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2025/26

CONCERT SEASON

WITH ALASTAIR

From the Board President

Dear Friends of The Symphonia,

Each new season brings a sense of renewal and the joy of live music. As The Symphonia enters its 21st season, we are grateful for the community that shares this journey with us. Your enthusiasm, loyalty, and support make our work possible.

We are proud to announce Alastair Willis as The Symphonia's first Music Director, overseeing all aspects of concert programming and continuing as creator of his theatrical and immersive New Directions series. Having worked with The Symphonia since its earliest seasons, Alastair has helped shape the ensemble's artistic vision and expanded its creative reach.



Our 2025-26 season features masterworks by Mozart, Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto (March 8, 2026), and Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (March 8, 2026), alongside a chamber version of Dvořák's New World Symphony (January 24 & 25, 2026) and Poulenc's Organ Concerto (November 23, 2025). This January, we are especially proud to present the world premiere of *Ebenus*, a concerto for clarinet co-composed by Kinan Azmeh and Christophe Chagnard and commissioned by Virginia & Harvey Kimmel. Developing a tradition, Holiday Pops returns to Mizner Amphitheater (presented by the City of Boca Raton) and a theatrical New Directions concert, *Vienna's Riches*, completes the season.

Beyond the stage, The Symphonia inspires through education and outreach. Strings & Self-Esteem empowers children through music, while our complimentary ticket program welcomes audiences from Lighthouse for the Blind, Boca Helping Hands, the Levis JCC, and Canines Providing Assistance to Wounded Warriors. Our partnership with the Youth Orchestra of Palm Beach County provides young musicians the opportunity to perform alongside Symphonia professionals.

Through collaborations with the City of Boca Raton, The Boca Raton, and the Boca Raton Museum of Art, we continue to connect art, education, and live performance in meaningful ways.

Thank you for joining us for another remarkable season. Your support ensures that The Symphonia's artistry will continue to inspire and uplift our community for years to come.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sheldon Kwait".

Sheldon Kwait
President, Board of Directors
The Symphonia



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2025-2026 CONCERT SEASON

MOZART & TIM

November 23, 2025, 3:00 p.m.
St. Gregory's Episcopal



HOLIDAY POPS WITH THE SYMPHONIA

Presented by the City of Boca Raton
December 6, 2025, 7:00 p.m.
Mizner Park Amphitheater



DVORAK'S NEW WORLD PREMIERE

January 24, 2026, 7:00 p.m.
January 25, 2026, 3:00 p.m.
The Studio at Mizner Park



BEETHOVEN'S EMPEROR

March 8, 2026, 3:00 p.m.
St. Gregory's Episcopal



VIENNA'S RICHES A NEW DIRECTIONS CONCERT

April 11, 2026, 7:00 p.m.
April 12, 2026, 3:00 p.m.
The Studio at Mizner Park



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DVORÁK'S NEW WORLD PREMIERE

The Studio at Mizner Park

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 2026 | 7:00 PM

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2026 | 3:00 PM

ALASTAIR WILLIS, Music Director

KINAN AZMEH, Clarinet Soloist

The Music Director's Chair is sponsored by The Kimmel Family.

Ebenus

Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra Kinan Azmeh & Christophe Chagnard
Kinan Azmeh, Clarinet Soloist

-INTERMISSION-

Symphony No.9 in E minor Op.95 "From the New World" Antonín Dvořák
chamber orchestra version by Jason Stephens

- I. Adagio – Allegro molto
- II. Largo
- III. Scherzo: Molto vivace
- IV. Allegro con fuoco

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THE SYMPHONIA MUSICIANS

Violin I

Leonid Sigal
Claudia Cagnassone
Ericmar Perez
Victoria Stepanenko
Bernie Vaughn
Orlando Forte
Tinca Belinschi
Nathan Clifford

