Top classical concerts of the year

Violinist Janet Sung. Janet Sung performed a smooth, mellow Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' with the Pennsylvania Symphony Orchestra in September.

CLASSICAL

Executive Director Sheila Evans for snagging the group at more or less the last moment, and then finding funding support to keep ticket prices relatively low. (Phil Metzger)

Lehigh University Choral Arts Jewel in the Center of the World, Oct. 26

During the 8th through 15th centuries in the Andalusia region of southern Spain, Christians, Jews and Muslims forged a relatively stable coexistence, sharing each other's architecture, art, science and music. Lehigh University Choral Arts, directed by Steven Sametz, explored that unique confluence in a hauntingly beautiful program of music and song. Wonderful examples of cultural collision abounded, including Sametz's own arrangement of Psalm 114, with verses sung alternately in Hebrew and Latin. By layering Gregorian and medieval Jewish melodies and languages over each other, Sametz ultimately blurred the differences between them, magically making them one. The program also featured outstanding performances by the Philadelphia-based Takht ensemble Al-Bustan, a five-member group performing on both traditional Arabic instruments and conventional Western strings and Syrian soprano Lubana al Quntar. (Steve Siegel)

Vega String Quartet, Nov. 11 and 17

It took only a few bars of Beethoven's perhaps least-performed quartet, No. II, nicknamed "Serioso," for it to become evident at Zoelner Arts Center that the ensemble performing it, the Vega String Quartet, is a budding major talent in the world of chamber music. The youthful quartet is in residence at Emory University in Atlanta, and has a new first violinist, Domenic Salerno, son of Lehigh music professor Paul Salerno, who most have ended the concert with a buttonless shirt. The rest of the program included quartets of Mendelssohn and Shakhovskoy, confirming the group's powerful technique, impeccable ensemble and boundless musicianship. Vega returned to Zoelner the following week in a different program of music by Salerno, his friend, Czech composer Jan Jirasek, giving Vega an opportunity to show its musical flexibility as well. Chamber Music Society of Bethlehem, are you listening? (Phil Metzger)

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