

Brunfelt, Guegold, and Wilkins on Akron Symphony's "Stand Beside Her"

by Jarrett Hoffman



The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in August of 1920, and leading up to the 100th anniversary of that event, the Akron Symphony is highlighting six women composers through a project called "Stand Beside Her."

I spoke to concertmaster Tallie Brunfelt and principal horn Meghan Guegold — who will both be featured as soloists in the Orchestra's November 16 concert — and asked what this

programming initiative means to them.

"I'm just so thrilled that the ASO is doing this, especially in light of the centennial," Brunfelt said by telephone. Being a woman at her position in the Orchestra makes this project all the more exciting for her. "There aren't many female concertmasters, and I think representation and visibility are extraordinarily important," she said.

"To be able to move classical music into the current day and age — to really be representative of everybody — is a great step. I hope that we continue to push the envelope even further and include more women, more people of color, and more unknown works, even if they're by composers who are well-known."

To Brunfelt, "Stand Beside Her" is the latest example of Christopher Wilkins' adventurous programming, which often includes works that have been overlooked. "Throughout my time in the Orchestra, almost every concert has had a piece I've never played," she said.



“And sometimes there have been pieces that I’ve never even heard of. I think that’s a really brave thing for a small organization like the Akron Symphony to do.”



Guegold is happy that the ASO is showcasing “great music that also happens to be written by women,” she said in an interview. To her, composers like Brahms, Mozart, and Beethoven are programmed for good reason. “We definitely still need to be playing that music,” she said. “But there’s a lot of wonderful music by women that we should absolutely hear too.”

“Stand Beside Her” began last month with a performance of Ethel Smyth’s 1906 Overture to *The Wreckers*, which Wilkins discussed in a previous [article](#). The project continues on Saturday, November 16 at 8:00 pm at E.J. Thomas Hall with a work by Guggenheim Fellowship recipient and Latin Grammy winner Gabriela Lena Frank.

Wilkins and the ASO will open Saturday’s program with “Coquetteos,” the last movement of Frank’s *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout* — written for string quartet in 2001 and arranged for string orchestra in 2003. Frank writes that *Leyendas* was inspired by the idea of cultures coexisting “without the subjugation of one by the other.”

As Wilkins said by telephone, “This piece draws on her Peruvian ancestry and has very recognizable folk elements. It’s attractive, appealing, toe-tapping music.”

The Orchestra’s program on March 28 will open with Joan Tower’s *Made in America*. “It’s wonderful and it’s based on *America the Beautiful*,” Wilkins said. Tower writes how that theme is met “by other more aggressive and dissonant ideas... Perhaps it was my unconscious reacting to the challenge of how do we keep America beautiful.”



The dance-influenced concert on May 16 includes works by three women composers. *Impressions of Cheonmachong*, a co-creation of Brooke Jee-in Newmaster and her brother Kyle Newmaster, draws on traditional Korean music. “Brooke created the drumming, the rhythmic elements, and the choreography, and her brother created the orchestration around it,” Wilkins said.

Anna Clyne's *Masquerade* will open the evening. "That's a piece she wrote for the Proms," Wilkins said, pointing out that she's been composer-in-residence with the Chicago and Baltimore Symphonies. "She's widely performed."

That program will also include the "Juba Dance" and "Finale" from Florence Price's *Symphony No. 1*. Wilkins noted that listeners might well be familiar with her music since it's being programmed more and more. "It isn't just that she's an accomplished, forgotten, female composer of color," he said. "The more people hear her music, the more they *want* to hear it."

One non-composer Wilkins pointed out from that program is Alice Blumenfeld, a flamenco dancer who teaches at Oberlin College. "She's sort of updating the tradition of flamenco," the conductor said. "I'm really excited about featuring her."

In a separate article, violinist Tallie Brunfelt and hornist Meghan Guegold discuss the paths their careers have taken, and the Vivaldi and Strauss concertos they'll play on Saturday, November 16.

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