

Arts Renaissance Tremont presents Burning River Brass: A holiday tradition

By Mike Telin



According to [HISTORY.com](https://www.history.com) “The Renaissance was a fervent period of European cultural, artistic, political and economic “rebirth” following the Middle Ages. Generally described as taking place from the 14th century to the 17th century, the Renaissance promoted the rediscovery of classical philosophy, literature and art.”

Founded in 1991 with a mission to enhance the quality and diversity of life in Tremont by providing the fine arts with a greater presence in its neighborhood, Arts Renaissance Tremont has played an important role in creating community and fostering a greater appreciation for the arts through accessible artistic programs.

Although the organization has experienced some setbacks over the past few years, taking a cue from that period in history and their own name, Arts Renaissance Tremont (ART) will return to its founding home, Pilgrim Church UCC, to launch its 34th season with a performance by Burning River Brass on Friday, December 19 at 7:00. The concert is free.

During a recent Zoom call, current ART board president and executive director Erica Brenner said that after the untimely passing of ART’s founder Chris Haff-Paluck on April 25, 2020, the Cavani Quartet stepped up to the plate and kept the series going. But when their careers took them out of town, they were not able to continue.

“One of the things that’s allowing us to bill this concert as a celebratory restart is that for the past four years the series took place at St. Wendelin’s which is a beautiful space that they generously gave us,” Brenner said. “Yet in so many ways Chris created the series with Pilgrim Church in mind for the way the seating surrounds the performers. So in a

sense, we feel like we're coming back to our roots and building for the future. And that is what the launch of the 34th season is all about."



Brenner (left) said that she has been overwhelmed by the enthusiastic conversations she has had with people who are thrilled that ART is not going away.

"Rev. Dr. George R. Graham and facilities manager Katherine Schultz at Pilgrim Church and the Church congregation are just thrilled about this. Pastor George often talks about how Pilgrim really is a community center and how they want to enhance that. And ART very much fits that vision."

Brenner is grateful for the number of young people who have signed on to serve as board members. "Many of them are artists and people who live in the community along with people who bring a broader perspective to the table, such as a psychologist, an arts administrator, and an accountant. So people have been stepping up and coming together to create something new."

A surprising turn of events came when Brenner told percussionist and Burning River Brass co-founder, Feza Zweifel, that the future of the ART series was uncertain. "His enthusiasm for keeping ART going was infectious and it made me excited about the future."



Why was Zweifel (left), who has taken over the reins as ART's artistic director, so passionate about keeping the series alive? "The series gave Burning River Brass our start," he said during that same Zoom conversation.

"I was at CIM with Chris Haff-Paluck. But fast-forward a bit — and this was after she started ART — she heard that my wife Heather and I along with some local friends were going to start Burning River Brass. She was in school with and knew all the original members of the group. So she graciously offered us our debut concert. We started off that year with two concerts, then we went to four, and then to eight. Then we went on to record seven CDs and tour all over the country and go to Taiwan. So this series has always had a fond place in my heart."

Zweifel said that he's having fun being part of a concert series in a creative role. "I couldn't be more excited to be involved with somebody like Erica, who has such industry experience, not just as a musician, but also in the production part of making things happen, along with recording and video. She's also somebody that I've known since 1989 and always had a connection with."

After the first concert of the new "Renaissance" season on December 19 by Burning River Brass, the music continues on Sunday, March 1, 2026 at 3:00 pm with "The ART of Influence" in which students who are now professional musicians share the stage with their teachers for an inspiring concert illuminating the tradition of mentorship and music.

"Rich King joined the Cleveland Orchestra horn section in 1988 and he's taught at CIM all these years," Zweifel said. "And one of his students, Megan Guegold, is also in the horn section. Then there's Tom Sherwood and Tanner Tanyeri who are both in the Orchestra's percussion section. Tanner studied with Tom at University of Michigan."

On Sunday, May 17, 2026 at 3:00 pm, in A Legacy of ART: Honoring Chris Haff-Paluck, ART alums perform a tribute concert to Chris, honoring her passion for welcoming all to experience great music. Performers will include the Amici String Quartet, guitarist Jason Vieaux, and The Cleveland Orchestra Double Bass Quartet.

Although serving in an administrative role is new to Zweifel, he's happy to be working with Erica Brenner. "I can play timpani in front of a huge audience but I can't talk — especially in front of new board people that I'm just getting to know. But Erica does that with ease — she knows what she's doing."

Published on ClevelandClassical.com December 11, 2025

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