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# Partners in Music

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# Guest Artist



Emily Levin

Photo: Dario Acosta

**P**raised for her “technical wizardry and artistic intuition” (*Herald Times*), harpist **Emily Levin** has forged a multifaceted career as a soloist, artistic creator, educator, and advocate for new music.

Levin is the only American to receive top prizes at the most prestigious harp competitions: Bronze Medal at the 9th USA International Harp Competition, and at just 18 years old, Finalist and Renié Prizewinner at the 2009 International Harp Contest in Israel.

Levin joined the **Dallas Symphony Orchestra** as principal harp in 2016, where she holds the Elsa von Seggern Chair. She has also served as guest principal harp with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Houston Symphony. As a soloist and chamber musician, she has performed at leading venues throughout North America and Europe, including Carnegie Hall, National Sawdust, Bravo! Vail, the Kimmel Center, the Ojai Festival, and the Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

In 2021, Levin founded **GroundWork(s)**, an initiative commissioning 52 American

composers—one from each state, plus Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico—to write new works centered on the harp. In the 2025-2026 season, GroundWork(s) will premiere a trio by Kareem Roustom in Boston, MA, and will celebrate the album release of Angélica Negrón’s *Ave del paraíso*, which premiered in Puerto Rico in 2023.

2025-2026 also sees the continuation of Levin’s revolutionary solo project *Experiments in Play*. An immersive, interactive narrative recital, *Experiments in Play* invites the audience to solve puzzles, interact with the plot, and influence the path of the music itself. From fantasy quests to murder mysteries, *Experiments in Play* welcomes the audience as an equal participant in live performance.

Harp faculty at the Aspen Music Festival and School and Southern Methodist University, Levin received her Master of Music from The Juilliard School and undergraduate degrees in music and history from Indiana University. Her honors history thesis discussed the impact of war songs on the French Revolution.

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*Hills* OF

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## *Program*

Sixty-Third Season  
Second Subscription Concert

### **From Bernstein to Copland**

Thursday, November 6, 2025  
Waco Hall, 7:30 p.m.

**LAWRENCE LOH**, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town* ..... Leonard Bernstein  
(1918-1990)

- I. The Great Lover
- II. Lonely Town (Pas de Deux)
- III. Times Square, 1944

Harp Concerto, Op. 25 ..... Alberto Ginastera  
(1916-1983)

- I. Allegro giusto
  - II. Molto moderato
  - III. Liberamente capriccioso – Vivace
- Emily Levin**, harp

INTERMISSION

*Elegy XXII* ..... Polina Nazaykinskaya  
(b.1987)

*Appalachian Spring* (Full Orchestra Version) ..... Aaron Copland  
(1900-1990)

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## Program Notes By Peter J. Rabinowitz

The two works that bookend tonight's concert—The **Three Dance Episodes** that **Leonard Bernstein** (1918–1990) extracted from his musical *On the Town*; and the ballet ***Appalachian Spring*** (1943–44), composed by **Aaron Copland** (1900–1990)—are nearly twins. Both were first heard in 1944; both were written for important choreographers (Jerome Robbins and Martha Graham, respectively); both are best known in their composers' later adaptations for concert use.

There are even stronger connections between their composers. Both were outside the US mainstream—politically outspoken sons of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. And both wrote some difficult, thorny scores. Even so, both also produced a great deal of approachable music deeply rooted in the vernacular traditions of the United States—music of such appeal that, despite their outsider status, the two helped define the American classical-music idiom far more than such establishment predecessors as Edward MacDowell and John Knowles Paine. Moreover, they were close friends: Copland mentored the young Bernstein as a composer; Bernstein, on the podium, served as what conductor Larry Loh calls “a fierce advocate” for Copland's music.

And yet, while these two offerings are arguably twins, they are assuredly not identical. While, as Larry says, the composers “have a similar harmonic style,” Bernstein had a “strong lean towards American popular music” while Copland “found his material in a different place, leaning towards folk song.” Those differences emerge unmistakably on tonight's program.

*On the Town* centers on the zany adventures of three sailors who, in search of a good time while on leave in New York, end up finding something deeper. At the same time, the musical is Bernstein's declaration of love for New York. Although the central movement is reflective, the two outer movements are brash, brimming with the city's nervous energy. Even if you've never heard this irresistible score before, you'll

probably recognize the song “New York, New York” in the exuberant third movement.

If *On the Town* is profoundly urban, *Appalachian Spring* seems to celebrate rural America. It was originally inspired by Martha Graham's physical movements and envisioned as an abstract work, but it turned into an evocation of nostalgia for pioneer life. What's most indicative of the power of Copland's imagination is its folksy quality: it may sound like a mosaic of traditional tunes, but most of the music we hear was the product of Copland's skill at inventing music that *sounded like* folk music. *Appalachian Spring*, in fact, includes only one quoted melody—Joseph Brackett's nineteenth-century Shaker song “Simple Gifts.” The ballet was originally written for a chamber group; it's now most often heard, as it will be heard tonight, in a shortened version for a larger orchestra.

Argentinian composer **Alberto Ginastera** (1916–1983) fits into this context remarkably well. He was also mentored by Copland and championed by Bernstein; and like Copland and Bernstein, he was a politically outspoken composer whose music incorporates both knotty modernism and a vernacular (in his case, folk-inspired) nationalism. The way his Concerto for Harp and Orchestra (1956–64) straddles the line between the two may surprise you—and the way it punctures the conventional image of the harp may surprise you even more. As tonight's soloist Emily Levin says, “The harp has this reputation of being the sweet, angelic instrument. This concerto is the opposite of that. You really feel like a rock star. It has bold rhythms, and you're loud and aggressive most of the time. It's really fun to play, especially the third movement.” The third movement not only provides the most fun; it's also the most difficult to perform: “You have percussion going non-stop, you have very loud orchestration, the harp is at the top of the register most of the time, and you are fighting to be heard.” It has become, by far, the most popular twentieth-century harp concerto in the repertoire.

