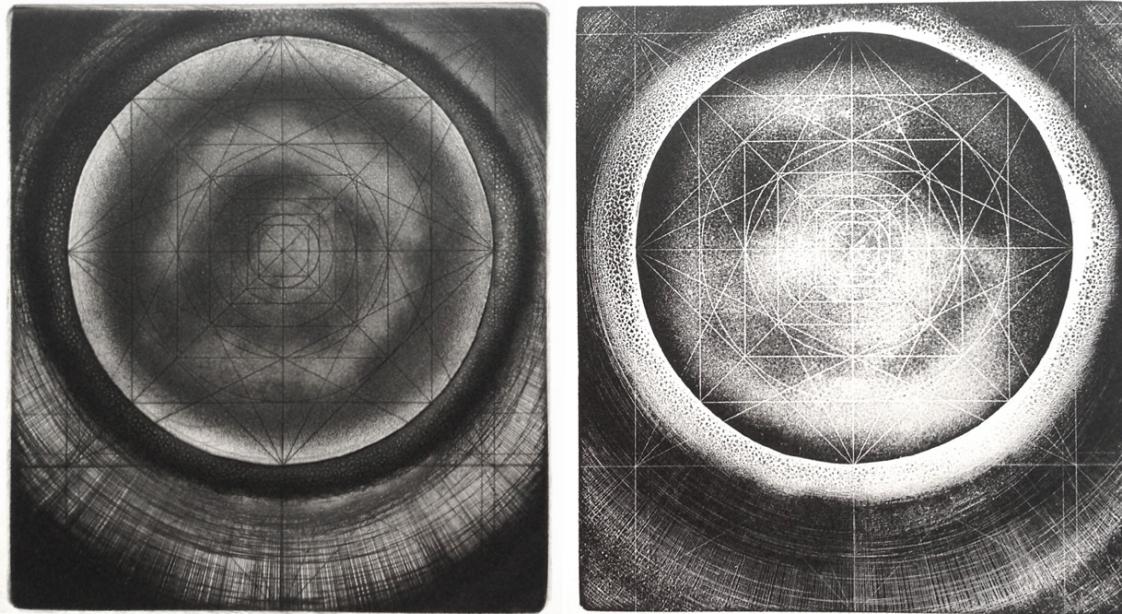


MOONSTRUNG AIR



CHORAL AND VOCAL MUSIC OF **GREGORY W. BROWN**
THE CROSSING || NEW YORK POLYPHONY



FIVE WOMEN BATHING IN MOONLIGHT

Five Women Bathing in Moonlight depicts a scene that poet Richard Wilbur observed at a seaside party in the 1940s. The poem is a portrait of a real event, though the poet renders it in an idealized form. It is dreamlike, frozen, and timeless. The music evokes these qualities with shifting harmonic centers, imitative polyphony, quasi-Baroque ornaments, and canonic structures.

VIDI AQUAM

The text for *Vidi Aquam* comes from a 16th-century treatise (*Del Beneficio di Giesu Christo Crocifisso*) written by a group of Catholic reformers quietly promoting an idea that would figure in the Reformation that was brewing to the north. The idea was *sola fide*, or 'by faith alone' – a reference to the notion that one's faith was all that was required for salvation, and not one's works. This treatise was translated from Italian into French, and then into English in 1575. I excerpted the translator's introduction from the English version and organized it into three sections. The Roman Catholic chant *Vidi Aquam* was a natural choice as a framing device for two reasons: firstly, the text of *Vidi Aquam* speaks to the notion of *sola fide*; and secondly, the recurring images of water within the text invite connections to a chant with water as its main image. The first movement serves as an introduction: we become aware of the natural world emerging through the fog of our daily lives and are amazed at its size and organization. The second movement looks at some of the specific elements that make up the natural world with a special focus on the forces of water. The third movement is a confirmation of all that we have seen and functions as a recessional as we go back to our daily lives.

SPRING

Spring is a setting of Thomas Stanley's translation of a classical Greek text by Anacreon. The piece opens with a metrically displaced six-part canon at the whole-step and proceeds with explorations of canons at a variety of transpositions. The text and music unfold as nature slowly reveals itself. The work closes with a contented and blissful idyll.

