

Ohio State director finds harmony in violin, ethics

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- Aaron Yarmel is a violinist with the Newark-Granville Symphony Orchestra and an associate director at Ohio State University.
- Inspired by his violinist mother, Yarmel began playing the instrument at age 5.
- He holds degrees in violin performance and philosophy from several prestigious institutions.
- Yarmel balances his career in higher education with performing in various musical groups.

NEWARK – He plays with an exceptional community of musicians.

“I started studying the violin at the age of 5, and violin-related activities quickly became the major focus of my life,” Aaron Yarmel said. “My mother is a violinist, and she was my first musical influence. In some cases, parents sign their children up for lessons and subsequently push them to practice. In my case, listening to my mother play the violin – at home and in concerts – inspired me to ask if I could take violin lessons.

“When I wasn’t playing the violin, I was reading – Tolstoy and Dante were my two biggest literary fascinations as a child – spending time outside with friends and studying the animals at a local pond.

“I always knew I would do something intellectual and something violin-related,” he said. “But I mistakenly assumed I would be first and foremost a professional violinist with intellectual side-projects – not the other way around.”

Today, Yarmel is a violinist with the Newark-Granville Symphony Orchestra – and associate director of the Center for Ethics and Human Values at Ohio State University.

“While the violin will always be a crucial part of what makes my life meaningful, I realized in college that philosophy is the discipline that can give me the tools to interrogate the questions that actually keep me up at night,” he said.

Yarmel, 37, grew up in Rochester, New York, graduated from high school there, the Eastman School of Music majoring in violin performance as a student of the late Zvi Zeitlin, earned a Master of Science from the London School of Economics’ Department of Logic, Philosophy, and Scientific Method, then a master’s and doctorate in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“My main career path has been, and continues to be, in higher education, but I’ve never stopped performing,” he said. “I played with two bands when

I lived in London. And throughout my doctoral studies, I performed with a number of professional orchestras in the Midwest, as well as chamber music groups, baroque music ensembles and contemporary music ensembles. When I was hired by Ohio State to be the associate director of the Center for Ethics and Human Values, I was hoping I would find a way to continue making music in Ohio. NGSO is a valuable part of this. It allows me to play wonderful music with excellent people who have opened many doors for me in the music community.”

Susan Larson is executive director of the Newark-Granville Symphony Orchestra.

“Aaron is an exceptional violinist who never ceases to amaze me,” Larson said. “He advances the NGSO’s mission through our outreach programs, performing with the Denison University Choirs, serving as concertmaster for Handel’s Messiah and engaging young audiences through our Tunes & Tales library concerts. His commitment to both education and music is evident in everything he does. We are fortunate to have him.”

Yarmel responded: “My career in higher education means I don’t need to rely on music to make a living, so I have the privilege of being selective about which groups I play with. The most important criterion is that I will only play with a group if I enjoy collaborating with the people in it, and NGSO has an exceptional community of musicians.”

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