Violin II

Erika Venable
Sha Zhang
Eddie Martinez
Kevin Seto
Patrisa Tomassini
Tony Huang

Cello

Ashley Garritson
Barbara Corcillo
Angela Maleh
Tadao Hermida

Bass

Hideki Sunaga
Janet Clippard

Flute

Elissa Lakofsky
Alexandra Meyer

Oboe

Erika Yamada
Jeffrey Apana

Clarinet

Richard Hancock
Noah Suarez

Bassoon

Gabriel Beavers
Benjamin Eisenberg

French Horn

Eva Conti
Stan Spinola

Trumpet

Kevin Lyons
Michael Hankins

Trombone

Tim Conner

Timpani

Mark Schubert

Percussion

Doug Friend
Neel Shukla

Harp

Laura Sherman

EBENUS

CONCERTO FOR CLARINET AND ORCHESTRA

- **KINAN AZMEH & CHRISTOPHE CHAGNARD**

AZMEH BORN JUNE 10, 1976, IN DAMASCUS, SYRIA

CHAGNARD BORN ABOUT 1963 IN PARIS, FRANCE

World premiere January 24, 2026

Kinan Azmeh

Hailed by critics and audiences alike, winner of Opus Klassik award in 2019 clarinetist and composer Kinan Azmeh has gained international recognition for his distinctive voice across diverse musical genres.

Originally from Damascus, Syria, Kinan Azmeh brings his music to all corners of the world as a soloist, composer, and improviser. Notable appearances include the Opera Bastille, Paris; Tchaikovsky Grand Hall, Moscow; Carnegie Hall and the UN General Assembly, New York; the Royal Albert Hall, London; Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires; Philharmonie, Berlin; the Library of Congress, the Kennedy Center, Washington DC; the Mozarteum, Salzburg, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie; and in his native Syria at the opening concert of the Damascus Opera House.

He has appeared as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Dusseldorf Symphony, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, The Azerbaijan State Symphony, Winnipeg Symphony, Symphony Nova Scotia, Toronto Symphony, A Far Cry, The Knights Orchestra, Calgary Philharmonic, Qatar Philharmonic and the Syrian Symphony Orchestra among others, and has shared the stage with such musical luminaries as Yo-Yo Ma, Daniel Barenboim, Marcel Khalife, John McLaughlin, Francois Rabbath, Aynur and Jivan Gasparian.

Kinan's compositions include several works for solo, chamber, and orchestral music, as well as music for film, live illustration, and electronics. His recent works were commissioned by The New York Philharmonic, The Seattle Symphony, The Knights Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Elbphilharmonie, Apple Hill string quartet, Quatuor Voce, Brooklyn Rider, Cello Octet Amsterdam, Aizuri Quartet, and Bob Wilson.

In addition to his own Arab-Jazz Quartet CityBand and his Hewar trio, he has also been playing with the Silkroad Ensemble since 2012, whose 2017 Grammy Award-winning album "Sing Me Home" features Kinan as a clarinetist and composer.

Kinan Azmeh is a graduate of New York's Juilliard School as a student of Charles Neidich, and of both the Damascus High Institute of Music where he studied with Shukry Sahwki, Nicolay Viovanof and Anatoly Moratof, and Damascus University's School of Electrical Engineering. Kinan earned his doctorate degree in music from the City University of New York in 2013.

His first opera "Songs for Days to Come" which is fully sung in Arabic, was recently premiered in Osnabruck, Germany in June 2022 to a great acclaim. He has recently been appointed to the National Council for the Arts on a nomination by President Joe Biden.

Christophe Chagnard

Engagement through creativity has been at the core of Christophe Chagnard's philosophy throughout his distinguished career. As a composer, his music addressed pressing global issues such as systemic racism, climate change, intolerance, and social injustice. His latest works "Gaman" (2017) and "Terra Nostra" (2019) address systemic racism and climate change respectively.

As a Grammy-nominated conductor, Christophe Chagnard has led a vast repertoire of symphonic, operatic, and ballet works of all styles and periods. He has also spent three decades making the concert hall accessible to all, addressing the elitist stereotype that plagues this art form.