MISSA CHARLES DARWIN

Charles Darwin keenly observed the natural world and started piecing together the great puzzle of our joint geological and biological story. Instead of accepting commonly held contemporary beliefs about the workings of our planet and its abundant organisms, he recognized our interconnectedness and came to a greater understanding of the grand scale of geological time. *Missa* is the Latin form of the word “Mass” and refers to the texts and music of the Roman Catholic liturgy. This liturgy has an established structure and in general terms is associated with a public celebration of faith. Charles Darwin’s name forms the latter part of the title due to the fact that the bulk of the texts used in this piece are taken from his writings, particularly the seminal *On the Origin of Species*. The musical and liturgical form of the Mass is distinct and canonic, with intrinsic proportions, structure, and drama. Casting Darwin’s texts into that form is a way of drawing parallels and exploring contrasts between the two. In the first movement, for instance, the central message of the Latin “Kyrie” is one of supplication and mercy, while Darwin’s natural selection is inherently lacking in mercy.

In order to bind the work together I devised an opening idea linked to Darwin, evolution, and genetics. Using a portion of the genetic sequence from *Platyspiza crassirostris* (a bird from the group commonly known as Darwin’s Finches), I translated the amino acids into notes, thereby deriving a melody. This melody serves as a motto of sorts for the Mass, showing up here and there as generative (musical) material. Other ideas taken from genetics appear in the “Credo,” where mutation, insertion, and deletion are applied to the motto melody (along with standard musical procedures of inversion and retrograde) to create an evolving musical texture.

Other underlying ideas in the work include symmetry, which is common to both science and music. A notable example of symmetry occurs in the “Gloria,” where the four voices sing the passage “different, yet dependent upon each other” in phrases that are graphical point-reflections of one another. The symmetry here serves to underline the interdependence of the voices, at the same time creating

something of intricate beauty. It also takes advantage of the double meaning of the word "reflect." Similarly, the "Sanctus" climaxes with a canon created from one simple melodic idea ("As buds give rise by birth to fresh buds...") rendered into four closely related melodies. These ideas merge together, intertwining to form an interlocking texture grown from a single idea.

The genetic sequence that has (in various guises) served as a motto for the piece returns in the final movement in a slightly altered, yet recognizable, form as a bookend for the piece. The final "Amen" includes a fleeting and oblique quotation of the Latin "Ite Missa est" in the midst of a reprise of the "Alleluia" that closes the second movement.

For more information on the origins of this piece and other aspects of the processes at work within it, please refer to the videos and other materials available on my website: www.gregorywbrown.com

ENTRAI, PASTORES, ENTRAI

Enrai, pastores, enrai is a traditional Portuguese Christmas carol found in a variety of collections, including a volume of transcriptions made by Fernando Lopes-Graça and Michel Giacometti. I came to know the music of Lopes-Graça as a singer, performing several selections from the hundreds of folk-song settings that he created over seven decades. This setting draws inspiration from Lopes-Graça's many choral adaptations and is an homage to him and to his work.

THREE AMERICAN FOLK HYMNS

As is common with folk-music, "Dying Californian" shows up in several collections and in a variety of forms. My first experience with the tune was hearing the version by Cordelia's Dad on their phenomenal folk/punk album, *Comet*. My second experience with the tune comes from Vance Randolph's excellent collection, *Ozark Folksongs*. The two versions of the song are fairly different and my rendering draws on each to create a new, distinct setting. Hezekiah Butterworth and Theron Brown's *The Story of Hymns and Tunes* (1906) summarizes the origins of "Sweet Hour of

Prayer:" "Rev. William W. Walford, a blind English minister, was the author, and it was probably written about the year 1842. It was recited to Rev. Thomas Salmon, Congregational pastor at Coleshill, Eng., who took it down and brought it to New York, where it was published in the *New York Observer*. Little is known of Mr. Walford save that in his blindness, besides preaching occasionally, he employed his mechanical skill in making small useful articles of bone and ivory. The tune was composed by W. B. Bradbury in 1859, and first appeared with the hymn in *Cottage Melodies*." "The Morning Trumpet" appears in many shape note collections and is a popular tune among those who enjoy singing from these wonderful books. My setting takes *Southern Harmony* of 1835 as its point of departure, making slight changes to the form of the piece, but maintaining a harmonic and rhythmic language which stays true to the original.

