

The Legacy of ART: a conversation with cellist Ralph Curry

by Mike Telin



Founded by Chris Haff Paluck 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.

Since her passing on April 25, 2020, the organization has experienced some setbacks, but this season,

Arts Renaissance Tremont (ART) has returned to its founding home at Pilgrim Church UCC, and launched its 34th season.

On Sunday, May 17 at 3:00 pm, the organization will present “A Legacy of ART: Honoring Chris Haff Paluck.” Performers include the Amici String Quartet, guitarist Jason Vieaux, and The Cleveland Orchestra Bass Quartet, and violinist Jason Yu. The concert is free.

To learn more about the event, I caught up with Cleveland Orchestra and Amici String Quartet cellist Ralph Curry, who had the pleasure of knowing Haff Paluck since they were freshman at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

“I basically knew Chris my entire adult life. And I remember that even as a student she was always willing to jump in and help do anything that needed to be done,” Curry said during a telephone conversation.

After spending time in the New York Philharmonic, the Colorado Philharmonic, and the Detroit Symphony, Curry returned to Cleveland to join the cello section of The Cleveland Orchestra. “I met up with Chris a few years later when she was working at CIM. We didn’t socialize, but we were certainly friendly every time we saw each other.”

Curry became aware of ART soon after Haff Paluck founded the series in 1991. “Chris saw the series as an opportunity for the excellent players in town to play in an acoustically good situation. “The Amici played all of the Beethoven quartets over a period of seven concerts. Before that we probably played on the series over a dozen times,” he recalled.

Why did musicians enjoy playing on the series? “First, those of us who love to play chamber music had very few opportunities to play anywhere at all. Second, it’s a wonderful audience, especially during the time we were working on the Beethoven quartets. People realized that this was a pretty rare opportunity to hear one, all-Beethoven program a year played by the same group, and to watch the development of the quartets. We also built a pretty nice fan base — we saw the same people every year and we always had a wonderful crowd.

Curry described the ART audience as a musical community within the community of Cleveland itself. “People knew there were going to be excellent performances by local musicians, so it was a real showcase for those of us who were working in town. And it’s just a really nice place to play. I’m so happy to see that the series is continuing, and we’re very happy to be back at Pilgrim.”

With the retirement of Cleveland Orchestra and Amici violinist Takako Masame, Curry said they were fortunate to have Mari Sato, who spent many years with the Cavani Quartet, join the group.

“She’s been a wonderful addition and has brought an infusion of new ideas. We were playing quartets from an orchestral viewpoint perhaps, and Mari has the experience of playing solely chamber music for her entire professional career. It’s been refreshing to have her join us.

On Sunday, the Amici will commemorate the life of Chris Haff Paluck with a performance of Samuel Barber's *String Quartet*.

“We were working on an all-American program, and that piece seemed to be the perfect tribute to Chris. It's so well-known because the middle movement is what Barber turned into a full string orchestra piece, the *Adagio for Strings*. It's totally different in the quartet version: it's much more intimate and absolutely gripping. We're really happy that we're able to play it as a tribute to Chris. She was one of the great champions of our quartet.”

When asked if he had any final thoughts, Curry said, “We miss Chris tremendously. She had a passion for her work, not only through the series in Tremont, but also for what she was doing at CIM for the students — finding opportunities for them to play in various places. Chris made sure that we all had places to perform. Her passing was a really big loss for the musical community.”

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