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Choral group, in debut, sings works seldom heard
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Only last week, choral-music Webcasts from the Utrecht Early Music Festival were enough to leave you in despair over ever hearing singing of that quality in Philadelphia. Then on Tuesday, something called The Crossing made its debut at St. Mark's church in Center City like an answered prayer.

The 15-member chorus sang a program of infrequently heard works written over the last 50 years – I'd encountered almost none of them before. Each was deeply worthwhile and, aside from some tentative chord tunings, superbly sung. Will it happen again? Yes, but we don't know when.

The concert was organized by former Philadelphian Donald Nally, once choral director of St. Mark's, the Opera Company of Philadelphia, and the Choral Arts Society. He has since migrated to the Welsh national opera, but missed his U.S. singers and colleagues enough to organize this handpicked group from Philadelphia, Washington and Chicago for intensive rehearsals and a single concert.

The program was fluid: The Fashionable Thomas Adès was promised but cut when other works needed more rehearsal. That's admirable. In a choral-depressed town like this, music is too often performed at any cost because it wouldn't otherwise be heard.

The program was a series of shortish pieces with texts ranging from long-established prayers to settings of verse from T.S. Elliot's *The four Quartets*, but arranged with an emotional temperature corresponding to the musical touchstones in the Roman Mass ("Kyrie," "Gloria," "Credo," etc.). Challenging works were positioned among more conservative, Anglican-steeped music by Herbert Howells and Gerald Finzi.

Among the surprises: North Dakota State University composer-conductor Edwin Fissinger (1920-1990) wrote a setting of the *Lux aeterna* that's nearly an out-of-body experience, with rhapsodic soprano solos going far afield of lush choral bedrock. *Bön*, a 1984 work by Swedish composer Thomas Jennefelt, was full of descriptive collage effects executed by the chorus with remarkable confidence.

Lamentations of Jeremiah by local composer Benjamin C.S. Boyle were written in two installments, 2003 and 2005, though lacking the pathos this text about profound loss usually inspires. The music observed the text more than embodying it. His cool sense of invention is puzzling, yet in ways that makes you want to hear it more.