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Volcanic eruption of sound at Hill's St. Paul's Church

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by **Michael Caruso**

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Chestnut Hill, presented a Choral Evensong Sunday, Nov. 17, in which the musical offerings leaned heavily in the direction of modern works more often performed by choirs specializing in that repertoire. Despite the challenging nature of the scores that were programmed, parish music director Zachary Hemenway, organ scholar Joseph Russell and the adult choir offered exemplary performances of every piece on the roster.

The afternoon service got underway with Russell's theatrically potent rendition of Maurice Durufle's "Prelude from his Suite." The pedal pipes of the parish's magnificent Aeolian-Skinner organ literally rumbled as the music menacingly rose from what sounded like a volcanic eruption, almost bursting the church's stone walls. The rendition was a powerful reminder of just how splendid an instrument this organ truly is.

Entering the sanctuary from the labyrinth at the back of the church, the choir sang James MacMillan's Introit, "O sing unto the Lord a new song." The voices of the choir's women floated the initial presentation of the music's theme, with the men joining in to provide a full chromatic harmonization beneath the principal melody. The music caught the feel of the sun setting in the west on dark afternoons in

Scotland, the composer's homeland.

Hemenway led the choir in Bruce Neswick's setting of Psalm 96: "O sing unto the Lord a new song," followed by an expressive rendition of Grayston Ives' austere and even astringent setting of the "Magnificat" (My soul doth magnify the Lord) and a sweeter reading of his gentler scoring of the "Nunc Dimittis" (Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace). The afternoon's final major work was William Mathias' anthem, "As truly as God is our Father." Hemenway elicited performances that were technically assured and interpretively convincing.

ADVENT CHORAL VESPERS

Ever the busy musician, Hemenway will accompany an Advent Choral Vespers at Old St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, 4th & Walnut Streets, Society Hill, Sunday, Dec. 1, 4 p.m. Chestnut Hill tenor William Linn will join him under the direction of Normand Gouin, music director at Old St. Joe's. For directions and parking details, call **215-923-1733**.

VIVALDI OF VENICE

Valentin Radu brought his Camerata Ama Deus to Chestnut Hill's Episcopal Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Friday, Nov. 8, for "Antonio di Venezia: Vivaldi Treasures." The program focused exclusively on music composed by Antonio Vivaldi, the Italian Baroque master who lived and worked in Venice. Along with the works of Bach and Handel, Vivaldi's music has come to epitomize the fashion of classical music from the early 17th century into the middle of the 18th.

The program featured five concertos and two sinfonias, displaying the broad scope of instrumentation that characterized Vivaldi's output. The evening's opening work was the Concerto for Strings "Alla rustica" and featured admirable playing in the two fast outer movements marked Presto and Allegro. However, there were serious problems of ensemble during the middle Adagio as well as more than a handful of digital mistakes from harpsichordist Bronwyn Fix-Keller.

Eve Friedman was the exemplary soloist in the "Concerto for Flute in F major." Even though there was a little pulling and tugging of tempo between soloist and conductor during the second movement Largo, with Friedman valiantly trying to give the music the lilt Vivaldi wanted, both fast outer movements showcased Friedman's refined tone and eloquent phrasing.

Paul Miller was the splendid soloist in the "Concerto for Viola d'Amore in D minor." Linda Kistler also triumphed as the violin soloist in the "Autumn" Concerto from "The Four Seasons," Vivaldi's most acclaimed score and certainly one of the most famous works from the entire Baroque era. Sarah Davol played exquisitely in the "Concerto for Oboe in D minor."

Only the "Sinfonia No. 1 in C major" and the "Sinfonia No. 2 in G major," both scored without a soloist, received unsatisfying renditions. Tempos were flaccid, and ensemble was unsettled.

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