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# arp's Studio 6

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**Celebrate the Season  
The Philadelphia Chorus**

**JOYFUL SONGS**

**Ring Out**

**~By Shannon Agnew and Ginger Agnew**



The tradition of choral music is alive, well, and thriving this holiday season in the talented hands of The Philadelphia Chorus, under artistic director Raquel Garcia. The rafters rang at their winter concert on December 13th, appropriately called JOYFUL SONGS, at the Trinity Center for Urban Life. If you missed the concert in Philadelphia, it is well worth journeying to Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square on December 16th to hear the exceptionally skilled ensemble masterfully present their repertoire. The concert earned the ensemble three incredibly deserved standing ovations.

The unseasonably warm Sunday afternoon brought family, friends, and music enthusiasts to the center to hear the joyful noises and stylistically diverse musical holiday treats. Displaying impressive musicianship, the chorus offered a beautiful selection of songs. Carefully researched program notes supplemented the evening with in-depth explanations of the musical elements and composer's backgrounds for the elucidation of audience members. Ten songs, ranging from magnificently lush carols in a more traditional style, impressionistic musical triumphs, pop and gospel infused songs, culminated in the stunning performance of the MASS IN BLUE. This blues/jazz infused mass featured Philadelphia's treasured tenor Justin Gonzalez.

From the first notes, there was also a boisterous celebration of the holiday season. The magnificent organ and rich textured vocal harmonies also captured a reverence for the times in which we live. The selections of music were ambitious. Each musician demonstrated a mastery of dynamics, syncopation, intonation, and musicality that radiated through the beautifully nuanced songs.

The first half of the concert featured six musical selections of impressionistic composition. These were grand, lush musical vocals over liturgical text, and more traditional and intimate choral carols in an old world style and sound. The first selections featured rotating soloists, giving each member a moment to shine and showcase his or her unique and skilled voice. Accompanists Judith Large and Benjamin Leiby masterfully switched between organ, grand piano, and synthesizer, creating a lush parade of sounds from flute to harp. Both executed intricate piano and organ passages with expression and ease, including PSALMS scored for four hand piano. Joined by percussionist Henry Eichman, the three wove an intricate musical

dialogue between the vocalists and instruments. Beginning grandly, the choir arched their first set exquisitely, journeying from grand organ to the expressive decorative piano bubbling under delicate vocals through to the beautifully sung A CEREMONY OF CAROLS (EXCERPTS).

The second set of the concert surprised and delighted listeners, as musicians Steve Beskrone on bass, Darryl Jackson on drums, and Brian Adamczyk on saxophone, joined the choir for the blues, pop, and jazz infused selection of songs. Demonstrating their vocal versatility, the choir swung, scatted, and celebrated the four musical selections in the second set with joy and talent. Notably, the dexterous voice and passion of tenor Aaron Jones sailed above the ensemble in his gospel solo in the selection WONDERFUL CHILD, earning a standing ovation. The epic musical undertaking MASS IN BLUE ended the evening, earning yet another standing ovation for the expressive mastery of soloist Justin Gonzalez. The ensemble, led by the dynamic Gonzalez, masterfully sculpted the sounds of the six jazz and blues movements of the piece. Each movement, building on the Chicago blues and New Orleans Jazz traditions, excited the crowd and infused the air with energy, appreciation and excitement. Listeners rewarded the musicians and singers with a three minute standing ovation at the end of the concert.

Raquel Garcia and The Philadelphia Chorus prepared a perfect selection. Song samplings from a multitude of styles provided something for everyone. Musical scholars can certainly appreciate the ensemble's mastery of harmony, dynamics, and blend. But one needs nothing but ears to enjoy the skillful presentation of these choral treasures. All who attend The Philadelphia Chorus concerts will feel brighter for having shared in the music.

I look forward to joining the Choir again for their spring concert on Sunday April 10th at 4:00 pm, featuring soprano Melanie Sarakatsannis. Tickets are available by phone at 610-352-3565 or online at [www.thephiladelphiachorus.org](http://www.thephiladelphiachorus.org).

JOYFUL SONGS  
THE PHILADELPHIA CHORUS  
Artistic Director Raquel Garcia  
PO Box 42735  
Philadelphia, PA 19101  
610-352-3565  
[www.thephiladelphiachorus.org](http://www.thephiladelphiachorus.org)  
**[www.thephiladelphiachorus.org](http://www.thephiladelphiachorus.org)**

*Coming in April*



Soprano Melanie Sarakatsannis



### **Ginger Agnew, M.Ed.**

Ginger L. Agnew, M. Ed. is listed in Directory of Pennsylvania Artists In Education with PA Council on the Arts as PAEP Artist. Ginger is a director, teaching artist, writer, actress, and photographer, who has been involved in many aspects of theater since the 1970s. In 1998 Ginger founded OFF Book Productions as director, theater educator, and producer of her own original plays. Ginger's theater education work extends to teen and adult coaching, headshot photography, and youth programs at Princeton University, Bryn Mawr College, Temple University and Philadelphia Arts Education Partnership. Currently Ginger works at Venice Island Performing Arts Center in Manayunk. Ginger appears in several episodes of PHILADELPHIA THE GREAT EXPERIMENT seen on ABC, and recently appeared on stage in A STOOP ON ORCHARD STREET in an extended run and tour and directed IF I WERE A DRAG QUEEN I WOULD BE FAMOUS a one woman show starring Shannon Agnew. Ginger has many directing credits to her name and on occasion still enjoys acting and singing as well. Favorite roles include Golde in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, Mabel in THE PAJAMA GAME, Berthe in PIPPIN, Ruth in PIRATES OF PENZANCE, Mrs. Sowerby in THE SECRET GARDEN, and Ruth in WORKING.

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