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A season for singing out



SCOTT SUCHMAN / Washington National Opera

The Opera Philadelphia season opens with Verdi's "Nabucco"; opening night will be simulcast at Independence Mall.



GALLERY: A season for singing out

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What was once the weakest link in Philadelphia's classical music season is now collectively walking off with the unofficial award for enterprising programming. Yes, choral organizations have been gathering strength for years, and now offer all manner of postcards from the edge.

One can always count on the Crossing choir for concerts never previously heard or imagined, whether world premieres or music from distant realms, like Latvia. And at the opposite chronological end of the repertoire, Choral Arts Philadelphia has six concerts of Bach cantatas juxtaposed with such like-minded pieces as Heinrich Biber's *Rosary Sonatas*.

The Mendelssohn Club rolls out a big gun next spring with its premiere of Julia Wolfe's *Anthraxite Fields*, but in the more immediate future it continues on its collaboration-minded way, most significantly with the Kimmel Center organ. Even the Opera Company of Philadelphia is presenting a choral opera, *Svadba*, as an insert in its regular season. Meanwhile, no Philadelphia Orchestra music director has been as oriented toward choral music as

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Yannick Nézet-Séguin. His fall contribution is Nico Muhly's 2005 *Bright Mass*, heard here in its first performance in an orchestral version.

- David Patrick Stearns, *Inquirer* music critic

Fall Preview: Classical Music

The Crossing (Sept. 15, the Icebox at Crane Arts. www.crossingchoir.com) John Luther Adams - not to be confused with the composer of *Nixon in China* - has a major Philadelphia premiere with the Crossing choir, co-commissioner of his *Canticles of the Holy Wind*, an evening-length work that, typical of this Alaska-based composer, is inspired by weather, nature, and wildlife. The season is titled "Astralis," after the Wolfgang Rihm work the group sings Dec. 20.

Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia (Sept. 15 and 16, the Kimmel Center, 215-893-1999, www.chamberorchestra.org) The young Korean pianist HJ Lim created a sensation with an EMI recording debut of all 32 Beethoven piano sonatas. Still in her mid-20s, she makes her Chamber Orchestra debut leaving the Beethoven to music director Dirk Brossé (who leads the *Symphony No. 4*) and playing Mendelssohn's *Piano Concerto No. 1*.

Philadelphia Orchestra (Sept. 26 to 28, Kimmel Center, 215-893-1999, www.philorch.org) Nico Muhly and Ludwig van Beethoven? Maybe they're not the couple of the new century but they'll share the orchestra's opening subscription series - Muhly's piece serene and meditative, Beethoven's boisterously propulsive. How will that feel? We'll see.

'Nabucco

' (Sept. 27 to Oct. 6, the Academy of Music, 215-893-1018 or www.operaphila.org) Opera Philadelphia's *Nabucco* production promises to be retro and high-concept simultaneously - sets will have a 19th-century artificiality, but presented as a dreamy flashback. It's a way of addressing the dramaturgical creakiness that plagues Verdi's early-ish operas. The biggest challenge may be vocal: Verdi expected his singers to do *everything*. Opening night will be simulcast at Independence Mall.

Astral Artists (Sept. 28, the Perelman Theater, 215-735-6999 or www.astralartists.org) The evening brings together increasingly celebrated Latin American composers, with the Philadelphia premiere of Osvaldo Golijov's *Ayre* plus works by Astor Piazzolla, Alberto Ginastera, and Paquito D'Rivera that could send you tangoing into the night. Performers, drawn from Astral's young-artist roster, include harpist Bridget Kibbey and flutist Angel Hsiao.

'The Emperor of Atlantis' (Oct. 10 to 13, Curtis Opera Studio, 215-893-7902 or www.curtis.edu) Viktor Ullmann's



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