREE RUHSTRAT** return for her seventh appearance with the Strings. Since her debut at age 12 with Lucas Foss and the Milwaukee Symphony, Ms. Ruhstrat has appeared as soloist with orchestras throughout the world, including the Berlin Radio, Gottingen, Colorado, Oregon, and Utah Symphonies, Radio Suisse Romande. and by special invitation of Sir Georg Solti in Chicago's Orchestra Hall. Ms. Ruhstrat has won numerous awards including first prize at the National Young Musicians' Debut Competition in Los Angeles. She became the youngest prize winner at Switzerland's Tibor Varga International Competition and went on to earn top prizes at the Carl Flesch, Julius Stulberg, and Mozart Festival Violin Competitions. Her distinguished career as a chamber musician includes performances here and abroad as a member of the GRAMMY nominated Lincoln Trio and Black Oak Ensemble. A champion of new music Ms. Ruhstrat has worked with some of the world's leading composers including Cart Orff, George Crumb, William Bolcom. Jennifer Higdon, Shularnit Ran and Augusta Read



Thomas. A graduate of the Curllis Institute of Music, her teachers have included Aaron Rosand, Joseph Gingold, Harold Wippler and Dorothy Delay. Her recordings include the Stamitz Duo for Violin and Viola, the Ravel Duo for Violin and Cello, the 2013 GRAMMY nominated "Annelies," based on the Diary of Anne Frank, and multiple recordings with the Lincoln Trio and Black Oak Ensemble.



"...she played with such an intensive fire and sleepwalking assuredness that she was stormily celebrated by the audience".

– Berlin Taggespiel

DECEMBER 3

Mostly Mozart

3pm | Free Admission | Highland Park High School | 433 Vine Avenue

CORELLI

Concerto Grosso Op. 6. No. 8 ("Christmas Concerto")

WOLFGANG MOZART

Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550

WOLFGANG MOZART

Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major, K. 503

Susan Merdinger, Piano

American Steinway Artist, **SUSAN MERDINGER** has been internationally acclaimed for her revelatory and virtuosic concert performances and recordings. Performing her sold-out solo piano recital debut in Carnegie Recital Hall at age twenty-four as a Winner of the Artists International, Merdinger has continued to grace the stages of some of the world's best concert halls, including Chicago Symphony Center, Scottish National Orchestra Center, and Merkin Concert Hall and has been featured on radio and television around the World. Merdinger enjoys an active performing schedule as a concerto soloist, recitalist, chamber musician and duo pianist. She has collaborated with members of the Chicago Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra, New York Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Philharmonic, the BBC Philharmonic, and with renowned international soloists, composers and conductors. Amongst her many honors, Merdinger is also the winner of The Dewar's Young Artist Award in Music, two Gold Medals in the Global Music Awards, The American Prize in Piano Performance, and two First Prizes in the Bradshaw and Buono International Piano Competition. A protegee of Steinway piano legends Claude Frank and Constance Keene, Ms. Merdinger also studied conducting under Otto Werner Mueller and Robert Kapilow, and holds degrees from Yale University and the Yale School of Music. Susan is the Founder and Artist Director of Sheridan Music Studio of Fort Sheridan, and an Artistic Advisor for IN.LIVE, based in Silicon-Valley.



"Great insight...Breathtaking...Refreshing...Generously endowed gifts"

– Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

"Eloquent expression...Exquisite beauty"

– Fanfare Magazine

FEBRUARY 4 ANNUAL BENEFIT

Gala Ravinia Concert – Dvorak X 2

3pm | \$40 General Admission | Bennett-Gordon Hall, Ravinia
Call 847.831.3622 for tickets