## Program Notes

The reasons for its popularity will be clear as you listen. First, it's a virtuoso work that demands the maximum from the performer—and the instrument. The cadenza that launches the last movement is especially striking: “It goes through all the special effects that the harp can do,” says Emily—while also “exploring the sonic world of the guitar.” Thus, it begins with an imitation of the open strings of a gaucho's guitar—one of the reminiscences of Argentinian folklore in the piece—and then, after “all these incredible textures and colors,” it closes with a “crazed buildup of glissandos, where I'm doing regular glisses, and then glisses with my nails. It's stunning, it sounds like icicles falling. And then you're suddenly in this third movement.”

But it's more than technical brilliance, and Emily suggests that you not let the music's surface—the unusual sounds and harmonies—distract you from “the journey on which Ginastera takes you as a listener.” The first two movements are “incredibly beautiful and haunting.” She points in particular to the atmospheric color of the second, with its “icy shades of purple. I see it as a very cold, almost Antarctic sunrise when it's freezing cold outside but there is kind of a lightness rising up out of it that I think is great.” Then, that great cadenza “pushes you off into this whirlwind, fiery third movement.” It's a journey that will leave you exhilarated.

***Elegy XXII*** (2025) by **Polina Nazaykinskaya** (born 1987) is by far the darkest and most somber work on the concert. The title refers to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. And the composer—who emigrated, like the parents of Copland and Bernstein, from Eastern Europe (specifically, in her case, Russia)—wrote it as an “anti-war statement with the hope that one day, people will re-evaluate what is happening.” About ten minutes long, it has, like all of Polina's pieces, an immediacy that grips you on first hearing. But its shape comes into focus and gains power if you recognize three musical references woven into the piece, references that amplify what Larry most admires about Polina's music: “the human layer beneath the notes.”

Most important of these is the Russian song “May There Always be Sunshine” (a song so popular that it is, in Polina's words, “a part of Russian mentality”), which first appears about halfway through the work. It's a peace song, and was an important part of the anti-nuclear movement in the 1960s (it was also sung in the United States by singers such as Pete Seeger). But just as, in his First Cello Concerto, Shostakovich ironically quoted Stalin's favorite song “Suliko,” so Polina twists “May There Always be Sunshine” to change its meaning. “The song that I'm quoting is actually a good piece, theoretically asking for all people to unite and to live in peace. But because what they're doing and saying right now in my country is so hypocritical, I decided to turn this



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For more information about joining Concerto Circle, call **254.754.0851**.

# Program Notes

piece upside down to portray that insincerity. So instead of being a gentle melody, it disrupts the orchestral fabric, like a wrecking ball.”

At the premiere performance, when the first trumpet asked if he should play it like the Red Army, she replied, enthusiastically, “Yes!”

There are two other musical references you should note. “May There Always be Sunshine” dissolves into a “tango of death” (“Tango music, for me, is very dark,” she says). And, moving in the opposite direction, after a climax, we

can hear, faintly, the “Ave Maria” that Gounod constructed out of the first prelude in Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

The trajectory is clear: “From this Soviet song through ‘Ave Maria’ into hopefulness. It’s not cheerful, you know, but it leads to a kind of very humble hope, a fragile hope.” It may well leave you stunned.

**Peter J. Rabinowitz**

Have any comments or questions? Please write to me at [notes@wacosymphony.com](mailto:notes@wacosymphony.com)

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**If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, scan the QR code or contact WSA Executive Director Carolyn Bess at 254-754-1035.**

See page 27 for a list of WSO Musicians and Fellows.



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Lee Ann and Scott James  
Shelley and Ryan Johnson  
Dr. and Mrs. Jered Johnston  
Brenda Jones  
Abby and Kurt Kurtz  
Laura and Kary Lalani  
Stefanie and James Martin  
Christy and Rob Martinez  
Joanna and Stephen Mayberry  
Gretchen and Sandy McCormack  
Jessica and Brett McCrory  
Lindsey and Greg McEachern  
Chris and Andy McSwain  
Julie and Charlie Melton  
Megan and Mason Miller  
Lisa Mitchell

Brooke and Tanner Moore  
Linda Morris  
Sarah and Mark Nelson  
Duke and Steve Nelson  
Amanda and Joe Nesbitt  
Ann Nixon  
Laura and Matt Pattillo  
Leslie and John Pegram  
Shelley and Matt Reeves  
Lauren and Josh Satterfield  
Esme and John Sawyer  
Sarah and Nolan Schaffer  
Jennifer and Michel Schornack  
Suzanne and Jonathan Sibley  
Deanna and Sam Starling  
Libby and Martin Starr  
Elizabeth and Gary Stripling  
Laura and Tod Swann  
Dr. Dianna Vitanza  
Deborah and John Warner  
Pam and Brent Watts  
Allison Weeks  
Heather and Brian White  
Mandy and Tom Williams  
Meredith Williams and Chris  
Gatlin  
James Wilson  
Kendra and Brad Wilson  
Christi and Jeff Young

## Concerto Circle

Annie and Alec Burriss  
Katie and Rhett Dawson  
Rebecca and Chris Eubank  
Penny and Jon Gimble

Andrea and Hunter Kosar  
Genesis and Ryan Luna  
Andrew Marshall  
Amanda and Jason Milam

Grayson Palmer  
Ryan and Andy Pattillo  
Ashleigh and John Prothro  
Andrea Racoti