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Santa Claus arrives on fire truck — with gifts

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SANTA'S GREETINGS Kids and parents come out to greet Santa Claus and his friends during the Boca Raton Firefighter and Benevolent's 23rd annual Santa Toy Delivery throughout the city of Boca Raton. STAFF PHOTO/ERIC BOJANOWSKI

Lidia Gomez, 3, wearing her pink tutu, met Santa Claus on the driveway with her sister Natalia, 4. They were ready for his arrival on a fire engine, but dazzled just the same.

"Our neighbors did this last year and we loved it," said their mother, Karin, as the girls opened presents and posed with Saint Nick, Mrs. Claus and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. "What a memory they're making."

Santa was stargazing, too. "She told me she saw my movie, 'The Polar Express,'" he said from his seat in Rudolph II, hohohoing out the window before hitting the next stop on the list.

The 23rd annual Santa Toy Delivery by the Boca Raton Firefighter & Paramedic Benevolent made more than 120 stops with three sets of trucks over two days, Dec. 14 and 15, said Rich Rafalski. This was his third year as Santa Toy Delivery coordinator.

Some 538 presents were delivered, he added. Parents paid \$20 to have Santa and company arrive with wrapped presents they brought to a central location by the deadline. The fee included a photo opportunity. "The money hasn't changed in 10 years," Rafalski said.

Sometimes, more than one family stood by as the engine pulled up. Lyla

Sweeney joined Andrew and Ryan Vladimir in Palmetto Park Terrace, for instance. And Santa often drew a crowd. When that happened, Santa went over to personally deliver Christmas greetings, while his elves gave out miniature candy canes.

"Sometimes out-of-towners are there because they don't do this in their town," said firefighter/paramedic Andrea Entus, aka Mrs. Claus on Rudolph II.

Unexpected things happened, too. At one house, Santa handed off a crying baby to Mrs. Claus. That worked. Brownies turned up

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Festival of Arts Boca reveals headliner: It's Itzhak Perlman

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The closely guarded secret is out. Considered the music world's pre-eminent violinist, Itzhak Perlman will perform twice in March at the Festival of the Arts Boca.

He'll open the festival with Mendelssohn on March 6, then appear again March 9 in the Mizner Park Amphitheater in support of the CD, "Eternal Echoes: Song and Dances for the Soul" with Cantor Yitzhak Meir Helfgot, Hankus Netsky and the Klezmer Conservatory Band. They're on tour, and this will be the Florida premiere.

Is Perlman doing Jewish music?

"It's really an outreach show to introduce this music to a wider audience; this is significant music and don't take it lightly. It's not a nostalgia concert," Netsky said by phone from the New England Conservatory of Music, where he's chairman



PERLMAN

of contemporary improvisation, director of the Jewish Music Ensemble and founder and director of the Klezmer Conservatory Band.

Perlman not only plays in "Echoes," he banters on stage with Netsky. "My role is really emcee," Netsky said. "We have a conversation in front of the whole crowd on what this means to him and Cantor Helfgot, and what it means to be Jewish."

What will audiences hear? "A whole world of

traditional Eastern European Jewish music," Netsky said. Perlman's "father was a Yiddish speaker and Holocaust survivor from Poland. ... He grew up in Israel and was discovered and was [already] at Julliard at 11. Somehow this culture really stayed with him."

For his opening concert, the repertoire will be strictly classical, said Constantine Kitsopoulos, going into his fourth season as music director for the festival. He's also music director of the Queens Symphony and general director of Chatham Opera. "This is the first time we've worked together. I'm very excited about it," said Kitsopoulos, who made his debut with the New York Philharmonic in September.

He'll conduct the festival orchestra in an overture, then ex-

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OPINIONS & VIEWS

Christmas, here at last

This has been the longest pre-period Christmas that I can recall. Decorations covered the stores before Halloween and ran through Thanksgiving. Now that Christmas has arrived, I hope you enjoy all the planning and work that went into making it a joyful holiday.

The weather is beauti-

ful, with a bright sun like the ones you see on the holiday cards. It doesn't



**DOROTHY
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seem to matter that cars have replaced horses to haul the tree and nature supplies

the tree and wreath on the front door. This is what one saw 100 years ago and we enjoy the memories

provided by the artist.

To keep with the new sensitivity of political correctness, more cards use the term "happy holidays." There are also many cards without a religious content that manage to submit to the divine doings of Christmas. I am not surprised to receive a religious card; I can understand the feelings of those who send them. I try to send the same type of card to those whose religion is strong.

Fortunately, I am a

member of an Internet firm that has the most unique and beautiful cards to suit everyone. Many of the cards in many categories have a delightful array of every type of card to express my feelings to everyone.

Christmas shopping has declined in the days before the holiday. The sentiment now has grown to shoppers who prefer to buy all the items on sale. This is a particularly good fortune for those who will

not be with you in person on Christmas Day.

Re-gifting has also enjoyed new status. It is proper to re-gift something if it is new and in the same wrappings in which it arrived. It is sometimes easier to buy a gift than receive one, with the exception of those recipients who never seem to want anything and usually don't even use what they receive. With all the new technical toys and items available, it has become

easier each year.

Yes, there is a lot of energy expended prior to the holiday. Now that it has arrived, I trust that you will have truly enjoyed yourself. Ignore the clean up or get friends and family to help, then you will once again agree that it is indeed a happy holiday.

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pects that Perlman will perform a concerto for violin by Mendelssohn. Perlman may do an encore. "The crowd will love it," he said. The maestro

and orchestra alone will also perform a Beethoven symphony.

Netsky said he met Perlman in 1996, when they both turned up to do a Great Performances documentary. They became

friends instantly. "He liked collaborating, and I ended up as music director and played at his kid's wedding. He had no idea I could write for orchestra," Netsky said.

The album's co-pro-

ducer, he was quoted in the Daily Forward at a recording session for the CD saying, "It's beyond anyone's expectations." He still feels that way.

"For Jews in my generation, we were not taught

anything about Jewish music," he said. "It was an awful thing to have robbed us of our cultural heritage."

Netsky is an unabashed Perlman fan. "I can't even say enough superlatives

about how wonderful he is. I think he is a complete musician, someone who can improvise as well as he reads, and brings music to the people," he said. "Itzhak has the ability to connect to everyone."

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