

SKYLARK
VOCAL ENSEMBLE

gentle dark

BROWN | DALEY



Collaborative Artistry

Skylark's artistic process is collaborative by design. Alongside their work as performers, members of the ensemble contribute to the development of each program through editing and transcription, language coaching, repertoire suggestions, and historical, cultural, and musical insight.

The resulting performances reflect the collective artistry of the ensemble.

SKYLARK

Matthew Guard, *Artistic Director*

Soprano

Clare Brussel
Sarah Moyer
Addy Sterrett
Janet Stone

Alto

Carrie Cheron
Helen Karloski
Sylvia Leith
Clare McNamara

Tenor

John K. Cox
Paul D'Arcy
Erik Gustafson
Nathan Hodgson

Bass

Matthew Goinz
Stephan Griffin
Nathan Halbur
Neil Netherly

Track List

Gentle Dark Gregory W. Brown

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | My darkness
<i>Soloist: Addy Sterrett</i> | 3:59 |
| 2 | In your sheltering | 6:34 |
| 3 | I need never near | 7:09 |
| 4 | IV. To bed and to sleep | 5:24 |

Requiem Eleanor Daley

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 5 | Requiem aeternam I
<i>Soloist: Clare Brussel</i> | 1:57 |
| 6 | Out of the deep
<i>Soloist: Matthew Goinz</i> | 3:43 |
| 7 | And God shall wipe away all tears | 3:10 |
| 8 | In remembrance | 2:23 |
| 9 | I heard a voice from heaven | 1:24 |
| 10 | Thou knowest, Lord | 3:25 |
| 11 | Requiem aeternam II
<i>Soloist: Clare Brussel</i> | 1:05 |
| 12 | In paradisum
<i>Soloist: Sarah Moyer</i> | 2:45 |

The Road to Where You Are Gregory W. Brown

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 13 | V. Love Song
<i>Soloist: Helen Karloski</i> | 5:16 |
|----|--|------|

Total	48:14
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Introduction

Matthew Guard, *Artistic Director*

Over the last decade, few composers have become more closely intertwined with Skylark than Gregory W. Brown. Some of our most rewarding artistic experiences have come through bringing Greg's music to life, whether in existing works or pieces written especially for us. Several years ago, he sent me a single page from James Agee's *A Death in the Family* with a brief note: "I have a half a thought to turn this into a requiem."

It took only a few minutes of reading to understand why.

Like many musicians, I first came to James Agee through Samuel Barber's *Sure on this Shining Night* and *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. I had never encountered this remarkable passage from *A Death in the Family*. Written from the perspective of a young child falling asleep, it reflects on the quiet security of home: parents talking in the next room, the certainty that they will always be there, the feeling that the world is ordered and safe. Yet the reader knows that these moments occur immediately before the sudden death of the child's father. Every expression of innocence is therefore illuminated by the knowledge of loss that lies just beyond the page.

Agee's passage is deeply personal, yet almost anyone can recognize themselves within it. When I first played Greg's completed work for my own mother, she quietly remarked that it had brought back a flood of memories from her own childhood. I suspect many listeners will experience something similar.

As Greg's piece began to take shape, we searched for another large-scale work that might stand beside it. Eleanor Daley's *Requiem* immediately came to mind. Skylark has performed its fourth movement, *In remembrance*, for many years, but we had never explored the complete work. That seemed an omission worth correcting.

Daley's *Requiem* draws together a unique and disparate collection of texts. Together they form a work that moves naturally between grief, remembrance, consolation, and hope. Although *In remembrance* has become beloved by choirs around the world, I believe the complete work deserves far wider recognition than it has received since its composition in the 1990s. I hope this recording encourages many others to discover it.

The album concludes with another work by Gregory Brown, *Love Song*. After two extended meditations on mortality, it feels like the

quietest possible farewell. Love, after all, is what gives loss its meaning. The tenderness that fills this final piece reminds us that endings and beginnings are never entirely separate.

We recorded *Gentle Dark* over several winter days alongside an extraordinary antique automobile collection on Cape Cod. Rather than trying to create the reverberation of a cathedral, recording engineer Luke Damrosch and I chose to maintain the natural, intimate acoustic that is clear enough to reveal every color and every breath of the ensemble. The atmosphere in those sessions was unusually focused; the cohesion the singers achieved was among the finest I have experienced in a recording environment. It seemed exactly the right sound world for music that speaks so quietly, and so deeply, about love and memory.



Gentle Dark

Music by Gregory W. Brown (b. 1974)

Text by James Agee

I came to know James Agee through Samuel Barber's iconic settings of his texts: *Sure on this Shining Night* and *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. I began reading *A Death in the Family*, Agee's posthumous Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of 1957 and the source for Barber's *Knoxville*. When I came to the passage that would become *Gentle Dark* I couldn't read any further and spent a good while engrossed in its themes.

