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NOTEWORTHY/Chestnut Hill LOCAL by Michael Caruso for 8/31/2006

It's taken a few years, but many of the movers and shakers of the local classical music scene have come to recognize the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill as one of Greater Philadelphia's premiere concert venues.

Five years ago, the church located "at the top of the hill" undertook a substantial structural renovation that included a full restoration of its principal sanctuary and the installation of a new neo-classical pipe organ built by the Mander Company of London, England. The sanctuary is now regarded as a choice spot for both choral and instrumental concerts and the organ is considered one of the gems of the entire region.

Interestingly, two other Chestnut Hill churches lay claim to equally admired organs: the Episcopal Churches of St. Paul and St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

Chestnut Hill Presbyterian will be the site of a choral concert featuring *The Crossing* on Friday, September 8, at 8 p.m. Donald Nally will conduct the choir in only its second concert and Scott Dettra will accompany at the organ.

Donald Nally's name is one of the few that local music lovers mention in the same breath as that of the late Michael Korn, the founder of both the Philadelphia Singers and the Bach Festival of Philadelphia. When Nally departed our fair town several years ago to take up the post of choral director of the Welsh National Opera in Cardiff, he created a void in Philadelphia's choral community. He had taken over the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia after its artistic reputation and financial stability had been seriously compromised during the final years of the tenure of the ensemble's founder, and he had assumed the direction of the music program at St. Mark's Episcopal Church on Locust Street in center city Philadelphia following clashes between his predecessor and the parish's rector. By the time of his departure, Nally had re-established the Choral Arts Society's position as a national leader in the cause of new choral music as well as created one of the region's finest church music programs at St. Mark's Church. At both positions, Nally has been successfully succeeded by Matthew Glandorf.

Nally resigned his post as choral director of the Welsh National Opera as of June 4, although he will return to conduct individual concerts. He explained that he considered that he was satisfied with the work he had accomplished with and for the company and simply felt the need to move on to a new challenge.

"We parted happily," he assured, "and I'm looking forward to returning to conduct several programs there this fall. But it was time for me to

take a break, to step back and evaluate my career and my life, to take some time off. The last number of years in my life have been extremely driven. Opera is a demanding art form. It can be fun, but it's only rarely fully satisfying. I feel that I need some time off to consider my future."

One part of that future that seems more than certain is Nally's love of choral music. Add to that his long time friendship with Mark Anderson, the organist and music director of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill, as well as the network of singers throughout the country and even the world who consider Nally a mentor as well as a maestro and who are willing to travel great distances to sing with him, and the concert on September 8 seems both fortuitous and inevitable.

"Mark is a long time friend," Nally said, "and he generously offered his church as the site for our concert. The presence of the church's wonderful organ and Scott Dettra (former organist at St. Mark's) to play it did determine some of the choices for the program.

We use the organ a lot in the second half. It would be a pity not to." The program features Bruno Bettinello's Madrigals for Five Voices of 2004, Thomas Ades' January Writ of 2000, James MacMillan's Te Deum of 2002, Judith Weir's Two Human Hymns of 1994, and Luigi Nono's Where Is Your Brother? : For the Disappeared of Argentina.

"The MacMillan was composed for Queen Elizabeth's jubilee celebration for soprano solo, choir and organ and it's 'classic' MacMillan -- high melodies and huge chords at the organ. It captures the idea of the awesome."

Nally pointed out that Bettinelli was the teacher of both Claudio Abbado and Riccardo Muti as well as pianist Maurizio Pollini. His Madrigals were composed during the 1990s when he was in his eighties and evoke the style of the baroque master Claudio Monteverdi through the prism of the 20th century. The Ades is a setting of a text drawn from "Ecclesiastes," traditional but virtuosic. Nono's work speaks of the abduction of countless opponents of the regime in Argentina while the Weir is cast in the form of a traditional English anthem. Tickets are \$20 for general admission and \$10 for students and seniors. They are available at the door. For more information, visit www.crossingchoir.com.