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## The Crossing at Christmas 12/21/2012

- Posted by [Sharon Torello](#) on December 22, 2012 at 2:00pm
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Hundreds of people filled the sanctuary at St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Chestnut Hill and as friendly, jovial, greetings were replaced by respectful silence in the candle lit sanctuary, it was abundantly clear that this would be no ordinary concert. Pure, heavenly tones emanated from the rear of the church. The [Crossing Choir](#) is known for the immense talent of their vocalists and they were capable of producing these notes, but as they continued without a breath it became clear that the source was not the human voice. It was, instead, tuned water glasses. The choir slowly joined the tones with their voices and the spiritual journey began.

Program notes were included but I opted to ditch them and just let the music take over my mind and body. The darkened space, masterful performances, and spiritual selection of music sent me to another place like no other concert that I can recall. Even though my eyes were shut for much of the concert, peeks revealed subtle changes in dramatic lighting that enhanced the mood for the different works. The audience recognized that

applause would be very disruptive, and music director, Donald Nally's, use of various serene transitions between pieces encouraged that respectful silence. Percussionist, Michael Sparhuber, skillfully provided those transitions via tuned water glasses, chimes, bells, and other instruments. Organist, Scott Dettra, emerged in a dramatic call/response with the choir in the rear of the church just before intermission. The choir sang with such clarity and precision that at one point I recalled the Greek myth of the Sirens and thought "This must be the music that drove mortals to dash their ships upon the rocks".

As they say, the devil is in the details, and the Crossing Choir went to extraordinary lengths to remove distractions and focus the audience on the music. For example, prior to the concert they removed all of the pew and kneeling cushions in an attempt to liven the acoustics. Then there were even smaller details like turning off the organ when it was not in use, thus eliminating a small amount of white noise from the sanctuary. I suspect they would have stopped the traffic on the local streets if that were possible.

Though the works in the program were centered on the birth of Christ, the contemplative selections, meditative environment, and zen-like transitions resulted in a programming masterpiece that transcended individual beliefs. The intimate, yet public, environment that the choir created provided the freedom to explore very personal emotions while also experiencing a feeling of connection to others. The outward show of emotion from other audience members demonstrated that I was not alone in this journey.

The heart felt standing ovation and large numbers who lingered to thank the musicians at the reception was just a small gesture to recognize a memorable experience. Bravi to all who were involved. Next year this concert will be marked on my calendar far in advance.

*Disclaimer: This article is an observation from the viewpoint of a "regular member" of the audience, not a critical review.*

Here are a few previous blogs about the Crossing Choir in case you'd like to find out about their more typical concert formats:

[Half-Crossed](#)


[Workshop](#)

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