The text for *Gentle Dark* is a meditation before sleep by the narrator of the novel, a semi-autobiographical 6-year-old version of the author named Rufus. The narrator directly addresses the darkness that surrounds him. Agee's mature voice through the mind of his young self creates a multi-layered dialog that blurs the lines between the ephemeral and the eternal.

Rufus addresses the dark with trepidation: Is it comforting? Is it threatening? The darkness will surely wrap him up, as it will all of his family and everything he holds dear. The innocence of the dialog, with its thinly veiled metaphors for death and salvation, is universal and deeply poignant — not least because the novel is Agee's final work and relates the true story of the loss of his own father.

The music dwells in these corners where childlike knowledge of the world's workings celebrates its certainties only to slip seamlessly into doubts and fears. One moment is triumph and the next is existential confusion. Ultimately the darkness will take him, but this is inevitable and in this inevitability is comfort.

I. My darkness

Gentle, gentle dark.

My darkness. Do you listen? O, are you hollowed, all one taking ear?

My darkness. Do you watch me? O, are you rounded, all one guardian eye?

O gentlest dark. Gentlest, gentlest night. My darkness. My dear darkness.

II. In your sheltering

Under your shelter all things come and go.

Children are violent and valiant, they run and they shout like the winners of impossible victories, but before long now, even like me, they will be brought into their sleep.

Those who are grown great talk with confidence and are at all times skillful to serve and to protect, but before long now they too, before long, even like me, will be taken in and put to bed.

Soon come those hours when no one wakes. Even the locusts, even the crickets, silent shall be, as frozen brooks.

In your sheltering.

III. I need never fear

I hear my father; I need never fear.

I hear my mother; I shall never be lonely, or want for love.

When I am hungry it is they who provide for me; when I am in dismay, it is they who fill me with comfort.

When I am astonished or bewildered, it is they who make the weak ground firm beneath my soul: it is in them that I put my trust.

When I am sick it is they who send for the doctor; when I am well and happy, it is in their eyes that I know best that I am loved; and it is towards the shining of their smiles that I lift up my heart and in their laughter that I know my best delight.

I hear my father and my mother and they are my giants, my king and my queen, beside whom there are no others so wise or worthy or honorable or brave or beautiful in this world. I need never fear: nor ever shall I lack for lovingkindness.

IV. To bed and to sleep

And those also who talk with them in that room beneath whose door the light lies like a guardian slave, a bar of gold, my witty uncle, my girlish aunt: I have yet to know them well, but they and my father and my mother are all fond of each other, and I like them, and I know that they like me. I hear the easy chiming of their talk and their laughter. But before long now they too will leave and the house will become almost silent and before long the darkness, for all its leniency, will take my father and my mother and will bring them, even as I have been brought, to bed and to sleep.

A DEATH IN THE FAMILY by James Agee. Copyright 1938, 1956, 1957 by The James Agee Trust, renewed 1985 by Mia Agee, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.



Requiem

Music by Eleanor Daley (b. 1955)

I. Requiem aeternam I

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine.
Dona eis sempiternam requiem.

*Grant them rest eternal, Lord.
Grant them perpetual rest.*

— From Missa pro defunctis

Each night I listened for your call,
when your call stopped
I held my breath, suspended,

I'd grow accustomed to a dialogue with silence,
then wait for the sounds of night

you, dying,
and I but witness to the end.

— From "The Sound of the Birds" by Carolyn Smart*

II. Out of the deep

Out of the deep have I called unto Thee,
O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.
O let Thine ears consider well:
the voice of my complaint.
If Thou Lord wilt be extreme to mark what is done
amiss: O Lord, who may abide it?
For there is mercy with Thee: therefore shalt
Thou be feared.
I look for the Lord: my soul doth wait for Him:
and in His word is my trust.
My soul fleeth unto the Lord;
before the morning watch, I say,

before the morning watch.

O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is
mercy: and with Him is plenteous redemption.
And He shall redeem Israel from their sins.

— Psalm 130

III. And God shall wipe away all tears

I heard a voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, the
dwelling of God is with all people and God shall
dwell with them and they shall be God's people. God
shall be with them and the voice of weeping shall
no more be heard; and God shall wipe away all tears
from their eyes, and there shall be no more death,
neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any
more pain, for the former things are passed away."

— Revelation 21:3,4

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine.

Light eternal shine upon them, Lord.

— From Missa pro defunctis

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he
that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall
he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me
shall never die.

— From the Burial Service, 1662 Book of Common
Prayer

IV. In remembrance

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow;
I am the diamond glint on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain;

I am the gentle morning rain.
And when you wake in the morning's hush,
I am the sweet uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
I am not there; I did not die.

