

MISSA SOLEMNIS

*Symphony of
OPRF to play
rarely-performed
Liszt work in
April*

Symphony of
Oak Park-
River Forest
conductor Jay
Friedman

By Mike Ellis || Photography provided by the Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest

The Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest (OPRF) will perform a rarely-heard choral work by prominent Hungarian composer Franz Liszt at Concordia University Chapel in River Forest this April.

Reputed among the greatest virtuoso pianists in history, Liszt was also one of the elite composers of the Romantic period, best known for his immensely challenging solo piano pieces and transcriptions of famous works by other composers. His Piano Sonata in B minor is widely regarded as one of the greatest pieces ever written for solo piano, and his Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C-Sharp minor contains a melody familiar to nearly all listeners. But Liszt also constructed a number of orchestral and choral works, including the early tone poem “Les Preludes” and *Christus*, a massive choral composition spanning the life of Jesus Christ.

While all of the aforementioned works are well-known to classical aficionados, very few are familiar with Liszt’s *Missa Solemnis* for choir and orchestra, which the Symphony

of OPRF will perform on April 7. According to Cheryl Flinn, a second violinist with the Symphony of OPRF, there is only one documented performance of the piece in the United States, which occurred in the 1880s.

“As a pianist, I was quite familiar with his piano music, but less familiar with his orchestral and vocal works,” said symphony board president David Leehey, who recommended the *Missa Solemnis*. “I had actually never heard this piece, or even knew that it existed. When I listened to it, my thought was, ‘Oh, my God, why doesn’t anybody perform this piece?’”

Leehey researched the work, and discovered that it was written for the consecration of a Hungarian basilica.

“Liszt wrote that he composed the work very quickly, and that it was ‘more prayed than composed,’” he said.

The April 7 concert will be conducted by Jay Friedman, and will open with a rendition of *Totentanz*, a Liszt piece for piano and orchestra, with Mio Nakamura serving as soloist. The *Missa Solemnis* will follow, as the symphony

chorus under choral conductor William Chin will join the orchestra, featuring organist Patrick Godon and vocal soloists Susan Krout, Sarah Ponder, Ace Gangosa and Daniel Eifert.

“One thing I have loved about singing in the chorus over the years is the repertoire we have done, and the Liszt *Missa Solemnis* is just one more amazing piece to add to those experiences,” chorus member Sue Sentowski said. “I’m so excited to be performing this piece with some amazing singers at the April concert.” ♦

The Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest will perform Franz Liszt’s Missa Solemnis in concert at the Concordia University Chapel in River Forest at 4 p.m. on April 7. Tickets are \$30 in advance, and \$35 on the day of the concert. Students through college are admitted free of charge. Free parking is available in the garage at Bonnie Brae Place and Thomas Street. For more information about the Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest, visit www.symphonyoprpf.org.