

The Music of Billy Joel Starring Michael Cavanaugh

Friday, March 25, 2022 - 7:30 PM | Saturday, March 26, 2022 - 7:30 PM
Holland Performing Arts Center, Kiewit Concert Hall

Ernest Richardson, conductor | Michael Cavanaugh, piano & vocals

Selections to be announced from the stage.

SPONSORED BY:



Michael Cavanaugh, piano & vocals

Michael Cavanaugh is the new voice of the American Rock & Roll Songbook and a charismatic performer and musician made famous for his piano/lead vocals in the Broadway musical *Movin' Out*. Handpicked by Billy Joel to star in *Movin' Out*, Cavanaugh evokes a style rivaling the Piano Man. He appeared in the show for three years with over 1,200 performances and received multiple accolades. The show culminated in 2003 with both Grammy and Tony award nominations.

Michael began playing at age seven, when his parents bought their first piano. Encouraged by family and friends, and inspired by his hero Billy Joel, Michael formed his first band at age 10 and began playing local functions, fine-tuning the craft that would become his chosen career.

His first full-time gig as a musician was an extended engagement in Orlando, Florida, at a piano bar called Blazing Pianos. In January of 1999, Michael received an offer that would unknowingly change his life: an opportunity to play Las Vegas at the famed New York, New York Hotel and Casino. It was there that Billy Joel spotted Michael and joined him on stage one fateful night of February 2001. It only took two songs before Billy was convinced that he had found his new Piano Man: Michael Cavanaugh. Michael closed up shop at New York, New York and moved to New York City to work alongside Billy Joel and Twyla Tharp to shape the Broadway Musical that would be called *Movin' Out*. In the lead role, he received both Tony and Grammy nominations.

With the close of *Movin' Out* at the end of 2005, Michael began touring in his own right, creating a show that reinterprets the modern pop/rock songbook. Michael soon became one of the hottest artists in the private events market, and he continues to perform worldwide for company and charity events as well as sporting events including many PGA tour events, the Super Bowl, and the Indy 500. His interpretation of the modern rock/pop songbook led to *Billboard* calling him "The New Voice of the American Rock and Roll Songbook," and he was recognized by Reuters as *Entertainer of the Year* for the private events market.

It wasn't long before symphony orchestras discovered Michael's talents and audience appeal. He accepted his first orchestral booking, "Michael Cavanaugh – The Songs of Billy Joel and More," which debuted in April 2008 with the Indianapolis Symphony and continues to tour today. In October 2008, he signed with Warner/ADA to distribute his first CD, *In Color*. In June 2010, Michael debuted his second symphony show in the *Generations of Rock* series titled "Michael Cavanaugh: The Songs of Elton John and More" and then debuted his third symphony show, "Singers and Songwriters: the Music of Paul Simon, Neil Diamond and James Taylor," in 2012. In 2015, he debuted his fourth symphony show: "Rockin' Christmas with the Pops." He continues to tour all four symphony productions along with performing with his band in performing arts centers and other public venues.

The Way I Hear It, his second commercial album, was released in April 2017, and it debuted at #17 on the Billboard Heatseekers chart. In 2020, Michael Cavanaugh reached the POLLSTAR Live75, which lists the top 75 active touring acts in the country.



Ernest Richardson, Principal Pops Conductor

Ernest Richardson is presently the principal pops conductor and resident conductor of the Omaha Symphony. Since 1993, he has laid the groundwork and led the development of the Symphony's vaunted education and community engagement programs, in addition to his artistic leadership in the Symphony Pops, Rocks, and Movies series. During Richardson's tenure, he has created the annual top-selling Christmas Celebration production, internationally performed "Only in Omaha" concerts, the Symphony's Family series, unique-to-Omaha Choral Collaborative, and a host of education and community program that brings the Symphony to all.

Richardson holds the position of music director and principal conductor of the Steamboat Symphony Orchestra in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Under his leadership the organization has grown from a community orchestra to a resident professional orchestra and one of the finest up and coming orchestras in the Front Range of Colorado.

A recipient of the 2016 Nebraska Governor's Arts Award for Excellence in Arts Education, Richardson has encouraged and supported countless young musicians. As the founding artistic director and CEO of the innovative Rocky Mountain Summer Conservatory, he based his program on four foundation principles that have catapulted it to national attention: the passionate, persistent pursuit of perfection that reveals the extraordinary within, vision directed leadership, the musician as athlete, and in all things, balance. The Rocky Mountain Conservatory has attracted the finest faculty and leading young musicians from around the world since 1997. Richardson also held the position of music director and principal conductor of the Santa Barbara Music and Arts Conservatory from 2012 to 2015, and works with students each summer at the Omaha Conservatory of Music Summer Institute.

An accomplished composer and arranger, Richardson's composition *Three Scenes for Chamber Orchestra* was debuted by the Omaha Symphony in 2011. His work is featured largely in the Symphony's annual Christmas production and on many education and outreach programs, and has been performed outside of Omaha by the Phoenix Symphony, the Neue Philharmonie Westfalen in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, and the Steamboat Springs Orchestra.

Richardson began studying the violin at age three with his father, Dr. Vernal Richardson. He continued his string education at Indiana University with Tadeusz Wronski, later concentrating on the viola at the University of Michigan with Donald McInnes. He studied conducting with Samuel Krachmalnick and Gustav Meier, and composition with William Albright and William Bolcom. An avid fly fisherman, Richardson can be found on trout streams in Colorado and municipal lakes in Nebraska. He has also earned a black belt in tae kwon do, and has been known to help his sons build award-winning pinewood derby cars and craft his own batons. He lives in Omaha with his wife and children.