— From "Immortality" by Clare Harner

V. I heard a voice from heaven

I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me,
"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they
rest from their labours: even so saith the spirit."

— From the Burial Service, 1662 Book of Common Prayer

VI. Thou knowest, Lord

In the midst of life we are in death.
Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut
not Thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us,
Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and
merciful Saviour, Thou most worthy Judge Eternal,
suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death
to fall from Thee.

— From the Burial Service, 1662 Book of Common Prayer

VII. Requiem aeternam II

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine.
Dona eis sempiternam requiem.

*Grant them rest eternal, Lord.
Grant them perpetual rest.*

— From Missa pro defunctis

The stillness is a room I've moved into,
and you are not here,
you are gone
the dark heart of a night without song.

— From "The Sound of Birds" by Carolyn Smart*

VIII. In paradisum

Go forth upon Thy journey from this world, O
Christian soul, in the name of God the Father, the
Son and Holy Spirit, in company with the blessed
angels and archangels and all the heavenly host. May
Thy portion this day be in peace and Thy dwelling
place in Jerusalem.

— From a Russian Benediction

In paradisum deducant angeli, in tuo adventu
suscipiant te martyres, et perducant te in civitatem
sanctam Jerusalem. Chorus angelorum te suscipiat,
et cum Lazaro quondam paupere, aeternam habeas
requiem.

*May the angels receive Thee in paradise. At Thy coming
may the martyrs receive Thee and bring Thee into the
Holy city Jerusalem. May the choir of angels receive Thee
and with Lazarus, once a beggar, may Thou have eternal
rest.*

— From Missa pro defunctis

*Carolyn Smart, "The Sound of Birds" from *The Way to Come Home*.
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Love Song

Gregory W. Brown (b. 1974)

Text by Maggie Dietz

Love Song was originally the final movement of a work for eight solo tenor and bass voices that was written for Constellation Men's Ensemble in 2024. The texts come from Maggie Dietz's wonderful collection *That Kind of Happy* (2016). The poetry that makes up that set revolves around ideas of parenthood as seen through a longer lens of human existence. Adapting the last movement for mixed-voices as a companion piece to *Gentle Dark* seemed like a natural fit for the themes in Agee's work.

The ephemeral and eternal are at work in Dietz's "Love Song;" we hear the voice of a mother thinking about what she can do for her child, and how her daily sweat and effort carry her love into the world. Her life becomes the song that lifts her child forward, as it has lifted mothers and children since time before time.

The ancients would lift
a clay spout to your lips—
water and honey and wine.

I give you milk, softened
with wine, and swear

you'll never hunger, never
thirst while I'm alive.

What suffering I can't preclude
I'll soothe with singing:

My future, for you

not the greenness of a leaf
but of the leaves on all
the April branches.

Fire, I give you fuel. I sweat
and chop the wood.

I tender forever in you
who begin where I end as if

your body is
my body, your elegance
my elegance.

Sustenance, emptiness
is lack of you, yearning is

the road to where you are.

You are the road, the where,
the song, the hunger. Child,

I give you sleep, I sing
you there.

"Love Song" by Maggie Dietz from *That Kind of Happy*. Copyright © 2016 by The University of Chicago. Used with permission.





Gregory W. Brown

Composer

Composer Gregory W. Brown's works have been performed across the United States and Europe — most notably in Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall in New York City, Cadogan Hall in London, and the *Kleine Zaal* of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. His 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*.

Brown's 2015 CD of original choral and vocal works — *Moonstrung Air* — was Q2's Album of the Week for Feb 16th: "[Brown's] command of transcendent sound is constant" and *GappleGate Classical-Modern Review* remarked: "The performances are exemplary, the sound excellent and the compositions show us that Gregory W. Brown takes to vocal writing as a natural. The music has eloquence, verve and old-in-new panache." Brown's cantata — *un/bodying/s* — was premiered by four-time GRAMMY®-winning Philadelphia choir The Crossing in June 2017 and released on Innova Records in 2018. This 35-minute cantata for 24 voices uses new texts by poet Todd Hearon and focuses on issues of displacement and ecology around the creation of the Quabbin Reservoir. *Gramophone's* review of *un/bodying/s* remarked that "[Brown's] writing is lively and affecting, full of exhilarating lines amid pungent details." *Fall & Decline*, a multi-movement work for six solo voices with electronics was commissioned by Variant 6 and released on Navona Records in 2021. *At This Point* (2023) for orchestra, choir, soprano, and narrator was commissioned to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Portsmouth NH and premiered at their historic Music Hall.

Brown has worked extensively with Skylark on projects ranging from aleatoric motets meant to be performed remotely (*Feathers*) to lecture-recitals (*Sub Rosa*) and the new secular requiem *Gentle Dark*.



