

Akron Symphony with Brunfelt & Guegold (Nov. 16)

by David Kulma



It's a rare treat to hear two excellent orchestra members out front as soloists in a single concert. In a program titled "The Four Seasons" on November 16 at E.J. Thomas Hall, the Akron Symphony and music director Christopher Wilkins featured concertmaster Tallie Brunfelt and principal horn Meghan Guegold in well-loved concertos by

Antonio Vivaldi and Richard Strauss alongside works by Joseph Haydn and Gabriela Lena Frank.

"Coquetos" is the last movement of Frank's *Legendas: An Andean Walkabout*, originally written in 2001 for string quartet and later arranged for string orchestra. The whole work aims to encapsulate equitable cultural coexistence, and thereby mixes Andean folk traditions with Western classical ones. Wilkins and the ASO played this vivacious love song with rhythmic vigor. With catchy minor-key tunes — often in parallel thirds — the piece worked well as a rousing concert opener.

Haydn's *Symphony No. 95* is the only one of the composer's dozen "London" symphonies in a minor key — here c minor. Wilkins led the ASO through a transparent reading that underlined Haydn's sprightly writing, even in supposedly darker territory. The highlight of the performance was cellist Erica Snowden-Rodriguez's agile extended solo in the third-movement trio. Once the brazenly fast notes appeared in the bustling major-key finale, the ASO brought this enjoyable work to an exciting conclusion.



Richard Strauss's early *Horn Concerto No. 1 in E-flat*, built in three movements connected in one long arc, is one of a few of his apprenticeship-level works that remains in the repertoire. And it's no surprise. Strauss's melodic gift was already intact, and as displayed through Meghan Guegold's round, singing tone, these melodies continue to sound as fresh as they must have at their premiere more than a century ago. Guegold shaped the noble lines with beautiful phrasing and easily handled the third movement's more treacherous virtuosity.

The concertos that make up Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* are well known for their vibrant textures and memorable tunes. Stringing all four of them together is a difficult feat for any violinist, but Tallie Brufelt supplied all the polish, poise, and power one could ask for. Wilkins and the ASO handled the *ripieno* carefully, giving Brunfelt a wonderful set of soundscapes on which to dance. Although the flashier movements tend to be excerpted in popular culture, the most memorable moments in this concert were the laconic opening of *Summer* and the glassy central movement of *Autumn*. Brunfelt's gorgeous long lines during Vivaldi's slow melodies played off beautifully against his more famous pyrotechnics.

Finally, congratulations to the ASO's Music Educator of the Year. Jason Burdett is the middle and high school orchestra director for Aurora City Schools, and over the past twenty years has incorporated multiple creative outlets for his students in addition to the traditional orchestra offerings. It was a delight to celebrate music education tonight

mid-program. Lovely concerts like this one from the Akron Symphony are only possible because of our society's dedication to including music in schools.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com December 9, 2019.

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