

Marie Bucoy-Calavan to make her Akron Symphony conducting debut

by Mike Telin



“If you delve into the choral works of Brahms, you will see that everything culminates in his *Requiem*. It’s what most people think of when you mention his works for chorus and orchestra,” conductor Marie Bucoy-Calavan said during a telephone conversation. “What I like about *Gesang der Parzen* (‘Song of the Fates’) is that you get the darker side of Brahms along with a little bit of heavy metal. It is very passionate and there are places where it’s harsh and heavy. I enjoy that aspect of it, and I think the chorus does too.”

On Friday, October 6 at 8:00 pm at The University of Akron’s E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall, Marie Bucoy-Calavan, who serves as director of the Akron Symphony Chorus and artistic director of the Summit Chorale Society’s Masterworks Chorale, will make her [Akron Symphony Orchestra](#) conducting debut when she leads all three ensembles in Brahms’ *Gesang der Parzen*. The program will also include Pulitzer Prize-winner Kevin Puts’ *Inspiring Beethoven* and Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7* led by ASO Music Director Christopher Wilkins, as well as excerpts from Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger*. A Preview from the Podium, featuring Wilkins discussing the evening’s music, will begin at 7:00 pm.

Bucoy-Calavan said that it was Wilkins’ idea to program a concert featuring works by Beethoven and Wagner. But when he asked her if she had any additional repertoire ideas, she immediately thought that the Brahms would contrast wonderfully with the Wagner. “*Gesang der Parzen* is written for a six-part mixed chorus, and the orchestration is so lush,” she said.

In the 1882 piece, Brahms uses a text from Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*. "The text is dark, and in the beginning, I did have problems connecting with it because it speaks in an older, loftier way. But Brahms' music portrays the angst that is in the text so well: The Fates can push us down — so even if everything is going well we should beware."

*Let the race of mankind
fear the gods!
For they hold dominion
over them in their eternal hands,
and can demand
what they please of us.*

Bucoy-Calavan said that *Gesang der Parzen* reminds her of the composer's First Symphony with its foreboding beginning. She added that the piece is in the same vein as another of his works for chorus and orchestra, *Schicksalslied* ('Song of Destiny'). "They're both about fate and not being in control of your own destiny."

The conductor was quick to point out that many of Brahms' vocal works show his lighter, brighter side. "In the 19th century when there was no YouTube or Netflix, it was in vogue to sit in your parlor and sing wonderful songs like his *Liebeslieder Waltzes*. He also wrote a lot of music for women's chorus and men's chorus which is lighter, although he did write some heady Shakespeare songs."

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg ("The Master-Singers of Nuremberg") is one of the longest operas in the repertoire, with an average performance time clocking in at 4 ½ hours. Bucoy-Calavan said that Saturday's performance will be a great way for audiences to hear Wagner's powerful choral music in a far shorter span of time. "This is going to be a big sing for the chorus, and they are creating a beautiful sound. It's clean, vibrant, and healthy and I'm excited about that," she said. "Wagner creates a lot of excitement in the way the chord progressions build along with the texture. The three ensembles will create a beautiful force of sound."

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