



## **Skylark Vocal Ensemble mesmerizes with tasteful interpretations**

**By Keith Powers / Contributing writer**

Posted Feb 1, 2018 at 3:30 PM

Updated Feb 1, 2018 at 3:30 PM

With 16 voices, the group approaches this program by emphasizing musical astuteness rather than sonic power – which it unveils nonetheless at times.

FALMOUTH – The classical music world has entered an era of adventurous, ambitious vocal ensembles. And the Cape soon may be able to claim one for its own.

With boundary smashing groups like Roomful of Teeth, the Lorelei Ensemble and the Crossing – shifting genres, making outstanding recordings, investigating outlandish vocal styles, and all the while winning Grammys, selling out concerts and finding critical acclaim – the a cappella format is finding itself on the cutting edge of musical trendiness.

The Skylark Vocal Ensemble may not have the name recognition of those groups, but it is hardly a newcomer to the format, and Wednesday evening’s performance of American composers at Falmouth Academy showed that the group can attract an audience, and then mesmerize listeners with tasteful, forceful interpretations of the vocal repertory.

The sold-out Morse Hall at Falmouth Academy – On a frosty Wednesday night in January? – showed that Skylark can fill a room. From a show of hands before the performance, most of the audience had heard Skylark on one of the group’s previous visits – the ensemble was founded in 2012 by artistic director and conductor Matthew Guard.

The group’s ambitions extend beyond the Cape – they perform in New Hampshire, on Boston’s North Shore, and are planning a London tour in April. They have one well-received recording, “Winter’s Night,” and have another planned for the spring.

With 16 voices, the group approaches this program by emphasizing musical astuteness rather than sonic power – which it unveils nonetheless at times. Although there is some clapping, some simple percussion and whistling, this is not a performance with extended or exotic techniques.

Guard has chosen rich settings, sometimes as many as eight parts, relying mainly on insightful phrasing and pure sound. Selections include works by Bernstein, Lauridsen, Ives, Thompson and Barber, some traditional songs, along with two world premieres by Greg Brown.

The richness of the part-writing in a group of Lauridsen's "Fire Songs" – madrigals, with texts from Petrarch – sets off the heat of passion. The music does this not with excesses, but by veering from restraint – there's even whispering – to harmonic shifts and angular, dissonant lines.

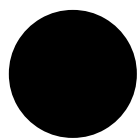
Brown's two premieres are paired with works by Ives and Thompson. Brown's work also shows adventurous, varied textures. His setting of a text on grief from Catullus explores the words with careful repetition and multiple stuck rests – the name of the lost love, Calve, recurring over and over.

Both of his works – the other also an exploration of grief, a Te Deum – are cleverly juxtaposed. An Ives hymn is either cynical, ironic or full of praise – one can never tell with Ives. Lots of his music sounds like two separate marching bands coming together unexpectedly in a city square, and this "Psalm 67" is no different.

Set in two different keys, with only the alternating phrasing keeping it from becoming total chaos, Skylark passes the conflicting musical ideas around expertly. The cadence may have the group singing in unison – or it might be an illusion, fooling the ear after so much complexity.

Closing out the concert with a heartfelt traditional piece, "Angel Band," and then encoring with another traditional pleaser, "Shenandoah," simply accents the only problem with the program. When they are done singing, one realizes that the concert isn't nearly long enough.

Skylark Vocal Ensemble repeats this program Thursday evening in St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Chatham. See accompanying box for information.



**SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL**

Wake up to the day's top news, delivered to your inbox

---

**Entertainment & Life**

## **Skylark Vocal Ensemble mesmerizes with tasteful interpretations**

**By Keith Powers / Contributing writer**

Posted Feb 1, 2018 at 3:30 PM

Updated Feb 1, 2018 at 3:30 PM

With 16 voices, the group approaches this program by emphasizing musical astuteness rather than sonic power – which it unveils nonetheless at times.

FALMOUTH – The classical music world has entered an era of adventurous, ambitious vocal ensembles. And the Cape soon may be able to claim one for its own.

With boundary smashing groups like Roomful of Teeth, the Lorelei Ensemble and the Crossing – shifting genres, making outstanding recordings, investigating outlandish vocal styles, and all the while winning Grammys, selling out concerts and finding critical acclaim – the a cappella format is finding itself on the cutting edge of musical trendiness.

The Skylark Vocal Ensemble may not have the name recognition of those groups, but it is hardly a newcomer to the format, and Wednesday evening's performance of American composers at Falmouth Academy showed that the group can attract an audience, and then mesmerize listeners with tasteful, forceful interpretations of the vocal repertory.

The sold-out Morse Hall at Falmouth Academy – On a frosty Wednesday night in January? – showed that Skylark can fill a room. From a show of hands before the performance, most of the audience had heard Skylark on one of the group's previous visits – the ensemble was founded in 2012 by artistic director and conductor Matthew Guard.

The group's ambitions extend beyond the Cape – they perform in New Hampshire, on Boston's North Shore, and are planning a London tour in April. They have one well-received recording, "Winter's Night," and have another planned for the spring.

With 16 voices, the group approaches this program by emphasizing musical astuteness rather than sonic power – which it unveils nonetheless at times. Although there is some clapping, some simple percussion and whistling, this is not a performance with extended or exotic techniques.

Guard has chosen rich settings, sometimes as many as eight parts, relying mainly on insightful phrasing and pure sound. Selections include works by Bernstein, Lauridsen, Ives, Thompson and Barber, some tradition songs, along with two world premieres by Greg Brown.

The richness of the part-writing in a group of Lauridsen's "Fire Songs" – madrigals, with texts from Petrarch – sets off the heat of passion. The music does this not with excesses, but by veering from restraint – there's even whispering – to harmonic shifts and angular, dissonant lines.

Brown's two premieres are paired with works by Ives and Thompson. Brown's work also shows adventurous, varied textures. His setting of a text on grief from Catullus explores the words with careful repetition and multiple stuck rests – the name of the lost love, Calve, recurring over and over.

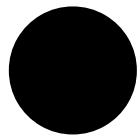
Both of his works – the other also an exploration of grief, a Te Deum – are cleverly juxtaposed. An Ives hymn is either cynical, ironic or full of praise – one can never tell with Ives. Lots of his music sounds like two separate marching bands coming together unexpectedly in a city square, and this "Psalm 67" is no

different.

Set in two different keys, with only the alternating phrasing keeping it from becoming total chaos, Skylark passes the conflicting musical ideas around expertly. The cadence may have the group singing in unison – or it might be an illusion, fooling the ear after so much complexity.

Closing out the concert with a heartfelt traditional piece, “Angel Band,” and then encoring with another traditional pleaser, “Shenandoah,” simply accents the only problem with the program. When they are done singing, one realizes that the concert isn’t nearly long enough.

Skylark Vocal Ensemble repeats this program Thursday evening in St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, Chatham. See accompanying box for information.



**SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL**

Wake up to the day’s top news, delivered to your inbox

---

ADVERTISING

**MOST POPULAR STORIES**



