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## **CANTICLES**

**Regal, Peaceful, Glorious**

**~review by Cosette Lyncheski**



Soprano Melanie Sarakatsannis

## **THE PHILADELPHIA CHORUS, Raquel Garcia, Artistic Director AT THE TRINITY CENTER FOR URBAN LIFE**

Regal, peaceful, and glorious are words that come to mind when I recall The Philadelphia Chorus CANTICLES. It was presented by Raquel Garcia, Artistic Director, on April 10, 2016. The afternoon focused on Mary, Mother of God. A beautifully written program note, by Joseph L Lombardi, S.J. of Saint Joseph's University's Philosophy Department, explained that while the Christian God has no gender, the personification of God is "Father" and "Son." Jesus' mother, Mary, becomes the representation of the feminine, maternal God. The repertoire of the afternoon was devoted to the beautiful music dedicated to the Madonna.

One of the elements that surprised me about the Chorus is how versatile they are able to sound in their performances. The pieces varied from spirituals to Poulenc. The program opened with "To the Mothers in Brazil (Salve Regina)" arranged by Gunnar Eriksson. It's a jazzy piece with lots of movement, reminding listeners that it's not only children who need their mothers. The next piece was "Ave Maria," by Daniel Elder. There are many songs devoted to this prayer but this arrangement has to be one of my favorites. Francis Poulenc's "Sabat Mater," translated to "The Mother Stood," was probably the most interesting of the evening. The chorus and orchestra mastered the quick changes in style and mood. Poulenc's work is very difficult to perform due to such varied keys, dissonance, and range. A few of the twelve movements expressed chaos that is associated with trials of our lives and it reminds the listeners that life is not always easy. The piece was inspired by the passing of Poulenc's friend. The twelve movements make up a full story and one shouldn't focus on just one or two movements.

The featured soloist for "Sabat Mater" was soprano, Melanie Sarakatsannis. She is an acclaimed opera singer and brought a wonderful element to the already beautiful performance. Every note that came from Sarakatsannis' mouth was pure bliss. She had the audience enchanted with her every sound. Every word was expressive and had a purpose. From the smiles on her face during the performance, it seemed as though she enjoyed the music as much as the audience did.

The second half began with a spiritual, "Motherless Child," by Adolphus Hailstork, featuring baritone John Miles. Miles transitioned seamlessly from chorus member to soloist with his booming voice sailing over the rest. "Magnificat" by John Rutter was easily my favorite performance of the evening. I can still hear the performance in my head because of Rutter's memorable melodies. The piece has seven unique movements devoted to Mary's reaction to being chosen to bear the Son of God. The work featured several soloists from the chorus including Paige Fleming, Megan Keiser, Justin Gonzalez, Barbara Purdom, Sara Wade, and Kristin Kalbach. Each soloist was unique and added a different element to each movement. The performance was powerful, touching, and reverent.

The evening wouldn't be complete without the impressive orchestra, comprised of piano, synthesizer, organ, french horns, trumpets, trombones, tuba, timpani, and percussion. Throughout the performance, it was exciting to check in with the musicians to see true masters of their craft. I particularly loved watching Benjamin Leiby on organ, hard at work.

The most important person at this performance was Raquel Garcia, Artistic Director. As conductor, she led the chorus through the journey of each work. Garcia was very in tune to the music that surrounded her, quickly correcting any slip-ups. During the a capella "Ave Maria," I could see her reminding the choir not to fall flat when the pitch was slipping. Garcia was so hypnotic in her movement that one could feel the emotion just by looking at her. It is no wonder that the choir sounded so passionate and expressive - it is because of her guidance. The music danced as she danced, and the music cried as she cried.

The 67 singers and 16 musicians clearly put in a lot of effort to make CANTICLES a success. Their harmonious sound is one that should not be missed if given the chance to see them perform. From the opening note to a surprise encore featuring standout tenor, Justin Gonzalez, the chorus had the audience transported. Raquel Garcia and The Philadelphia Chorus' next endeavor is an afternoon of solos and duets on September 25, 2016. Congratulations to Raquel Garcia and The Philadelphia Chorus on their presentation of CANTICLES and I hope to enjoy their future performances with them.

CANTICLES  
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Cosette Lyncheski is a Wagner College Theatre/Speech alum. She has had experience as a director, lighting tech, hair/makeup asst., and costume designer. She has studied dance and theater criticism as well as dialects and stage combat. Starting at age 5, she has been in 35+ productions with companies such as Spring Lake Theatre and The Strand. She has also appeared on screen in *Orange is the New Black*, *Annie*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, and many more.

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