As a guitarist, he explores a wide array of styles and traditions together in genre-defying creations intended to present an open and inclusive voice that transcends labels.

Stepping beyond the bounds of music, Chagnard was appointed Artistic Director at Earthbound Expeditions in 2018, curating cultural trips worldwide. In 2020, he took his vision and expertise globally and founded his own boutique company Renewal Journeys designed for intimate groups of travelers seeking the ultimate in custom cultural exploration.

Deepening his commitment to environmental sustainability, he also founded Earth Creative, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the creations of artists who use nature as their medium in order to raise awareness about our increasingly threatened environment and the causes and effects of climate change.

From 2015 to 2018, Chagnard served as Director of Outreach at Classical KING FM 98.1 where he designed and implemented educational projects and oversaw hundreds of public relation events each year. He also curated music programs for the Travel Club and lectured during trips abroad.

Chagnard co-founded the Northwest Sinfonietta in 1991 and lead it to prominence until 2015. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer described the Northwest Sinfonietta as “the finest chamber orchestra in the Northwest.” Chagnard performs regularly with some of the biggest names in music, including Lynn Harrell, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Cecile Licad, Richard Stoltzman, Awadagin Pratt and Lara St. John. Chagnard also served as Music Director of the Lake Union Civic Orchestra for 20 years and forged it as one of the finest community orchestras in the Northwest.

Chagnard is also a prolific composer whose works have been heard widely across North America and in Europe. His most recent compositions include *Gaman* (2017), commissioned by Music of Remembrance to commemorate the anniversary of the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WW II and *Terra Nostra* (2015, revised 2019), a multi-media symphonic creation about climate change. In 2010, his ground-breaking composition *Opre Roma!* for three gypsy jazz guitars and orchestra was critically acclaimed and performed repeatedly in the U.S. and Cuba. *Embargo, Suite Cubana* was premiered in April 2013 as a vibrant tribute to Cuban music and culture.

Chagnard received his musical training in composition and conducting from Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory where he studied with Frank Battisti, Benjamin Zander and Pascal Verrot and graduated with Academic Honors. From 1992 to 1994, Chagnard served on the faculty of the Berklee College of Music and in 1993; he became the first Music Director of the New England String Ensemble in Boston. He also served as Director of Orchestras at the University of Puget Sound from 2001 to 2012.

About the clarinet concerto, *Ebenus*, Chagnard wrote:

“Ebenus (ebony in Latin) is a concerto for clarinet and orchestra that is the fruit of a collaboration between Kinan Azmeh, a composer/clarinetist from Syria, and Christophe Chagnard, a composer, conductor, and guitarist from France. This in itself provides a very broad approach with multiple ethnic influences and distinctive styles. The idea of a partnership towards the creation of a concerto is not new as many composers such as Mozart, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky, collaborated closely with the soloists who premiered their creations. Ebenus however is distinctive in the fact that the contributions from the two composers is equal. The soloist's contribution, in this case, is not merely technical and pertaining to the solo part only, it is a full-fledged composing of various sections.

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Cont.

While planning the composition of this concerto, it was decided that each composer would alternate back and forth while providing input as it evolved. What makes this approach particularly interesting is that it manages to bring forth the two distinctive styles while creating a synthesis towards a single coherent composition. Most of the solo part is of course a reflection of Azmeh's distinct technique and aesthetic while most of the orchestration is very much the expression of Chagnard's craft. One point of intersection which has been particularly interesting to explore is harmony as there are infinite ways to add chords to a melody and those choices completely affect the resonance and emotional impact of the piece. Structurally, the concerto is in multiple sections which are very distinctive and feature memorable leitmotifs throughout.

"The title Ebenus refers to the wood that the clarinet is made of and which is currently endangered as climate change is dramatically affecting the growth of those precious trees. There is a worldwide shortage of ebony which is symptomatic of the many environmental challenges that our habitat is facing. Ebenus' message is one of hope towards a sustainable future for the next generations. This partnership has been immensely fulfilling as it invited both composers to venture into unknown musical territory, opening their creative minds in enriching and unexpected ways. Special thanks to maestro Alastair Willis and The Symphonia for premiering this creation, and to the Kimmel family for commissioning it."

