
CHESTNUT HILL LOCAL

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by **Michael Caruso**

SAN FRANCISCO BOYS

The San Francisco Boys Chorus paid a visit to Philadelphia's Roman Catholic Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul Saturday, July 15. Led by its director, Ian Robertson, the choir sang at the Cathedral Basilica's Vigil Mass and then performed a concert afterward. Accompanying the choir and congregation during Mass at the Cathedral's huge but dilapidated pipe organ was Zachary Fritsch-Hemenway, music director of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Chestnut Hill.

The chorus, which grew out of the San Francisco Opera, opened its concert with a lithe and lively performance of Antonio Vivaldi's "Laudamus Te." Particularly impressive was the crisp delineation of the consonants of the Latin text, the varied dynamics and the tonal balance between the higher and lower registers of the boys. The trebles and altos sang with memorable clarity while the tenors and basses offered a warmly resonant foundation for the upper lines.

In a choice of repertoire that was delightfully "déjà vu" for me, the chorus next sang John Ireland's "Magnificat" and "Nunc Dimittis," the traditional settings from Anglican Choral Evensong regularly heard at both St. Paul's and St. Martin's Episcopal Churches in Chestnut Hill. Hearing the music performed by a boy's choir with especially strong trebles and altos gave the reading a feeling of historical authenticity. The timbre of the singing recalled the link between Evensong and the ancient liturgies of Vespers and Compline through an interpretation of exceptional lyricism.

The program's most unusual work was "Messe des Pecheurs de Villerville" (The Mass for the Fishermen of Villerville). The score was composed in 1881 by Gabriel Faure and his former student, Andre Messager. Faure composed the "Gloria," "Sanctus" and "Agnus dei" while Messager wrote the opening "Kyrie" and "O Salutaris." All five movements speak in the pastel tones of late French Romanticism, and all were sung with secure flexibility and eloquent lyricism by the chorus' trebles and altos.

Equally fine renditions were given to Cesar Franck's "Panis Angelicus," a splendid antiphonal combination of the spirituals "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Deep River," Aaron Copland's arrangements of "Shall We Gather at the River" and "The Gift to Be Simple" and the Hebrew song, "Al Shlosha," which brought the concert to a satisfying close.

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