

46° Mostly Cloudy  
Forecast »

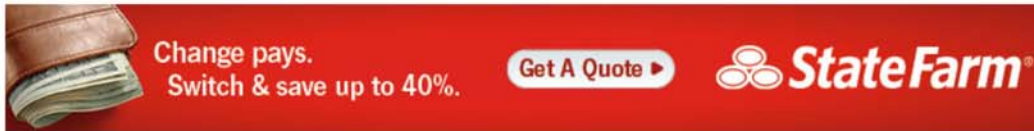
philly.com

Monday, April 22, 2013

Subscriber Services | The Inquirer | DAILY NEWS

Home | News | Sports | Entertainment | Business | Food | Lifestyle | Health | Marketplace | 🔍

TRENDING GOSSIP TV MOVIES ART ATTACK MUSIC THINGS TO DO OUT &amp; ABOUT EVENTS GAMES COMICS HOROSCOPES TICKETS



Change pays.  
Switch & save up to 40%. [Get A Quote ▶](#) **State Farm**

## Piffaro, Crossing choir take different routes to seasonal joy

David Patrick Stearns, *Inquirer Classical Music Critic*

POSTED: Monday, December 24, 2012, 3:01 AM

Joy is the destination emotion this time of year. And the pressure to get there is enormous, which is where Christmas concerts come into our lives.

Two weekend programs intelligently attacked the problem from opposite directions: Piffaro the Renaissance Band took the left-brain route Saturday at the Trinity Center in a Germanic program with fine program notes and lighting levels that allowed you follow translations from Latin and German when guest soprano Laura Heimes was singing.

On Friday, the Crossing choir at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Chestnut Hill was a right-brain concert full of mystery and candlelit atmosphere. As the chorus unexpectedly moved to different parts of the church, you had to experience the music more intuitively. Even transitional moments were accompanied by quiet ambient chimes, telling you to keep your brain turned on.

"The Crossing@Christmas"; program included near-classics Bo Holten's *First Snow*, John Tavener's *Mother and Child*, and Samuel Barber's organ treatment of "Silent Night." The danger with joy-inducing music is being lulled into happy sameness. That will never happen with Tavener's straightforward word settings, ending with a Hindu temple gong that Crossing artistic director Donald Nally employed with the theatricality of a seasoned opera conductor.

Einojuhani Rautavaara's *Canticum Mariae Virginis* was the best of all, maintaining momentum with amiable canonic writing in which technical functions and exterior musical description were one and the same. Penn faculty composer James Primosch, whom I don't usually associate with choral music, generated much magic with *spirally ecstatically*, to e.e. cummings' poem.

*Stars*, a setting of Sara Teasdale verse with composer Eriks Esenvalds at his most openhearted, began and ended the concert with tuned water glasses to suggest the voices wafting into the infinite.

Piffaro's *Frohliche Weihnachten!* was dominated by Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), though the lesser-known works by Jacob Handl (1550-1591) were bigger discoveries, his *Mirabile mysterium* having great emotional depth and an expressive range sitting on the cusp of change, when ethereal polyphonic writing gave way to the emotionally charged baroque period.

Heimes was a pleasure to hear, with a low-vibrato voice and stylistic assurance, though Piffaro itself didn't have its best night, a reminder of how easily one takes for granted the group's typical mastery of truly arcane instruments.

Contact music critic David Patrick Stearns at [dstearns@phillynews.com](mailto:dstearns@phillynews.com).

Be part of  
one of the most



in the country!

Lead Supporter  
**Bank of America**

[Advertise Here](#)

### Entertainment Today

#### Latest Entertainment Stories

- 3 Doors Down bassist charged in fatal crash
- Dancing with Philadelphia Stars finds its winners
- 'From the Mixed-Up Files' author E.L. Konigsburg dies
- GLAAD honors Clinton
- Two TV dramas will keep viewers guessing
- [More Entertainment »](#)