ANTONIN DVORAK

Concerto for Cello in B Minor, Op. 104
Alexander Hersh, Cello

ANTONIN DVORAK

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op. 86

After his debut with the Strings last season in a magnificent performance of the Concerto for Cello No. 2 by VICTOR HERBERT, Alex was invited back to perform the iconic Dvorak Cello Concerto inspired by the Herbert. Having given his Carnegie Hall debut recital in 2022, Alex has quickly established himself as one of the most exciting and creative talents of his generation. He frequently appears as soloist with major orchestras, including the Houston Symphony and Boston POPS, and has received top prizes at competitions worldwide including the: 2022 Pro Musica International Award, Astral Artists National Auditions, Salon de Virtuosi Career grant, New York International Artists Association Competition, and the Schadt competition. A passionate chamber musician, Hersh has performed on tour with Musicians from Marlboro and appeared at music festivals worldwide including: Marlboro, Caramoor, Chamber Music Northwest, Ravinia, Music@Menlo, I-M-S Prussia Cove, Manchester, Pertman Music Program, Amsterdam Cello Biennale, Kneisel Hall, and Lucerne. He serves as co-Artistic Director of NEXUS Chamber Music, an artist driven collective of musicians whose mission is to make classical music culturally relevant through live concerts and multimedia content.



Raised in Chicago, Alexander Hersh began playing the cello at the age of 5. He received his B.M. and M.M. from New England Conservatory where he graduated with academic honors. Later he was a recipient of the Frank Huntington Beebe fund for studies in Berlin where he studied at the Hanns Eisler Hochschule for Musik Berlin. His previous teachers have included Laurence Lesser, Hans Jergen Jensen, Kirn Kashkashian, Nicolas Altstaedt, and Paul Katz. He plays a G.8. Rogeri cello, courtesy of Guarneri Hall NFP and Damton & Hersh Fine Violins.

Bonus for Major Contributors

Show how important Strings concerts are to you and the community by making a contribution of \$100 or more. The Strings is exempt from federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code Section 501 (c) (3). You will receive a minimum of two tickets, preferred seating, listing in the Program Book, and free tickets to a Donor Appreciation Chamber Music Concert at 3pm on Sunday, April 14, at the Highland Park Community House.

MAY 5

Mahler 1

3pm | Free Admission | Highland Park High School | 433 Vine Avenue

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto for Piano No. 2 in B flat. Op. 19

Kimberly Han, Piano

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 1 in D Major ("Titan")

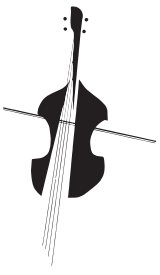
KIMBERLY HAN, a 22-year-old pianist and violinist, is from Lake Forest, Illinois. She graduated from Yale University majoring in Neuroscience, and is now a first year medical student at Harvard Medical School. She started piano at age five and a half, and has collaborated with Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Lake Forest Symphony, Highland Park Strings, MYA Symphony Orchestra, Napotnova Youth Orchestra, Kankakee Valley Symphony, Fox Valley Orchestra, etc. She was awarded "Young Steinway Artist" since 2019; 4-year (2016-2020) scholarship recipient by US Chopin Foundation; and 2016-2018 Lang Lang Young Scholar.

As a solo pianist and chamber musician, Kimberly has performed in L'Auditori of Barcelona in Spain, Oxford Music Festival in UK, Swiss Alps Classics in Switzerland, Emanacje Music Festival in Poland, Carnegie Hall (Stern Auditorium/Perleman Stage, and Weill Recital Hall), Orchestra Hall of Chicago Symphony Center, Preston Bradley Hall of Chicago Cultural Center, DePaul Concert Hall, Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, Bennett-Gordon Hall of Ravinia, Frost Chopin Festival, WFMT "Introductions", and NPR "From the Top".



"I'm no music critic, or scholar, and I can only bang out a few notes on the piano so I'm not an expert in the music arena, but I've attended a gazillion concerts of all varieties in my lifetime and I hope that makes it OK to say that yesterday's concert was one of the most outstanding and thrilling I have ever had the joy of seeing. The sound of the orchestra was magnificent and the selections could not have been more interesting both individually and as a grouping. All in all it was a particularly memorable afternoon and I congratulate you for having brought this group to such a pinnacle over so many years. May they continue to flourish under your outstanding leadership for a long time!"

– Lenore Blum



Highland Park Strings

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45th Season | 2023-2024 | Dr. Allan Dennis, Principal Conductor

October 15 – Bolcom and Brahms | Highland Park High School
December 3 – Mostly Mozart | Highland Park High School
February 4 (Benefit) – Dvorak X 2 | Bennett-Gordon Hall, Ravinia
May 5 – Mahler 1 | Highland Park High School

Call 847.831.3622 | Visit hpstrings.org