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NOTEWORTHY/Chestnut Hill LOCAL by Michael Caruso for 12/7/2006

Donald Nally will lead his newly formed choir, The Crossing, in a program of Christmas music on Friday, December 22, at 8 p.m. in the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, located at 8855 Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill.

Nally's absence from the local choral music scene has been sorely felt. He was the first choral conductor since Michael Korn's death in August of 1991 to dominate not just the region's choral community but to make his musical presence felt outside the sometimes limited confines of choir music. Nally was the artistic director of the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia as well as the music director of the Opera Company of Philadelphia Chorus and the music director/choirmaster of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in center city Philadelphia.

At St. Mark's, Nally presided over a music program that boasted as its centerpiece a performance of a setting of either the Latin Ordinary of the Roman Catholic Mass or an Anglican Communion Service in English. His tenure at the Choral Arts Society was marked by numerous local premieres of modern choral music as well as the establishment of a standard of technical perfection and interpretive integrity rarely matched and never surpassed in recent local musical history. His work with the Opera Company Chorus was noteworthy for the theatrical vitality of the ensemble's singing.

Since his departure from Philadelphia, Nally has worked as chorus director for the Welsh National Opera in Cardiff, Wales, preparing the opera company's choir for numerous productions as well as for individual concert appearances. He has also guest conducted throughout the country, including in Minneapolis, where I caught up with him just prior to Thanksgiving Day. He mentioned that his new choir, The Crossing, is taking the initial steps to incorporate itself as a non-profit organization, a move that is good news for local lovers of choral music and fans of Nally's peerless musicianship.

"We want to keep it simple, though," he assured, "because we want to be able to focus on doing what we really love doing -- singing the music we love." Nally pointed out that the Internet, through the ubiquitous employment of e-mails, has enabled small, new ensembles such as The Crossing to build up an audience base with little or no expense.

"Hopefully," he continued, "this will allow us to plan in advance the programming of a season of three or four concerts. Right now, we're really forced to wait until 16 or so singers are available on a given date and then we can make specific plans for that one concert. But we don't want to set up a large organization because we want to direct most of our budget to the singers."

Nally said that he hoped that local audiences would be drawn to the December 22 program at Chestnut Hill Presbyterian on the strength of the reputation The Crossing has already built, even though the choir is so newly formed.

"I hope people will come," he said, "knowing the quality of what we do and trusting that our program of familiar and unfamiliar music will express the wonder, mystery and joy of the season presented in a

contemporary voice. I don't want our choir to function as a museum, only performing older music and well-known works. I often set out to a music store and purchase countless new scores. Some are good, some won't work for us, but I'm always looking for something new that can be paired with music that is more familiar or even new settings of familiar texts or carols. I hope our audience trusts us and will join us in enjoying and embracing the holiday."