- Gregory W. Brown

FIVE WOMEN BATHING IN MOONLIGHT

When night believes itself alone
It is most natural, conceals
No artifice. The open moon
With webs in sky and water wields

The slightest wave. This vision yields
To a cool accord of semblance, land
Leasing each wave the palest peals
Of bright apparent notes of sand.

The bathers whitely come and stand.
Water diffuses them, their hair
Like seaweed slurs the shoulders, and
Their voices in the moonstrung air

Go plucked of words. Now wading where
The moon's misprision salves them in-
To silver, they are unaware
How lost they are when they begin
To mix with water, making then
Gestures of blithe obedience,

As five Danilovas within
The soft compulsions of their dance.

- Richard Wilbur

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VIDI AQUAM

1.
Vidi aquam *I saw water*

Let us a little stir up our wits and look about us as far and wide as this huge frame of the world may extend, so divinely set together, and garnished with so great diversity of goodly creatures, so well compassed, and in such an order so wisely compacted, that there is nothing whereof there may not be rendered a reason.

Alleluia

2.

This huge Sun, the maker of light and heat, and the cause of all earthly generation; the Moon, which marketh us out the years, the months, the seasons; the Sky, so trimly azured and richly set with glistening stars; this huge Sea, which beateth upon all sides of the earth, the weight of which is borne upon his own round counter-piece.

The great number of living creatures that are upon it, whereof some fly in the air, everywhere dispersed, and othersome dwell in hollow caves of it, which nature hath fashioned of set purpose for them.

So many high mountains within whose veins are found innumerable treasures; and others, from whence issue many a fair spring, sprouting out their thin and clear water whereout do gush violent streams and pleasant rivers, nourishing infinite numbers and kinds of fishes.

Et omnes, ad quos *And all, to whom the
pervenit aqua ista, salvi water came, have been
facti sunt...* saved...

The full hugeness of the whole, the power of the Elements, the natural beauty of the creatures: what are they else but the utterance and open showing of God's love and great liberality towards us?

3.

The Lord spake the word, and we were made. He commanded, and we were created. In His hand is the life of every living thing.

Yea, ask even the beasts, and they will inform thee, demand of the fowls of the air, and they will tell thee, and to the Fishes of the Sea, they will answer thee.

Or else, speak to the Earth, and She will report unto thee: The Lord spake the word, and we were made. He commanded, and we were created.

And by Him have all of us our being, and our moving, and our countenance.

Alleluia

SPRING

See the Spring herself discloses,
And the Graces gather roses;
See how the becalmed seas
Now their swelling waves appease;
How the duck swims, how the crane
Comes from winter home again;
See how Titan's cheerful ray
Chaseth the dark clouds away;

Now in their new robes of green
Are the plowman's labors seen:
Now the lusty teeming Earth
Springs each hour with a new birth;
Now the olive blooms: the vine
Now doth with plump pendants shine;
And with leaves and blossoms now
Freshly bourgeons every bough.

*Anacreon (ca. 582 - 485 BCE)
translated by Thomas Stanley (1625 - 1678)*

MISSA CHARLES DARWIN

texts compiled and edited by Craig Phillips

"Introitus; Tropus Ad Kyrie"

Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge

– *Introduction to The Descent of Man (1871)*

Kyrie, eleison
Christe, eleison
Kyrie, eleison

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy

One general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die

– from *On the Origin of Species (1859)*
Chapter 7: Instinct

"Gloria"

There is grandeur in this view of life
Produced and exterminated by slowly acting causes
Not by miraculous acts
Not by catastrophes

There is grandeur in this view of life
In its progress towards perfection
and whilst this planet has gone cycling on
endless forms most beautiful and wonderful
have been and are being evolved

Reflect that our elaborately constructed forms,
different yet dependent upon each other
have all been produced by laws acting around us

From the war of nature
from famine and death
from so simple a beginning
There is grandeur in this view of life

– from *On the Origin of Species (1859)*
Chapter 14: Recapitulation and Conclusion

"Alleluia"

It is those who know little
and not those who know much
who so positively assert that this or that problem
will never be solved by science

– *Introduction to The Descent of Man (1871)*

But if we admit a first cause,
the mind still craves to know
whence it came and how it arose.