Eleanor Daley

Composer

Born and raised in Parry Sound, Ontario, Eleanor Daley, OC, received her Bachelor of Music Degree in Organ Performance from Queen's University in 1978, and holds diplomas in piano and organ from the Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto, and Trinity College, England, respectively. She has been the Director of Music at Fairlawn Avenue United Church in Toronto since 1982, during which time she has established a thriving choral program.

One of Canada's most successful and gifted composers of choral music, Eleanor is a recognized leader in choral circles the world over. Her compositions are distinguished by a rich imagination and lyricism, enduring qualities that are immediately appealing to singers and listeners alike.

A prolific composer, she has a remarkable gift for melody, and her works, which are widely performed, recorded, and aired throughout North America, Great Britain, Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the Far East, are most notable for their sensitive interweaving of text and music.

Requiem, commissioned by the Elmer Iseler Singers, received the National Choral Award for Outstanding Choral Composition of the Year from the Association of Canadian Choral Communities in 1994.

In 2023, Eleanor was the recipient of the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award, as well as an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD) from Queen's University. She was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2022, was the recipient of the Ontario Arts Council's Louis Applebaum Composers Award in 2020 and was the first Composer-in-Residence at the 2005 international choral festival, FESTIVAL 500, in St. John's, Newfoundland.



Matthew Guard

Artistic Director

Matthew Guard is the founder and artistic director of six-time GRAMMY®-nominated Skylark.

A lifelong musician, self-taught conductor, and entrepreneur, Guard combines artistic vision with strategic thinking. His programming explores unexpected connections between music, art, literature, history, and place. Recent projects include an exploration of hidden musical codes with Dan Brown, *A Christmas Carol* with Christine Baranski at the Morgan Library & Museum, *Path of Miracles* at the Hispanic Society Museum & Library, and explorations of mathematics and music at MIT.

Guard pioneered the “story score” concept, integrating narrative directly into musical performance. Under his leadership, Skylark has earned six GRAMMY® nominations, received critical acclaim from BBC Radio 3 and *The Times* (UK), and releases recent recordings in partnership with LSO Live.





SKYLARK

Vocal Ensemble

Skylark is a six-time GRAMMY®-nominated vocal ensemble founded in 2011 by artistic director Matthew Guard.

The ensemble's programs bring music into conversation with place, history, and ideas, often conceived for specific spaces and cultural institutions. Projects have included an exploration of hidden musical codes with Dan Brown; *Clear Voices in the Dark*, pairing Francis Poulenc's wartime *Figure humaine* with American Civil War songs; *A Christmas Carol* with Christine Baranski at the Morgan Library & Museum; *Path of Miracles* at the Hispanic Society Museum & Library; and candlelit performances at the Met Cloisters.

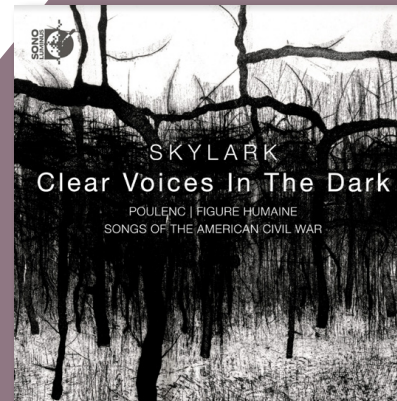
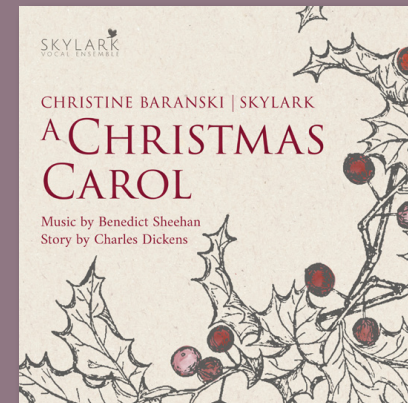
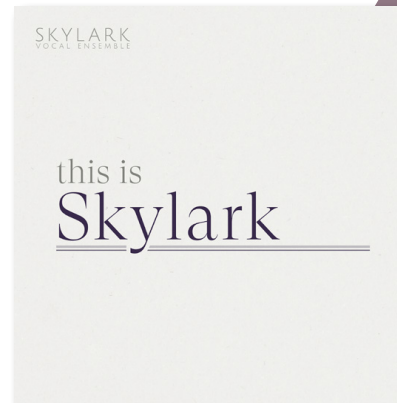
Skylark performs regularly in Massachusetts and New York and has appeared internationally at venues including St. John's Smith Square in London. Recent recordings are released in partnership with LSO Live.





More from Skylark

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Learn more about all our recordings at skylarkensemble.org.



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