

Akron's Urban Troubadour wins \$80K Knight Foundation grant

by Hannah Schoepe



Out of a field of 45 semifinalists, the Knight Foundation announced [17 winners](#) of the Akron Knight Arts challenge in November of 2017, distributing funds totaling \$743,000. [Urban Troubadour](#) received the Foundation's support with a grant in the amount of \$80,000. Formed by John and James Knight, the Knight Foundation supports excellent journalism, arts, and technology in Akron, Detroit, Miami, and St. Paul — communities that were instrumental to the success of the Knight-Ridder Newspapers. The Arts Challenge was established to nurture artistic talents and creative

ideas that benefit those communities.

Urban Troubadour is an excellent example of just such a creative idea. Established by flutist and Akron resident Jane Berkner, this collective of Northeast Ohio musicians inhabits unusual spaces, turning concerts into happenings and promoting a fresh way for the community to experience public performances. The musicians come together to play in venues such as microbreweries, restaurants, and loft spaces, combining music with gallery openings, wine tastings, and more.

“Big halls are a thing of the past, and concerts in homes and unconventional spaces are all the rage,” Jane Berkner said via email. “We hope to breathe new cultural life into downtown Akron and go exploring. Audiences will hear a concert in a penthouse loft, then walk next door to an art gallery for dessert. We’ll find a glass of wine or try out a new stout at the local brewery, then put everyone on a trolley and move them to a restored historic building to hear a concert. The social and artistic synergy is fantastic!”

The funds come in the form of a matching grant: to receive full funding, Urban Troubadour must raise an equivalent amount in the next two years. Berkner seemed undaunted by the prospect of raising the money, safe in the knowledge that the Knight

Foundation selects projects they believe will succeed. “I was extremely excited when I found out that we had won the grant. The Knight Foundation plays a big role in Akron’s cultural life, and winners of the Knight Arts Challenge are considered the best means of engaging and enriching the community through the arts. Receiving their seal of approval during the first year that we are getting up and running is huge for us. It’s very encouraging that they recognize the value in what we’re trying to achieve.”

Urban Troubadour plans three events this spring:

Sunday, March 25 at 3:00 pm, “Romance of France”

Jane Berkner, flute, Jody Guinn, harp, Michael Strauss, viola & Miles Richardson, cello. Music by Debussy & Roussel at Akrona Galleries, followed by a trolley ride for a 5:00 pm French wine tasting at Beside the Point at West Point Market. Akrona Galleries, 1765 W. Market St., Akron. Tickets available [online](#).



Tuesday, April 24 at 6:00 pm, “Blutique Sneak Peek”

Jane Berkner, flute, Stephen Aron, guitar, Brian Johnson, baritone, Michael Strauss, viola and Scott Dixon, double bass. 6:00 pm Pre-concert wine and small bites at Uncorked Wine Bar, followed by a 7:30 pm concert in the United Building for a sneak peek of downtown’s new Blutique Hotel (music by Josef Kreutzer, Erwin Schullhof & Dusan Bogdanovic) and a 9:00 pm After concert with piano and jazz vocals at Chill Ice Cream parlor. Uncorked Wine Bar, 22 High Street, Akron. Tickets available [online](#).

Sunday, June 3 at 3:30 pm, “Two Americas Concert”

Jane Berkner, flute, Cynthia Watson, oboe, Alix Reinhardt, clarinet, Lisa Fink, horn & Ryan Finefrock, bassoon. 3:30 pm Pre-concert margarita at Nuevo, 5:00 pm Concert at the Main Library (music by Eric Ewazen & John Steinmetz) & 6:45 pm After concert Salsa dance party, small bites, wine, and music by Jackie Warren & Sammy de Leon. Nuevo, 54 East Mill St., Akron. Tickets available [online](#).

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