– *Letter to N. D. Doedes, 2 April 1873*

Alleluia

"Credo"

Natura non facit saltus *Nature makes no leaps*

– *Carolus Linnaeus from Philosophia Botanica (1751)*

All that we can do
is to keep steadily in mind
that each organic being
at some period of its life
during some season of the year
during each generation or at intervals
has to struggle for life
and to suffer great destruction

We may console ourselves
that the war of nature is not incessant
no fear is felt
death is generally prompt
and that the vigorous, the healthy,
and happy survive and multiply

With all his noble qualities,
with sympathy which feels for the most debased,
with benevolence which extends to
the humblest creature,
with his god-like intellect,
Man may be excused for feeling pride

at having risen to the very summit of the
organic scale

But with all these exalted powers
he still bears
the indelible stamp of his lowly origin

– from *On the Origin of Species* (1859)
Chapter 3: Struggle for Existence
and *The Descent of Man* (1871)
Chapter 21: General Summary and Conclusion

"Sanctus"

As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds
and these, if vigorous, branch out
and overtop many a feebler branch
so it has been with the great Tree of Life
which fills with its dead and broken branches
the crust of the earth
and covers the surface with its ever branching
and beautiful ramifications

– from *On the Origin of Species* (1859)
Chapter 4: Natural Selection

"Agnus Dei"

Silently and insensibly
natural selection is working
throughout the world
at the improvement of each organic being
scrutinizing the slightest variations
rejecting the bad;
preserving the good

– from *On the Origin of Species* (1859)
Chapter 4: Natural Selection

If we must marvel
let it be at our presumption in imagining

that we understand the many complex
contingencies on which existence depends

– from *On the Origin of Species* (1859)
Chapter 10: On The Geological Succession of
Organic Beings

Alleluia

Ite missa est

Go, you are sent forth

ENTRAI, PASTORES, ENTRAI

Enrai, pastores, entrai
por este portal sagrado;
Vinde ver o Deus Menino
entre palhinhas deitado.
Entre os portais de Belém
esta uma árvore de Jassé,
com três letinhas que dizem:
li ai li ai lé Jesus, Maria, José.

Enter, shepherds, enter
in through this sacred archway;
Come to see the infant Lord
laying in the soft hay.
Among the archways
of Bethlehem there is a tree of Jesse,
with the three little letters say:
li ai li ai lé Jesus, Maria, Joseph.



photo © Geoffrey Silver, Acis Productions

GREGORY W. BROWN lives and works in Western Massachusetts. He holds degrees from the Hugh Hodgson School of Music (University of Georgia), Westminster Choir College, and Amherst College, where he studied with Lewis Spratlan. His recent commissions for vocal ensemble New York Polyphony have been heard on American Public Media's *Performance Today*, BBC Radio, Minnesota Public Radio, Kansas Public Radio, and Danish National Radio; his *Missa Charles Darwin* received its European debut in March 2013 at the Dinosaur Hall of Berlin's Museum für Naturkunde.

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photo © Rebecca Oehlers Photography

THE CROSSING is a twenty-four member professional chamber choir conducted by Donald Nally and dedicated to new music. Consistently recognized in critical reviews, The Crossing has been hailed as "ardently angelic" (*Los Angeles Times*, 4/14) and "something of a miracle" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7/14). Originally formed by a group of friends in 2005, the ensemble has since grown exponentially and "has made a name for itself in recent years as a champion of new music." (*New York Times*, 2/14). The ensemble has sung in such venues as Walt Disney Concert Hall, The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Crossing frequently commissions works and has presented over forty world premieres. Recordings soon to be released include Lewis Spratlan's *Hesperus is Phosphorus* and Gavin Bryars' *The Fifth Century*, both commissioned by The Crossing.

www.crossingchoir.com



photo © Chris Owyong

NEW YORK POLYPHONY is regarded as one of finest vocal chamber ensembles in the world. Praised for a “rich, natural sound that’s larger and more complex than the sum of its parts” (National Public Radio), the four men apply a uniquely modern sensibility to repertoire that ranges from austere medieval melodies to cutting-edge contemporary works. Their dedication to innovative programming, as well as a focus on rare and rediscovered early music, have earned New York Polyphony critical accolades and a devoted following. The ensemble’s fourth album, *Times go by Turns*, was noted as “...a complex, clear-eyed yet still painfully beautiful tapestry” by *Gramophone Magazine* and nominated for a 2014 Grammy® Award in the Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance category.

