



Special photo

The LSO at its concert in January of this year.

## A symphony rises



Special photo

The LSO Choir adds their voices to the symphonic sounds.

## LSO strikes a chord with community

By Jk Murphy

From the wings of the Lawrenceville Arts Center Grand Stage, conductor Pyeongkang Park waited as 46 professional musicians tuned and settled into place. The stage set, Park strode to the podium to applause from an audience of 400. He raised his baton and launched the orchestra into the world premiere of “The City of Lawrenceville,” an original composition.

With those first strains of music, the Lawrenceville Symphony Orchestra was born.

The date was Oct. 27, 2024, and the LSO has been regaling Gwinnett County audiences with symphonic sounds since. That premier, though, will always hold a special place in the heart of conductor Park.

“While every performance I have been part of is precious, if I were asked which one holds a special place in my heart, that day would undoubtedly be one of the most unforgettable performances,” Park, who goes by P.K., said.

That concert featured Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5.

“(It) famously begins with the ‘da-da-da-dum’ motif, of which Beethoven remarked, ‘Thus fate knocks at the door.’ In that same spirit, the LSO knocked on the doors of the City of Lawrenceville and its community members like

a stroke of destiny,” Park, who speaks with a strong Korean accent, said during an hour-long interview with the Daily Post.

He said the world premiere of “The City of Lawrenceville,” composed by Kenneth Park, was another particularly significant highlight.

“We were also honored to have the Lawrenceville Symphony Orchestra Choir and Killian Hill Christian School Choir join us for this historic moment.”

The debut concert of the LSO two years ago still resonates for the conductor.

“Standing on that stage, my first feeling was one of deep gratitude to God. Beyond that, I felt an immense wave of thankfulness for the musicians, the choir members, the audience, and the venue staff who all made that moment possible. It was a stage overflowing with joy and a profound sense of fulfillment.”

### NEXT ON THE PROGRAM

Since that beginning, the orchestra has been performing three or four concerts each year. Its next performance will be part of the local celebration of America’s 250th anniversary at the Lawrenceville Lawn at 8 p.m. Aug. 1.

The playlist has not been finalized, but Park says the music will be American traditional and patriotic,

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### NEXT CONCERT

♦ **Aug. 1 at 8 p.m. at Lawrenceville Lawn** — The LSO will perform as part of a community America 250th celebration.

♦ **Expected on the playlist:** Music will be American traditional and patriotic, including a new commissioned work recognizing the nation’s 250th anniversary, Dvorak’s Symphony No. 9 (New World), a rendition of “My Way” selections from “The Sound of Music,” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

### HOW TO HELP

Classical music lovers can help the Lawrenceville Symphony Orchestra by joining Conductor Park’s “Cup of Coffee a Month” campaign. Pledge \$5 per month for a year (\$60) and help the LSO reach its goal of 1,000 members or \$60,000.



Special photo

Russian-born pianist Anna Keiserman was featured at the LSO concert in January. Performance credits include Le Poisson Rouge, Carnegie Hall, and the Fête de La Musique. She has toured through Italy, Spain and Russia. As a soloist she performed concerti with the Volgograd Symphony Orchestra (Russia), the University of Minnesota Symphony Orchestra and the Somerset Symphony Orchestra, among others.

# Up to \$500 in Rebates available for natural gas appliances.

Visit [lville.city/rebates](http://lville.city/rebates) for more information.



Mark Case, left, starts the race as (left-right) Bowen Ogg, Jordan Mote and Matthew Alex-Mill cheer on their Pinewood Derby during the Awana Clubs Grand Prix at Lawrenceville First Baptist Church in Lawrenceville on May 13.

Photos: Kate Awtrey-King



## Pinewood Derby fun brings Awana kids and church family together

By Kate Awtrey-King  
Special to the Daily Post

“THREE, TWO, ONE, GO!” shouted the kids as their Pinewood Derby cars zipped down the lane at Lawrenceville First Baptist Church on May 13 at their annual Awana Clubs Grand Prix.

Adeline Ashford won first place in speed with her car, “Six Seven Beauty.”

“My dad had a secret where we had to put graphite on the wheels so it would go super fast,” she said. “That’s how I won, it was just speeding and speeding.”

Her mom, Jill Ashford said that as they were preparing for the derby that Adeline told her, “I don’t even care about winning the race, I just want it to be the prettiest.”

Besides the speed category, a handful of judges varying in age and experience selected their favorite cars based on creative design.

“I liked seeing all the different cars and all the creative ideas the kids had. It was fun to reward them and see how excited they got,” said David King, who helped judge the design category. “It reminded me of being a kid again and being in Cub Scouts.”

The Grand Prix closed out the end of Awana’s before heading into summer break.



Adeline Ashford, right, accepts her trophy from Chris Paul for winning first place in speed at the Awana Clubs Grand Prix at Lawrenceville First Baptist Church.

Senior Pastor, Brian Fillingim said, “Our derby was an awesome experience for the kids. It really brings the children and the rest of our church together, bridging that gap and preparing us for what lies ahead which is Vacation Bible School the first week of June.”

