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A Look into Montclair Early Music Group's Joyeux Noël Christmas Concert



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MONTCLAIR, NJ - Held for the second time since 2019, Montclair Early Music Group's Joyeux Noël Christmas Concert occurred on Saturday, December 4, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Donning Medieval garb, volunteers from the group played French Christmas tunes, whose origins dated back to the 1500s.

The Joyeux Noël concert simulated the French court as closely as possible. In addition to the ensemble performing renditions of prominent medieval and renaissance-era French music, other entertainers such as jugglers, dancers, and storytellers were present. All volunteers were dressed in attire from the medieval/renaissance period. This served to further remain accurate to the era and enhance the experience of attendees.

Montclair Early Music is a nonprofit that aims to improve the community of Montclair by spreading early music. While the organization performs two major concerts per year, it also plays a role in providing schools and other local institutions with recorder lessons. The organization also offers lessons to individuals who would like to learn how to play the recorder or classical guitar.

President and founder, Julienne Pape, describes the organization as "a group of amateur musicians who play the recorder and other instruments... we are all volunteers; we have no staff. We are open to all levels of players, and we have classes for people who want to learn how to play the recorder or classical guitar. There's something about playing in small groups that's just different from playing in a large group." Additionally, in order to fine tune their skills, members of the organization meet on a weekly basis and rehearse.

"This organization is fairly unique in [the sense] that it does have string instruments. Most recorder medieval organizations are strictly recorders. This is different. It's nice to be a part of a different kind of organization presenting this level of music," described lead guitar player, Martin Brounstein.

Joyeux Noël's attendees were required to show proof of vaccination prior to attending the event. Upon entering, they remained seated in the church's pews to view the performance. Individuals of all ages were present at the concert.

Madame Anne Jure, a French teacher at Orange High School, brought a group of some of her students to the event. When asked about what her students gained from watching the concert, she stated, "I think this [was] a good opportunity for [my students] to be exposed to French culture and the Medieval times... to see what was going on... to learn about the music."

"I learned about different songs and clothes from the medieval times," her student, Doriane Nesmon added.

Montclair Early Music plans on organizing a similar event in the spring for Juneteenth. "We're going to premiere a new composition for recorder and orchestra," Pape stated regarding the upcoming event.