



## Composer inspires unusual program for Skylark

By Keith Powers / Contributing Writer

Posted Jan 25, 2018 at 6:01 AM

Two pieces of music by composer Greg Brown will get their premiere with Skylark Vocal Ensemble, which will mix them with other contemporary compositions.

How long should it take to write five minutes of music? Does 10 years sound about right?

Greg Brown has written lots of music. His “Missa Charles Darwin” – a composition structured like a mass but using text from Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species” rather than the standard Latin – might be the best known. It figures prominently in his brother Dan’s “Origin,” the latest fact-packed, thriller novel from the author of “The Da Vinci Code.”

Greg Brown’s five-minute “Te Deum” hymn is one of two of his pieces that the Boston-based a cappella **Skylark Vocal Ensemble** will premiere in concerts Wednesday in Falmouth and Thursday in Chatham. Brown’s “Te Deum” may be short, but its roots run deep, and its genesis was complicated.

“I grew up on campus at Phillips Exeter Academy,” he says. “The church there has a beautiful stained-glass window, with parts of the ‘Te Deum’ text translated into English.

“The space is important to me, with some good associations. But it’s also associated with the loss of close friends. I have mixed feelings, and using the text in a personal way reflects my own sorrow and anger at the loss.”

The writing of Brown’s own “Te Deum” began around 2007. “I was unhappy with the first try, and I put it in a drawer. I tried again three or four times. Sometimes you fix things, sometimes you delete things. It took years to figure out, and I had to have some humility about it.”

Now the piece gets its premiere, along with Brown’s “Sepulchrum Mutum,” in a series of concerts in which Skylark will mix Brown’s works with other contemporary compositions. The program, “American Voices,” includes music from Leonard Bernstein, Charles Ives, Randall Thompson, Samuel Barber, Morten Lauridsen and others.

Skylark is a fluid ensemble that will perform this program with 16 members. Skylark “began in 2011 as a group of friends, and transformed into a group of professional singers,” says Matthew Guard, the artistic director.

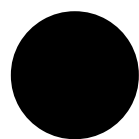
Skylark’s most recent recording, “Winter’s Night,” reached the Billboard Traditional Classical chart, and a second recording is due out in March. In addition to the performances in Falmouth and Chatham, Skylark will sing this program Tuesday in Exeter, New Hampshire and Feb. 2 in Marblehead. A tour to London is planned for late March.

“We are based in greater Boston now,” Guard says, “but we did our first summer retreat in 2013 in Falmouth, and we love being in this part of the world. We have a few home communities, and Falmouth is one of them.”

Guard’s program for this concert is based on pairings. “We matched each of Greg’s pieces with what we thought were good foils: first, an Ives psalm in two keys at once, that goes nicely with (Brown’s) ‘Te Deum.’ And to go along with ‘Sepulchrum Mutum,’ which uses a poem by (Roman poet Gaius) Catullus, we chose a piece by Randall Thompson that sets words from (Roman poet) Horace” to music.

“I spoke to Greg about some of his influences,” Guard says, “and who he values. And that led us to Samuel Barber’s ‘Reincarnations,’ and from there to Morten Lauridsen’s ‘Fire Songs.’

Brown is “a smart composer, with a thorough understanding of repertoire and styles,” Guard says. “The challenge is to put music in context for people. We started with his two pieces, and then (thought), ‘What else?’ It certainly wasn’t the typical process.”



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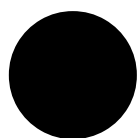
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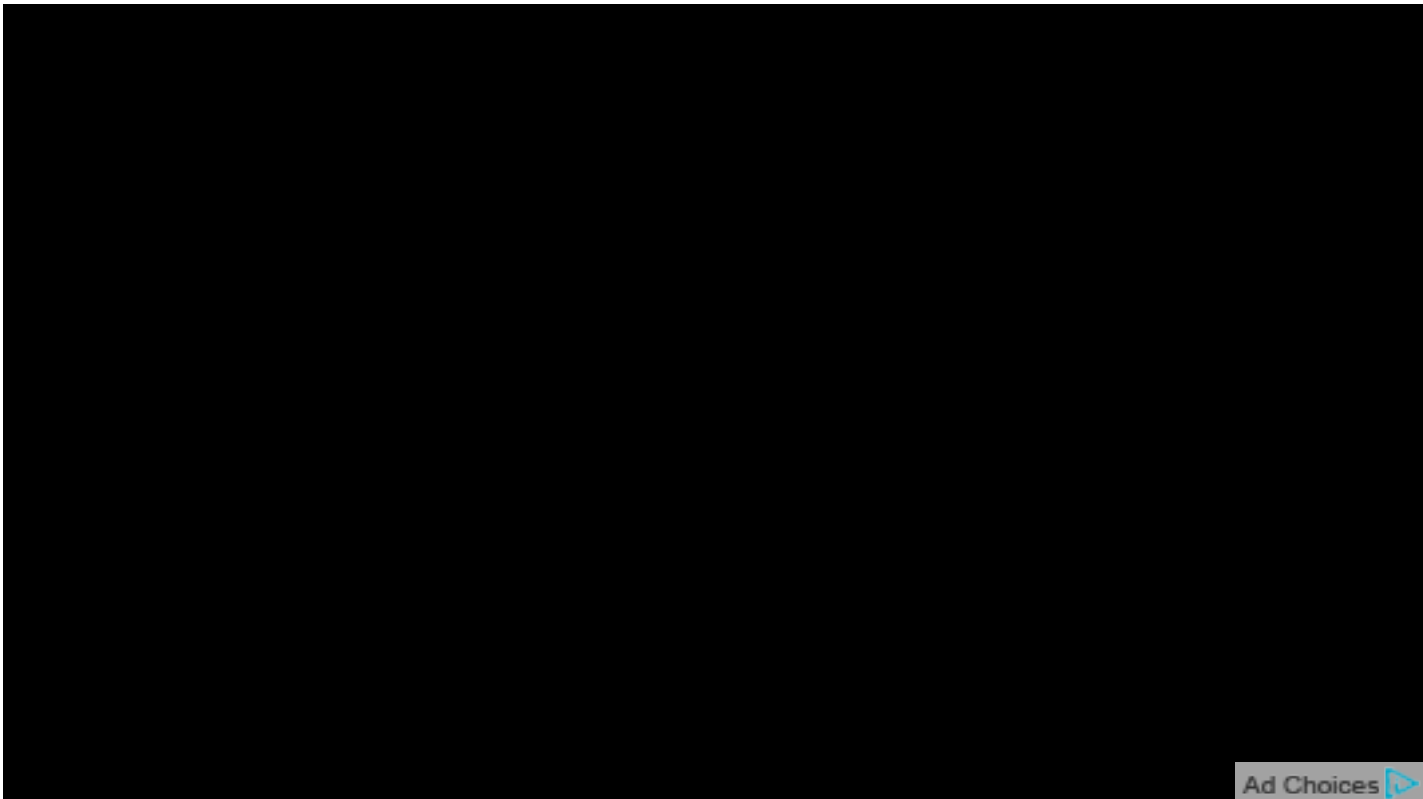


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