Vacation Bible School will run June 1-5, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and online registration for kids pre-K 4 through 5th grade is open now on their website, [www.lawrencevillefirst.org](http://www.lawrencevillefirst.org).

LOCAL COLUMNIST ■ BRANDON BRIGMAN

## Honoring the fallen through ‘Murph’

This Memorial Day weekend, thousands of people across the country will gather in gyms, parks, driveways and garages to take part in a workout known simply as “Murph.”

For many, it’s one of the toughest workouts they’ll do all year.

But the workout was never really about fitness.

Murph is named after Lt. Michael P. Murphy, a Navy SEAL who was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2005. During Operation Red Wings, Murphy and his team were surrounded by Taliban fighters after their position was compromised. Knowing the danger, Murphy left cover and stepped into an open area to get a signal on his satellite phone so he could call for help. He knowingly exposed himself to enemy fire to save his teammates.

He was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Originally, Murphy called the workout “Body Armor.” After his death, CrossFit founder Greg Glassman posted it as the Workout of the Day on the CrossFit website, and over the years it has become a Memorial Day tradition for many inside and outside the fitness community.

What started as a workout within CrossFit and military circles has grown into something much bigger. You’ll now see people doing Murph at boot camps, local gyms, military bases and community fitness events all across the country.

Part of the reason it has grown so much is because of its simplicity.

The workout is:

- ♦ 1-mile run
- ♦ 100 pull-ups
- ♦ 200 push-ups
- ♦ 300 air squats
- ♦ 1-mile run

Traditionally, it’s performed while wearing a 20-pound weight vest.

And yes — it’s hard.

Every year, people debate the “right” way to complete it. Some do all the pull-ups first, then push-ups, then squats. Others break it into smaller rounds, like 20 sets of 5 pull-ups, 10 push-ups, and 15 squats.

But honestly, none of that is the point.

The purpose isn’t to post the fastest time on social media or prove how tough you are.

The purpose is remembrance.

At our gym, one of the things I appreciate most about Murph is seeing people of all fitness levels participate. Some do the full workout with a vest. Others scale it down to a Half Murph or modify the movements entirely.

If you can’t run, you can bike or row.

If you can’t do pull-ups, you can do ring rows.

If push-ups are difficult, elevate your hands on a bench.

There’s always a way to participate.

And maybe that’s part of why Murph resonates with so many people. It’s challenging, but it’s also inclusive. Everyone suffers a little together. Everyone pushes through discomfort together. And for a brief moment, fitness becomes about something bigger than calories, abs, or personal records.

It becomes about gratitude.

Memorial Day can easily turn into just another long weekend filled with cookouts, pool parties and travel. There’s nothing wrong with enjoying those things. But Murph serves as a reminder of why the holiday exists in the first place.

So whether you tackle the full workout, modify it, or simply spend a few minutes learning about Lt. Murphy’s story, take a moment this weekend to remember those who gave everything.

Because freedom — and the ability to spend a Monday doing something as simple as a workout — isn’t free.

*Brandon Brigman is the owner of No Excuses CrossFit in Suwanee. For 15 years he has helped more than 1,000 people improve their fitness and nutrition through group classes and personal training. For more information, visit [www.noexcusescrossfit.com](http://www.noexcusescrossfit.com).*

## SYMPHONY

From C1

including a new commissioned work recognizing the nation’s 250th anniversary, Dvorak’s Symphony No. 9 (New World), a rendition of “My Way” selections from “The Sound of Music,” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

After that performance, the LSO will launch its new season in November at the Lawrenceville Arts Center, followed by a concert in February and again in May.

### STANDING OUT IN A CROWD

Symphonic music fans have several options in this area. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Georgia Symphony Orchestra and the Gwinnett Symphony Orchestra.

Still, Park believes the LSO fills a niche. “In this area, there are those who really want, they thirst for, this music.”

The LSO was “founded with a vision to connect cultures and create access to exceptional live music right here in Lawrenceville ... LSO offers a platform for both emerging and established talent — especially drawing from the vibrant Korean-American musical community,” a statement on its website reads.

LSO musicians — all paid professionals — come from wide geographies and backgrounds. Many crossed paths with Park during their respective musical journeys; several come from University of Georgia, where he studied for his doctorate degree. Other players come from Conyers, Winder, Bethlehem, Duluth and other areas of Georgia.

The repertoire leans classical, but you’re also likely to hear Broadway hits, movie and Broadway classics and the occasional Disney tune.

Gwinnett County resident and LSO cellist Jacob Guidi agrees the LSO is finding its place in the community’s entertainment spectrum.

“There are other local orchestras across Gwinnett County, but in terms of something that’s embedded within Lawrenceville locally, there’s nothing like it. Dr. Park has been able to do a lot of good work in sustaining and growing the quality of our ensemble with little resources at first.”

### FROM KOREA TO U.S.

The Korean-born conductor’s musical journey has been long — in both time and distance.

