

Boston Camerata

The Boston Camerata might have been born some 54 years ago, under the star of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, but it's hard to imagine a more perfect setting for its artistry than the Dumbarton Oaks music room. It was there Sunday — in candlelit Renaissance splendor, surrounded by tapestries and framed by marble arches — that the Camerata kicked off its newest Christmas program, a collection of the music of the Iberian Peninsula and the New World that the Camerata is calling "The Brotherhood of the Star." "Brotherhood" is the operative word here. As Music Director Emeritus Joel Cohen explained, the cultural riches of both of these regions derive their diversity from various races and religions.

The music flowed seamlessly, knitting Gregorian chant, 13th-century cantigas, Renaissance motets, 18th- and 19th-century foot-stomping indigenous celebrations, and 20th-century chants from Moroccan and Turkish Sephardic Jews into a many-colored tapestry that rivaled those on the walls. The six singers and four instrumentalists grouped and regrouped almost imperceptibly, and there was almost as much rhythm to the morphing from one piece to another as there was in the music itself.

Sections of the program were framed by readings of the familiar Christmas portion of the Gospel of Saint Luke and some wonderful declamatory reading of Spanish texts, and the program ended in an exuberant and ecstatic free-for-all on "Convidando Esta la Noche" by 17th-century Mexican composer Juan Garcia Zespiedes.

Cohen's comments emphasized the music's diversity. To my ears, what is so fascinating is how much these pieces have in common. They share a spirit grounded in a harmonic idiom, a melodic shape and a rhythmic energy that makes their Hispanic origin unmistakable. The Camerata's elegant performance highlighted and made accessible their pleasures.

— **Joan Reinthaler**