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## Music inspired by Protestant Reformation at Hill church

Posted on October 13, 2017 by Brendan Sample  
by Michael Caruso

Piffaro, the Renaissance Band, will present "Welcome the People: the Musical Legacy of the Reformation" Saturday, Oct. 21, at 7:30 p.m. in the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill. The program marks the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Germany by the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther. With the help of the acclaimed chorus, The Rose Ensemble, Piffaro will guide listeners through the first formative century of the Reformation and the music it inspired.

Piffaro co-director Robert Wiemkin explained that when Luther nailed his "95 Theses" to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, his action shattered the tradition of sacred liturgical music and laid the foundation for new works of sacred choral music.

"Luther was a great lover of music," Wiemkin said, "calling it the greatest treasure in the world after the Word of God. He, himself, penned some of the earliest of what became a Lutheran tradition of sing-able yet sophisticated hymns. The most recognized of these, of course, is 'Ein feste Burg' (A Mighty Fortress), sometimes called the 'battle cry of the Reformation.'"

Wiemkin explained that the program includes examples of the founding and early development of the chorale and hymn in the hands of such composers as Johann Walther, Adam Gumpelshaimer, Jakob Regnart. Michael Praetorius, Hans Leo Hassler, Melchior Franck and Stephen Mahu. A new original work by local composer Kile Smith will open the concert.

"In the program's second half," he said, "we'll celebrate the culmination of this artistic ferment in a reconstruction of a celebratory mass in grand style as it was practiced in German reformed churches in the early 17th century. Our model is the baptism of Prince Frederick of Wurttemberg and Barbara Sophia, Margravine of Brandenburg, which took place in Stuttgart in March, 1616."

The Rose Ensemble, founded in 1966 by artistic director Jordan Sramek, is a professional choir based in St. Paul, Minnesota. For ticket information, visit [www.piffaro.org](http://www.piffaro.org).

### BALLET X

When Christopher Gruits of East Falls took over the reins of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, one of his goals was to once again make the facility in West Philadelphia a center for modern ballet and dance. Along those lines, he invited Ballet X's artistic & executive director Christine Cox to offer local audiences a sampler of the company's regular season at the Wilma Theater in Center City.

That summary roster was performed last weekend in the Annenberg's classically modern Zellerbach Theater. Nearly all of its 936 seats were filled with dance lovers eager to experience three works from the troupe's repertoire. The show opened with "Gran Partita," with choreography by Jorma Elo; the show continued with "Malasangre," with choreography by Cayetano Solo; and it closed with "Big Ones," with choreography by Trey McIntyre. The Zellerbach's spacious stage and faultless sightlines provided Friday evening's audience with a splendid example of the company's artistic ingenuity and technical prowess.

Elo set "Gran Partita" to classical scores by Mozart, Berg and Bach. In each movement the choreography goes beyond mirroring the sound and shape of the music to express its inner motivations through gestures and movements that seem to flow naturally out of its sounds through the bodies of the dancers and then out into the theater.

In "Melasangre," Solo employs the quirk of having the men wear skirts and the women wear tights, dancing to Latin-inflected songs. McIntyre's "Big Ones" uses songs by Amy Winehouse to reveal throbbing emotions within the comings and goings of individual and group relationships.

In all three works, the dancers of Ballet X performed with mesmerizing energy, incredible precision of ensemble and an exemplary ability to communicate the concepts and feelings behind the choreography. Hubbard Street Dance Chicago will grace the Zellerbach stage Friday, Oct. 20, 8 p.m. and Saturday, Oct. 21, 2 p.m. Visit [www.annenbergcenter.org](http://www.annenbergcenter.org) for more information.

The Pennsylvania Ballet will dance Tchaikovsky's "The Sleeping Beauty" Oct. 12-22 in the Academy of Music. Visit [www.paballet.org](http://www.paballet.org).

### MAESTRO RETURNS

Yannick Nezet-Seguin, music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, returned to the ensemble's podium last weekend to conduct performances Oct. 6-8 in the Kimmel Center's Verizon Hall. The concerts marked the opening of the Philadelphians' regular season of subscription concerts. They also inaugurated the yearlong celebration of the Fred. J. Cooper pipe organ that graces Verizon Hall. Several of the season's programs will include renditions of major works for organ and orchestra.

Paul Jacobs, chairman of the organ department of New York City's Juilliard School of Music, was on hand to give the East Coast premiere of Wayne Oquin's "Resilience" for Organ and Orchestra. Composed in 2015 and lasting approximately 10 minutes, the score is at its best during its orchestral passages and not during its sections for either solo organ or organ and orchestra in ensemble. Oquin's writing for the solo instrument is little more than a series of basic chords for the hands enhanced by simplistic pedal work for the feet. Jacobs was given no opportunity to display either his acclaimed virtuosity or the instrument's plethora of tones.

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