



# Planet Hugill - A world of classical music

Classical music news, reviews, interviews, previews and musings on contemporary music from contemporary classical composer Robert Hugill

One of Saga Magazine's 50 Best Bloggers Over 50

<http://www.planethugill.com/> Twitter: @RobertHugill

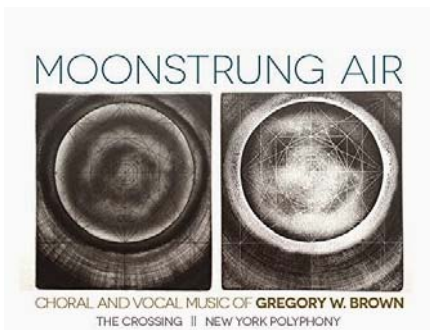


<a href="#">Home</a>	<a href="#">Performances we've heard</a>	<a href="#">CD's we've listened to</a>	<a href="#">People we've interviewed</a>	<a href="#">Twitter - @RobertHugill</a>	<a href="#">Who we are</a>
----------------------	--	--	--	---	----------------------------

Sunday, 22 February 2015

## Moonstrung Air - Gregory Brown

Labels: [cd review](#)



Moonstrung Air - music by Gregory W Brown; New York Polyphony, The Crossing, Donald Nally, Eric Dudley; Navona Records  
Reviewed by Robert Hugill on Feb 13 2015  
Star rating: 4.0

### Contemporary vocal music which showcases the intriguing and intelligent work by this American composer

I first came across Greg Brown's music when reviewing New York Polyphony's recording of his *Missa Charles Darwin* on Navona Records. Both the work and the music intrigued me, and I ended up helping to facilitate (and taking part in) the UK premiere of *Missa Charles Darwin* in a new version for mixed choir in a performance given by London Concord Singers and the late Malcolm Cottle. Now Navona Records has issued a complete disc of Brown's music so that New York Polyphony's recording of *Missa Charles Darwin* and *Three American Folk Hymns* has been teamed up with more of Brown's intriguing music, with *The Crossing*, conducted by Donald Nally, performing *Five Women Bathing by Moonlight*, *Vidi Aquam*, and *Entrai Pastores Entrai* along with a recording of *Spring* conducted by

Eric Dudley.

Gregory W. Brown lives and works in Western Massachusetts. He studied at the Hugh Hodgson School of Music (University of Georgia), Westminster Choir College and Amherst College, where he studied with Lewis Spratlan. His music is essentially tonal, and he writes sympathetically for the voice but that does not mean that he writes down or that his music is not complex. I know from my experience of singing *Missa Charles Darwin* that his style is in fact highly complex, whilst remaining tricky but achievable for an amateur group like London Concord Singers. Listening to the wider selection of Brown's music on this disc, you sense that he is familiar with and sympathetic to the style of well-made Renaissance polyphony beloved of many choristers. Brown also has an interesting view of what constitutes a settable subject and text, so that the works on this disc challenge in a number of very satisfying ways.

*Five women bathing by moonlight* is a setting of a poem by Richard Wilbur, depicting a seaside party in the 1940's. The poet renders the real event as dreamlike and timeless, and it is these elements that Brown's setting picks up on. There is a lovely clarity to the sound of the choir, The Crossing which is a 24 member professional choir, but there is a clarity to the texture of Brown's writing too. His impulse is essentially lyric, but with passing dissonances and a feeling of well wrought polyphony. The piece is dreamlike, in a way which is sober and grave.

