

DeLeone returns to IPO for George Gershwin celebration



Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra's "Spring Pops: Gershwin Celebration" on March 5 at Lincoln-Way North Performing Arts Center in Frankfort and March 6 at Rialto Square Theatre in Joliet includes soloist Alfreda Burke, of Oak Lawn. (Photo courtesy of Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra)

Jessi VirtusioDaily Southtown

When it comes to American composers, George Gershwin is one of the most well-known.

Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra presents "Spring Pops: Gershwin Celebration" on Saturday at Lincoln-Way North Performing Arts Center in Frankfort and March 6 at Rialto Square Theatre in Joliet.

"As far as America is concerned, there's no better (composer). He didn't try to be anything other than himself musically. He was a great pop songwriter," IPO conductor laureate Carmon DeLeone said.

"So many times composers feel they have to put on a special serious hat. I don't consider Gershwin not serious, but he used the material he knew best. It's very authentic and very American because he grew up in the heyday of America's Great Songbook and composed so many of the tunes that are part of it."

Maestro DeLeone's program includes the "Porgy and Bess" concert suite featuring soprano Alfreda Burke, of Oak Lawn; baritone Michael Preacely; and members of the South Holland Master Chorale directed by Albert M. Jackson.

Recommended to DeLeone by IPO executive director Eska Koester, Burke has performed in North America and Europe including Carnegie Hall in New York. DeLeone first heard Preacely, who recently completed a European tour of "Porgy and Bess," during a Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra rehearsal.

"He will just light up the stage. He is amazing so I'm really looking forward to having him there," said DeLeone. "We are really going to celebrate the music of Gershwin with some great talent."

The all-Gershwin concert also includes pianist Michael Chertock, who performed and conducted a Gershwin program with the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, as the soloist for "Rhapsody in Blue."

"He is known throughout the world actually as a piano soloist. He travels a great deal with the Boston Pops Orchestra playing 'Rhapsody in Blue' and playing the music of Gershwin," DeLeone said about his Cincinnati Ballet colleague.

Chertock is the ballet's assistant conductor while DeLeone has been music director of the ballet for 47 years. During DeLeone's 25 years as IPO's music director, he conducted "Rhapsody in Blue" four times including in 2001 with Chertock performing.

"It feels wonderful. I'm really looking forward to this," said DeLeone of his first time back with the IPO since conducting the final concert of the season in May 2012.

The pops program also includes a Gershwin medley and "Cuban Overture."

"Unfortunately, Gershwin passed away in his 30s, and there was nothing after that," said DeLeone. "That's the real shame. Had he lived a normal long life, just think of it. We would have twice as much fantastic material."

Jessi Virtusio is a freelance reporter for the Daily Southtown.

Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra

When/Where: 8 p.m. Saturday at Lincoln-Way North Performing Arts Center, 19900 S. Harlem Ave., Frankfort; 3 p.m. Sunday at Rialto Square Theatre, 102 N. Chicago St., Joliet

Tickets: starting at \$25; student and group discounts available

Information: 708-481-7774 or www.ipomusic.org; 815-726-6600 or www.rialtosquare.com

Etc.: "Spring Pops: Gershwin Celebration" features IPO conductor laureate Carmon DeLeone; soloists Alfreda Burke, Michael Preacely and Michael Chertock; and members of the South Holland Master Chorale