Azmeh added:

"Composition is a very solitary profession in which the composer celebrates his/her total freedom and imagination in the face of a blank page before them. This act is both incredibly humbling and deeply empowering. This work however, one that is the result of the rare collaboration between two living composers celebrates an additional yet equally powerful human virtue and that is trust. The parallel and accumulative work of both composers is built on trust and the mutual belief that the sum is much larger than the parts."

Biographies and program notes courtesy of the composers

SYMPHONY NO.9 IN E MINOR OP.95 "FROM THE NEW WORLD"

- ANTONIN DVORÁK

BORN SEPTEMBER 8, 1841, IN MÜHLHAUSEN, BOHEMIA

DIED MAY 1, 1904, IN PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

This work was premiered on December 16, 1893, by the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall. Anton Seidl conducted. This chamber orchestra version was created by Jason Stephens.

Antonin Dvořák had a strong affinity for the music of common people. He collected and studied folk music, but paradoxically, seldom incorporated authentic indigenous music into his works. Drawn to the simple beauty of African American spirituals and Native-American songs, Dvořák boldly suggested that American composers needed to cultivate a national identity in their music.

Dvořák's suggestion came on the heels of his 1892 appointment as director of the American Conservatory of Music in New York. He would spend the next summer in the small Czech community of Spillville, Iowa, where he would complete his "American" string quartet and quintet. After only a few months in this country and before his summer trip, he began an experiment – a symphony blending stylized folk elements of his native Czech land with those of his temporary American home.

In the December 15, 1893, edition of the New York Herald – the day before the premiere of the symphony – Dvořák published an essay on national identity in music. He stated that American composers should be aware of all indigenous music. The composer had heard many spirituals from his student Harry T. Burleigh and found them to be beautifully expressive. Native-American melodies were familiar to him from transcriptions and a visit to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in New York. In the essay, Dvořák wrote of the similarity of the melodies of both cultures and suggested that there must be some way to incorporate such truly American music in new compositions. [In the following decade, a small musical ripple arose from the "Indianist" composers, led by Arthur Farwell, who adopted Dvořák's technique of creating stylized exotic melodies as well as transcribing many authentic Native American songs.]

Dvořák's own Symphony No. 9, "From the New World," incorporates some of these elements but retains a Czech identity throughout. It seems somewhat like a postcard to his fellow Czech citizens from an extended vacation in America – there is an American flavor at times but the result is purely Czech. As for quotations of American music in the symphony, there are none.

The first movement opens with a tender descending melody supported by meditative chords, almost like a benediction before a long journey. Agitated and strong, the main section of this movement begins with an assertive horn figure that becomes the germ of the movement. Many have pointed to the second theme of the first movement as resembling "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," but it stops there as merely a resemblance.

For the second movement, Dvořák once again begins with a slow, almost prayerful, introduction. The main theme of the Largo movement, often called "Going Home," is reminiscent of a spiritual but is not an original African American melody. In short, Dvořák's melodic materials offer mere indications of Americanness but are the inspired work of a master composer in taking new melodic contours and assimilating them to his needs. The middle section of this movement is a quietly turbulent song with a decidedly Czech flavor.

The scherzo, *molto vivace*, is a dazzling orchestral tour-de-force. The undulating and bustling texture infuses this music with a sense of propulsion that is very direct in its approach. A central section includes a lighter Czech dance.

Dvořák's finale opens with a forceful and virile horn theme. A second theme, driven by triplets, gives way to a languid clarinet solo. The development section introduces new material and builds dramatic tension. In the final measures, Dvořák returns to a brassy restatement of the finale's opening music, which brings the symphony to a triumphant conclusion.

