

Akron Symphony to feature Brunfelt & Guegold in Vivaldi & Strauss

by Jarrett Hoffman



This weekend, the Akron Symphony will spotlight two of its own. Concertmaster Tallie Brunfelt will take on the quadruple challenge of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, and principal horn Meghan Guegold will play Richard Strauss's early *Concerto No. 1* on Saturday, November 16 at 8:00 pm at E.J. Thomas Hall.

When Guegold was an 18-year-old student at the University of Akron, she was determined not only to learn the Strauss, but to play it memorized on that uncommon and ambitious event: the freshman recital.

"I thought, you know, I want to perform for a living, so I might as well jump right on in," the hornist said during an interview.

That work, a pillar of the horn repertoire, wasn't a surprising choice. "It's definitely one of the best concertos we have," Guegold said, adding that it might be *the* best from the Romantic era. The lyricism and the heroic quality of the writing attracted her. "I think it was the start of my real love of Strauss's music."

Another 18-year-old taking a bold step was Strauss himself: that was the age he wrote the piece. "It's sort of mind-boggling to me, but I also keep that in mind when I'm playing it." Guegold noted the reverence Strauss felt for his father, who was a great horn player. "So proudness is definitely important when trying to find the character."

The Strauss is an important concerto, but not much in all of classical music has broken into the world of pop culture like Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. "I think everybody probably knows some portion of it, whether it's from a ringtone or hearing it in commercials," Brunfelt said by telephone.

The violinist's first real memory of the piece is when she bought a recording of Gil Shaham and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. "And I loved it," she said. As a senior in high school, she played *Winter* with her school orchestra. "Since then I've played each one separately, but this is going to be my first time doing all four."

Even for an accomplished violinist like Brunfelt, that journey can be intimidating. Not only is the set 40 minutes long, but the music is often virtuosic, and it's as recognizable as just about anything, which can leave any performer feeling vulnerable. "I'm definitely working on pacing myself and getting physically prepared to perform at the highest possible level," Brunfelt said. "And I'm really looking forward to playing it with my great colleagues."

A native of St. Paul, Minnesota, and a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, Brunfelt has gone on to make a career for herself that stretches from Ohio through Pennsylvania to her home of New York City. In addition to being concertmaster in Akron, she holds positions in the Harrisburg and Allentown Symphonies. She also has numerous credits on Broadway and in soundtracks for movies and television — and when we spoke last week, she still had a Christmas show to play that night at Radio City Music Hall.

"I'm extremely lucky in that I get to do something different pretty much every day," Brunfelt said. "I feel very fortunate that at this point in my life, I've been able to put together enough different things to be able to call it a career."

It wasn't always that way. "It took years of being pretty scrappy — trying to make the connections and win the auditions when it really mattered," she said. "There were definitely some difficult years in there to balance out what I'm fortunate enough to have now."

Guegold's career has unfolded differently in that it has kept her closer to home. "I'm from Mantua," she said, noting with a laugh how locals pronounce it *Man-uh-way*. She followed up her bachelor's at the U of A with graduate studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Now she's principal in both the Akron and Canton Symphonies, a frequent call of The Cleveland Orchestra, and part of the faculty of CIM's Preparatory and Continuing Education division.

One of her earliest memories of hearing live music? An Akron Symphony children's concert. "I remember Tucker Jolly, the great tuba professor from the University of Akron, playing *Tubby the Tuba*," she said. "I'm proud to have grown up here and to now be a part of this arts and music scene that's so rich."

Saturday's program under Christopher Wilkins also includes Haydn's Symphony No. 95 and Gabriela Lena Frank's "Coquetteos" from Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout. The latter is part of the ASO's "Stand Beside Her" initiative highlighting women composers.

In another article, Brunfelt and Guegold give their thoughts on that project, and Wilkins discusses the featured composers.

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