

Northbrook Symphony explores Spain, France

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By [DOROTHY ANDRIES](#) Contributing Columnist

When's the last time you heard about the Pyrenees -- you know, that mountain range separating Spain and France? Maestro Larry Rapchak, conductor and music director of the Northbrook Symphony Orchestra, has given it considerable thought and for his opening concert, "Across the Pyrenees," has selected music that demonstrates the influence the cultures of Spain and France have had on one another.

Spanish composers are Turina and Rodrigo, who both studied in Paris, and the French are Bizet, whose most famous opera "Carmen" is set in Spain, and Ravel, whose "Bolero" is patterned on a type of Spanish dance.

"I've actually programmed two rousing opening numbers," Rapchak explained. "Turina's "La Procession du Rocio" will open the concert and Bizet's patriotic number "La Patrie" will be played after intermission."

The highlight of the program will be Rodrigo's beloved "Concierto de Aranjuez," with guitarist Christopher Laughlin making his Northbrook Symphony debut. Laughlin has operated a music school in Northbrook for 13 years, but prior to that had an international career as a guitar soloist.

"There are a good handful of guitar concertos, but this is the best known," Laughlin said. "It's unusual for a guitar concerto to hold up so well and be so well loved."

Laughlin worked with Rapchak previously at Chicago Opera Theater in such productions as Berlioz's "Beatrice and Benedict" and Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro." "I'd been looking for a program where I could use Chris," Rapchak said. "It will be good to work with him again."

Laughlin, a graduate of the Peabody Conservatory with a masters from Yale University, is himself a blend of cross-border cultures. He studied Spanish guitar on fellowships in Paris for two years, then toured Europe, Africa, India and Pakistan, supported by U.S. State Department grants.

"I stopped touring when it was time to settle down and raise a family," he said. "So I started my music school 13 years ago and we now have 20 instructors."

The conductor believes the Turina piece will be an exceptional curtain-raiser for the Rodrigo. "It depicts a religious procession honoring Our Lady of the Roses held in June in Seville," he said. "It's full of great Spanish rhythms, but it also has quiet moments, with a wonderful hymn-like melody played by the cellos."

"Then all the bells of the churches in the town begin to chime, so we'll have two sets of bells. The trumpets finally play the Royal Anthem of Spain and the music fades away, as if the procession is just moving on."

The Bizet has a bitter-sweet aspect, he continued. "It's witty and exciting and was written in 1873 after the composer wrote the first act of 'Carmen,' so you'll hear suggestions of the march from that opera. But it was also just after France lost the Franco-Prussian War, so there is a dirge and the Marseilles can be heard."

Ravel's "Bolero" is often performed, but Rapchak said it presents its own challenges. "The strings play pizzicato throughout and it's a real test of endurance and accuracy. When the piece is done well, however, it can be hypnotic."

The symphony's season continues with "The Year 1809: Passing the Torch" on Dec. 20. "Mendelssohn was born in that year," Rapchak said, "so we've programmed his violin concerto; Haydn died that year, so we're playing his Symphony No. 99 and Rossini wrote "La Cambiale di Matrimonio" in 1809, so we're playing the overture from that opera."

On Feb. 21 the dancers of the Leopold Group will perform with the orchestra; on March 21 the "Vienna's Fab Four" program features music by Haydn, Mozart, Hummel and Beethoven; and the season concludes May 16 with the United States Navy Band Great Lakes playing Gabrielli's Three Works for Brass Instruments.

Northbrook Symphony Orchestra

4 p.m. Oct. 18 at Glenbrook North High School, 2300 Shermer Road, Northbrook. \$23-\$39; \$7 for children and students. (847) 272-0755 or www.northbrooksymphony.org Pre-concert lecture at 2:30 p.m.



Maestro Larry Rapchak



Christopher Laughlin

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