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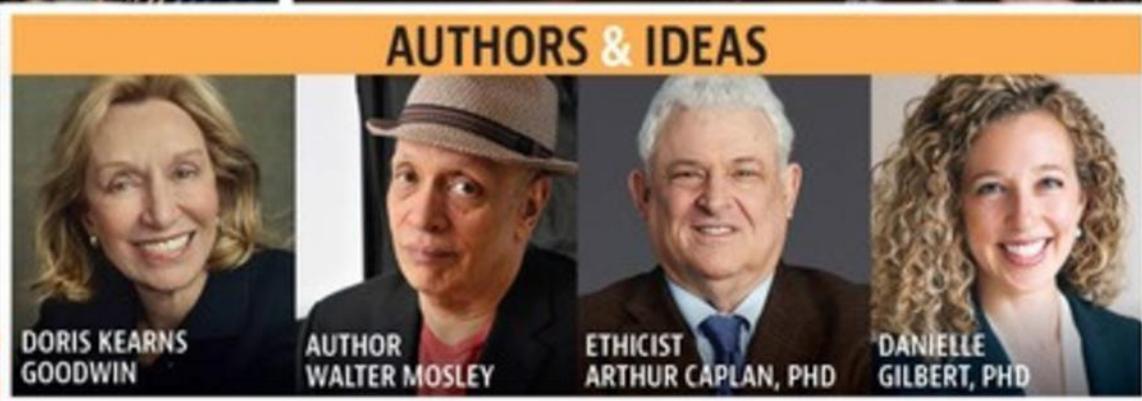
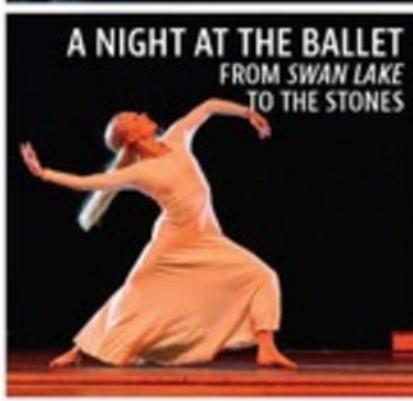
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beautiful music.**

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A young woman with dark hair tied back is playing a violin on stage. She is wearing a sleeveless, multi-colored sequined dress. Her eyes are closed, and she is looking upwards and to the right. She is holding the violin with her left hand and the bow with her right hand. In the background, there are other musicians, including a cellist on the left and another violinist on the right. The stage has a blue and orange background.

Hina Khuong-Huu EOIVC 2023



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MUSIC DIRECTOR, ALASTAIR WILLIS

Grammy-nominated conductor Alastair Willis is in his ninth season as Music Director of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, and is now The Symphonia's first Music Director, having served as its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor for five years. In past seasons, Willis has guest conducted orchestras around the world including the Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Mexico City Philharmonic, Orquestra Sinfonica de Rio de Janeiro, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchestra Berlin, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, China National Orchestra (Beijing), Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra and Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma) among others.



His recording of Ravel's "L'Enfant et les Sortileges" with Nashville Symphony and Opera for Naxos was Grammy nominated for Best Classical Album in 2009.

Last season, Willis was re-engaged by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Qatar Philharmonic, River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, Salute to Vienna, and Seattle's Music of Remembrance. This season he returns to the Qatar Philharmonic, Music of Remembrance, and Gyor Philharmonic in Hungary.

Previous positions include Music Director of the Illinois Symphony, Principal Guest Conductor with the Florida Orchestra's Coffee Concert series, Associate Conductor of the Seattle Symphony, Assistant Conductor with the Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestras, and Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony Youth Orchestra.

Born in Acton, Massachusetts, Willis lived with his family in Moscow for five years before settling in Surrey, England. He received his bachelor's degree with honors from England's Bristol University, an Education degree from Kingston University, and a Masters of Music degree from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. Willis currently resides in South Bend, Indiana, with his wife and daughter.