Born in 1983 in Seoul, Park developed an early interest in listening to classical music, collecting between 200 and 300 CDs. It wasn’t until his ninth year of school that



Special photo

LSO rehearsal for the January 2025 concert.

he picked up his first instrument — the trumpet. He studied music at Konkuk University in Seoul and discovered his goal was to conduct.

“I began conducting during my university years and have led numerous concerts of all scales over the past two decades. However, the inaugural concert of my own organization ... was an experience of overwhelming emotion,” Park said of the LSO’s debut.

Park also had the opportunity to study under the first female conductor in Korea, Maestra Kyung-Hee Kim.

While he launched his musical career in Korea, America came calling.

“I believe many, almost all musicians want to have the opportunity to study in the USA because in USA, classical music is very awesome,” Park said.

Soon, he got his chance.

After an audition in Seoul, Park was accepted into the master’s program at Rutgers University in New Jersey. He studied there before a full scholarship and stipend at Georgia State University lured him south. At GSU, he earned a masters of music and an artist certificate in orchestral conducting. From there, he enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of Georgia where he served as assistant conductor to UGA Director of Orchestra Activities Mark Cedel. As assistant conductor he had the opportunity to conduct at least one piece at every UGA concert.

### COMING TO LAWRENCEVILLE

During a spring break visit before moving to Georgia, PK and his family knew little about Gwinnett



Photo: YuanWang

Talented soprano and the LSO’s financial manager Eunyoung Lee performs at the LSO’s “Opera vs. Musical” concert April 12, 2025, at the Lawrenceville Arts Center.

County. It was only later they discovered the county’s large Korean community. When looking for a place to live, they chose Lawrenceville.

Park’s first concert came literally by accident. A car crash during his family’s drive to Georgia (his SUV’s engine was destroyed after rear-ending another car in South Carolina) resulted in a \$6,000 insurance payout. After buying a used Kia Sedona for \$1,500, he used \$3,000 of the remaining payout — with his wife’s permission — to fund his first concert in the USA. It was an event at Salt and Light Presbyterian Church in Buford. He hired 15 or so musicians. That success gave him confidence to pursue more community-oriented concerts.

Today, the Lawrenceville resident teaches at Killian Hill Christian School where he serves as choir/band/music director.

### PAYING FOR THE BAND

Irene Madden became an LSO fan in the orchestra’s early days. Prior to her first concert, she wasn’t familiar with the orchestra and carried few expectations.

“My neighbors next door are Korean and I noticed they had a Korean pianist that was going to be in the concert. So I took my neighbors,” Madden said.

“I was blown away. I couldn’t believe it.”

She was so impressed with the caliber of her first LSO concert she became a donor and advisor.

“I talked to (Park) after the concert. He was very approachable. He’s infectious. He was just so grateful that someone recognized the talent.”

Madden requested a meeting. “So we met. He didn’t have a post office box. He didn’t have a dedicated phone line (or website). And

I said, ‘Look, I want to help you. I’m going to write you out a check, but I want you to do this, this, this, this with it.’”

That guidance helped boost the orchestra to a wider audience.

While the launch of the LSO seems to be a hit, maintaining a professional symphony can be difficult.

LSO funding comes from ticket sales and corporate and individual sponsorships, but Park has an idea for a grass-roots campaign that will help sustain the orchestra and its musicians — a Cup of Coffee a Month Campaign.

Ava Cosman met Park during her days as a UGA music student. Today she serves as LSO’s development manager, handles social media and plays viola in the orchestra. She explains Parks’ vision for the cup of coffee campaign.

“So if a person donates \$5 a month — the price of a cup of coffee — for a year ...that’s \$60. He’s looking for 1,000 donors to raise \$60,000.

“So we’re partially on our way there to complete the funding that we want to get in order to pay our musicians more, but still doing the work to seek out more sponsors, more grant work, more donors,” Cosman said.

### A FEATHER IN CITY’S CAP

Having your city’s moniker paired with a professional orchestra is a point of pride for residents and city leaders alike.

City Councilwoman Victoria Jones was so taken by early performances she got involved and now holds the title of Vice President of the LSO.

“The first concert I attended was an afternoon performance in the Cabaret Theater at the Lawrenceville Arts Center. What really stayed with me was watching Dr. Park conduct. There was something incredibly inspiring about the way he led the orchestra — with such precision, energy, and passion.”

Jones said she is also impressed by the level of talent the LSO brings to the city.

“At the most recent concert, we had flutist Sarah Shin, who has performed at Carnegie Hall. To have that caliber of artistry right here at the Lawrenceville Arts Center is truly remarkable.”

Mayor David Still agrees. “We love having the Lawrenceville Symphony Orchestra at the Lawrenceville Arts Center and look forward to continued future opportunities to engage the community through their performances. Their presence adds to the overall arts experience for residents and visitors alike.”

More information on the Lawrenceville Symphony Orchestra can be found at <https://www.lwvso.com/>