www.newyorkpolyphony.com

New York Polyphony appears courtesy of BIS Records

THE CROSSING

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Piano

John Grecia

Soprano

Kelly Bixby
Veronica Chapman Smith
Rebecca Hoke
Rebecca Siler
Shari Wilson*
Jessica Beebe

Alto

Elise Sutherland*
Heidi Kurtz
Ellen Grace Peters
Tanisha Anderson
Johanna Gates

Karen Wapner

Tenor

Steve Bradshaw*
Micah Dingler
Stephen Spinelli
Jimmy Reese
Ryan Fleming
Vinnie Metallo

Bass

Colin Dill
Steven Hyder
Frank Mitchell
Dan Schwartz
Kevin Krasinski*
Jackson Williams

* Vidi Aquam soloist

Tracks 1-4, and 12 recorded July 18 2014 at Saint Peter's Church in the Great Valley in Malvern PA

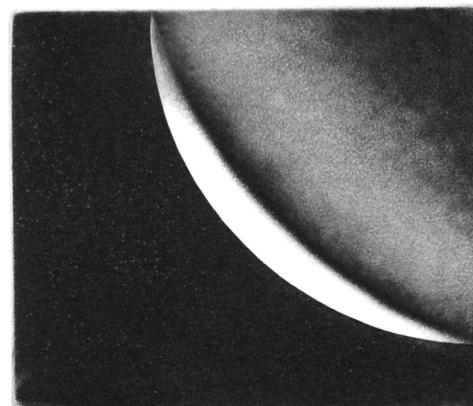
Director Donald Nally

Session Producer Andy Happel

Session Engineer Eugene Lew

Tracks 5-11, and 13-15 recorded September 30, and October 1, 2013 at American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York NY

Session Producer, Engineer & Editing Jens Braun



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Amaranta Viera

Elizabeth Baber Weaver

Geoffrey Williams

Steven Caldicott Wilson

NEW YORK POLYPHONY

Countertenor

Geoffrey Williams

Tenor

Steven Caldicott Wilson

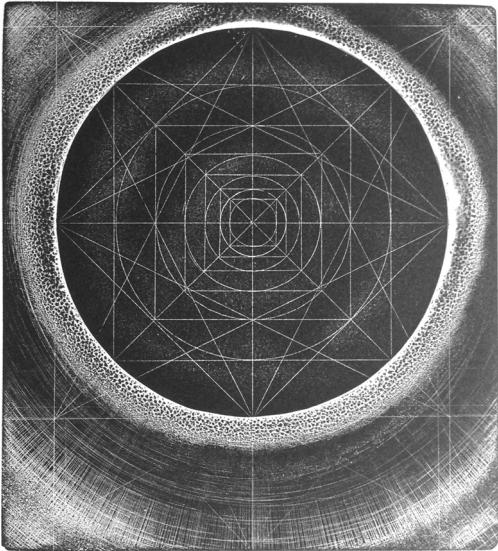
Baritone

Christopher Dylan Herbert

Bass

Craig Phillips

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1 FIVE WOMEN BATHING IN MOONLIGHT 5:05

THE CROSSING | Donald Nally, Director

VIDI AQUAM

THE CROSSING | Donald Nally, Director

2 TO STIR UP OUR WITS 3:02

3 OBSERVING NATURE 7:56

4 ASKING OF NATURE 5:00

5 SPRING 4:51

"SPRING" ENSEMBLE | Eric Dudley, Conductor

MISSA CHARLES DARWIN

NEW YORK POLYPHONY

6 INTROITUS; TROPUS AD KYRIE 2:16

7 GLORIA 3:48

8 ALLELUIA 3:07

9 CREDO 6:14

10 SANCTUS 4:10

11 AGNUS DEI 2:53

12 ENTRAI, PASTORES, ENTRAI 5:23

THE CROSSING | Donald Nally, Director

THREE AMERICAN FOLK HYMNS

NEW YORK POLYPHONY

13 THE DYING CALIFORNIAN 3:06

14 SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER 4:21

15 THE MORNING TRUMPET 3:51



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