CO-COMPOSER AND CLARINET SOLOIST, KINAN AZMEH

Hailed by critics and audiences alike, Opus Klassik Award-winning clarinetist and composer Kinan Azmeh has gained international recognition for his distinctive musical voice across diverse genres.

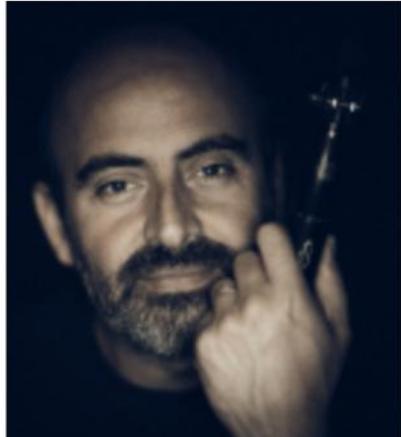
Originally from Damascus, Syria, Azmeh performs worldwide as a soloist, composer, and improviser. His appearances include major venues such as the Opéra Bastille in Paris, Tchaikovsky Grand Hall in Moscow, Carnegie Hall and the UN General Assembly in New York, the Royal Albert Hall in London, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Library of Congress and Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, and the opening concert of the Damascus Opera House.

As a soloist, he has appeared with leading ensembles including the New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Düsseldorf Symphony, West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Qatar Philharmonic, and the Syrian Symphony Orchestra. He has collaborated with artists such as Yo-Yo Ma, Daniel Barenboim, Marcel Khalife, John McLaughlin, François Rabbath, Aynur, and Jivan Gasparian.

Azmeh's compositions span solo, chamber, and orchestral music, as well as works for film, live illustration, and electronics. Recent commissions include projects from the New York Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, The Knights, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Elbphilharmonie, Brooklyn Rider, Aizuri Quartet, and Bob Wilson.

A member of the Silkroad Ensemble since 2012, Azmeh appears as a clarinetist and composer on the Grammy Award-winning album *Sing Me Home*. He also leads his Arab-Jazz Quartet CityBand and the Hewar Trio.

Azmeh studied at the Juilliard School and earned a doctorate in music from the City University of New York. His first opera, *Songs for Days to Come*, premiered in Germany in 2022. He was recently appointed to the National Council for the Arts by President Joe Biden.



CO-COMPOSER, CHRISTOPHE CHAGNARD

Engagement through creativity has been at the core of Christophe Chagnard's philosophy throughout his distinguished career. As a composer, conductor, guitarist, and arts advocate, his work consistently addresses pressing global issues including systemic racism, climate change, intolerance, and social injustice. Notable compositions such as *Gaman* (2017) and *Terra Nostra* (2015, rev. 2019) confront these themes directly, using music as a catalyst for reflection and dialogue.



A Grammy-nominated conductor, Chagnard has led a vast repertoire of symphonic, operatic, and ballet works spanning all styles and periods. For more than three decades, he has championed accessibility in classical music, working to dismantle the elitist stereotypes often associated with the concert hall.

As a guitarist, Chagnard explores diverse musical traditions, blending styles in genre-defying works that emphasize openness, inclusivity, and artistic freedom. His creative vision extends beyond performance: in 2018, he was appointed Artistic Director of Earthbound Expeditions, curating cultural journeys worldwide. In 2020, he founded Renewal Journeys, a boutique company offering deeply customized cultural travel experiences. He also established Earth Creative, a nonprofit organization promoting artists who use nature as their medium to raise awareness about environmental sustainability and climate change.

From 2015 to 2018, Chagnard served as Director of Outreach at Classical KING FM 98.1, where he developed educational initiatives and curated music programs for international travel. He co-founded the Northwest Sinfonietta in 1991, leading it to national prominence until 2015; the Seattle Post-Intelligencer hailed it as "the finest chamber orchestra in the Northwest." He also served for two decades as Music Director of the Lake Union Civic Orchestra.

Chagnard received his training at Berklee College of Music and the New England Conservatory, graduating with academic honors, and has held faculty and leadership positions at Berklee and the University of Puget Sound.



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