

Celebrating the life of Christine Haff-Paluck

by Mike Telin



In a message posted on Sunday, April 26, 2020, Arts Renaissance Tremont board president Fred Calatrello wrote:

It is with great regret and a heavy heart that I must inform you that Chris, our friend, colleague and the moving spirit behind ART, passed away last night with her husband at her bedside.

I don't have to tell any of you what a great loss this is not only for us but also for her many

former students, her numberless friends in the musical community and, indeed, anyone who had the good fortune to know and work with her over the many years she lived in and served this community.

We all know that in addition to husband, family and friends, Chris' great passion over the past three decades has been ARTS RENAISSANCE TREMONT; not only did she create the organization but she worked year in and year out to secure funding and artists so that each year we could bring great music to audiences in N.E.Ohio. For Chis, this was truly a labor of love.

On Saturday, April 23 at 3:00 pm at Trinity Cathedral, Arts Renaissance Tremont invites the community to celebrate the life of Christine Haff-Paluck during a Memorial Concert and Gala Benefit.

The longtime artistic director of ART will be honored with performances by Jinjoo Cho, Hyunsoo Kim, Burning River Brass, Amici Quartet, Cavani Quartet, North Coast Winds,

Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, Cleveland Chamber Choir, Shuai Wang, and Dianna Richardson and students from the Cleveland School of the Arts. The afternoon will also include world premieres by composers David Conte and Geoffrey Peterson. The event is free and open to the public. Donations will be accepted.

The love and admiration that people had for Chris can be felt in the many remembrances that people shared on this [ClevelandClassical.com tribute page](#).

In a letter to friends announcing the establishment of a memorial fund, Chris's husband, Gerry Paluck wrote,

“For more than forty years, Chris had been a freelance double bassist, educator, mentor to young musicians, concert presenter, and arts manager at the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the founder and moving spirit of Arts Renaissance Tremont (ART).”

“Through her crowning achievement, Arts Renaissance Tremont, the non-profit organization Chris created 29 years ago, she established a yearly program of free classical music concerts. Through ART she has not only given established musicians, but also aspiring young artists an additional venue to showcase their talents. Chris has been dedicated to providing great music at no cost to audiences of all ages throughout Northeast Ohio, and she has done all this and more without the benefit of a large supporting organization and without the slightest thought of personal remuneration or recognition.”

We spoke to four people who will be part of Saturday's celebration.



Cleveland Orchestra cellist and Amici String Quartet member **Ralph Curry** said “Chris was a lovely person who I knew basically my entire adult life, as we started at CIM as freshmen on the same day.”

After school, Curry and Haff-Paluck reconnected after he joined the orchestra and she was working at COYO. “When she started working at CIM, it was pretty astonishing how much she did to find performing opportunities for students,” Curry said.

For twenty-five years the Amici String Quartet have regularly performed on the Arts Renaissance Tremont series. “Cleveland is a musical city, but when it comes to chamber music it often looks to the outside,” he said, adding that Haff-Paluck was always supportive of local talent. She was also supportive of the Amici’s idea to perform the complete Beethoven quartet cycle.

“Chris was deeply committed to the task at hand,” Curry recalled. “For her there were no obstacles. And she was always quick to laugh at herself. She is missed by me and those for whom she advocated.”



Violinist **Jinjoo Cho** said, “Chris was one of the first people I met when I moved to Cleveland when I was fourteen. She was working at COYO, and I remember her meeting me at Severance and walking me through the backstage area to play my audition.”

For Cho, Haff-Paluck was more than just an arts administrator. “She was my mom, my manager, my PR person, she was everything to me, she was my family — she trusted me.

What inspired her most was advocating for young people. We were her children and she was our cheerleader and caretaker. Her positive attitude was so maternal but without judgment — I think about that all the time when I’m teaching. In so many ways she was the beacon of what a person should be.”



Trumpeter and a founder of Burning River Brass, **Heather Zweifel**, remembered first meeting Haff-Paluck in the early ‘90s while playing the Akron and Canton symphonies. “She was still playing bass and gigging a lot back then,” Zweifel recalled.

Like the Amici and Jinjoo Cho, Burning River Brass were also regulars on the ART series. “She

gave us our very first concert — on September 14, 1996,” Zweifel said.

“It was instrumental in the group’s success because we got two great reviews right off the bat, one from the *Plain Dealer* and another from the *Akron Beacon Journal*. That helped legitimize us and things just sort of snowballed from there. We were always grateful to Chris, she was our kickstarter before there was such a thing. She was so supportive of home-grown Cleveland groups and we will forever be grateful to her.”

What will the members of Burning River Brass play on Saturday? “A Fanfare in the style of Gabrieli,” Zweifel said. “Chris was always asking us to program Gabrieli so we thought that would be the most appropriate thing to do.”



Cavani Quartet violinist **Annie Fullard** remembered Haff-Paluck as an inspiring mentor, and comforter. “Chris was my counselor at Summer Music Experience at the Western Reserve Academy in Hudson when I was thirteen years old.” Fullard said.

“Other than her telling me to go to sleep, my first experience with her there was playing the Schubert “Trout Quintet” together. We did the variation movement and although the music was over my head, it was so exciting.”

Fullard recalled being “overwhelmed” and “upset” after the performance. “Chris just came over, put her arm around me and said ‘it’s okay. We all go through this and don’t worry about it. Life will go on.’ She didn’t go on and on, she just had a great way of being there for us.”

Later, when the Cavani joined the faculty at CIM, Fullard and Haff-Paluck reconnected. “This was when she was at COYO and I do know that she was very proud to have COYO members playing chamber music and being coached by Cleveland Orchestra members.”

When Haff-Paluck took a position at CIM, the two became faculty colleagues. “Chris created a whole new level of interaction with the Cleveland community because she felt that music was a catalyst for that,” Fullard said. “And particularly for audiences who do not have access to it. She wanted to make sure that everyone would be able to experience this quality of music making.

“She also did things face-to-face, not so much by making phone calls and sending emails, but going to visit the places and people she was interacting with. Because of that she made close friends and people trusted her.”

Fullard noted that all of Haff-Paluck’s visions about how to interact with the community were realized in Arts Renaissance Tremont. “ART is perhaps her most important legacy,” Fullard said. “She was excited about featuring musicians in the community, especially young artists, and about the honest sharing of beautiful music with other human beings. Those were her core values. It’s an honor for Cavani to be able to continue her vision and to mark ART’s 30th anniversary year by celebrating Chris’s life.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 19, 2022.

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