*Vidi Aquam* intriguingly sets text from a 16th century treatise (*Del Beneficio di Giesu Christo Crocifisso*) written by a group of Catholic reformers promoting an idea that would figure in the Reformation, the idea of sola fide, or 'by faith alone'. The treatise was translated from Italian into French, and then into English in 1575. Brown excerpted the translator's introduction from the English version and organized it into three sections. As a framing device, he uses the Roman Catholic chant *Vidi Aquam*. The work is written for choir and piano (played by John Grecia), and the texts view our relationship to the natural world. For the first movement, the choir's long intertwining lyrical lines are counterpointed by a rhythmical piano writing. The second movement has a dramatic piano peroration before the choir comes in with what is a well-made part-song again counterpointed by the piano. The results are lyrical and highly expressive, though it has to be admitted that the resonant acoustic means that the choir's words do not come over as well as I could have wished. The movement also includes a lovely moment for solo voices. The movement ends with another piano peroration, this time including a figure like the tolling of a bell. The final movement combines quietly intense vocal lines with edgy piano chords, and though the lyrical music builds there is a highly strenuous counterpoint before all dies away.

*Spring* is performed by specially constituted vocal ensemble conducted by Eric Dudley. The text is a translation from the Ancient Greek of Anacreon. The music is more complex here, with opaque harmonies though still with a sense of transparency in the way the vocal lines are laid out. The structure uses canon in multiple forms, which helps to explain the sound world and the sense of continuous movement. It is an intense and austere piece.

Brown's *Missa Charles Darwin* uses the form of the mass with *Introuit*, *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Alleluia*, *Credo*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* but with a text taken from the principally writings of Charles Darwin. As a constructional device, Brown takes an initial melodic idea (sung unaccompanied



Gregory W Brown

### Interview

Mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately talks recordings, recital and family

### Live reviews

- Making the music count  
Purcell's *King Arthur*
- Lyric drama  
Saimir Pirgu at Rosenblatt
- Emotional blast  
*La Traviata* at ENO
- Lyrically poetic  
*Mastersingers* at ENO
- Vibrant performances  
Cardinal's Musick's *Psalms of David*
- Swing out loud  
London A Cappella Festival

### Reader Offer



CODE: HUGILL15  
Exp: 30/04/15

Free Opera Now Magazine  
Click on image or follow link  
<http://www.rhinegold.co.uk/ondigital/>  
with code HUGILL15 expires 30/4/2015

### CD Reviews

- Spiritual Music in a secular world
- Brilliance Clare Hammond *Etude*
- Conservative but quirky Valentin Molitor
- Clarity & rhythm: *Danzas Espanolas*
- All Chopin: Ralf Taal
- A Multitude of Voices: *Sospira*

### Labels - search the site by subject

AAM Aldbrough ancient voices Arcangelo awards  
ballet review ballet review; Barbican BBC  
book review BREMF British Youth Opera  
Britten 100 Buxton Festival by Hilary  
Glover by Jill Barlow cabaret Cadogan Hall  
cd news cd review Choral at  
Cadogan cinema CLS co-opera co ColF  
Competition concert review  
concert; conference report conundrums Covent  
Garden diary Dresden Music Festival dvd  
review English Concert ENO ETO exhibition  
review feature article film review  
Garsington Globe Theatre Glyndebourne  
Glyndebourne on Tour Grange Park Opera  
Grimeborn GSMD Guest Posting Hamburg  
Handel ihse interview JAM Kings Place  
LPO LSO music education music news  
NEWS newsletter OAE online opera Opera  
Holland Park opera magazine Opera North  
Opera Rara opera review  
performance play review preview  
Proms radio RCM Reader Offer recording  
review RNCM Rosenblatt Recitals; RWW

like chant) which is based on the DNA of Darwin's Finches, and then subjects it to various procedures which emulate those of genetics (mutation, insertion, deletion as well as the more standard musical ones of inversion and retrograde). This means that the musical texture very much evolves and whilst any one particular harmonic moment is not challenging, the harmonic movement is very much non-standard (quite a challenge for singers!) and the complexity can resemble on of Bach's denser fugues. That none of this matters is a tribute to the superb performance from New York Polyphony. They are an all male group (Geoffrey Williams, Steven Caldicott Wilson, Christopher Dylan Herbert and Craig Phillips) and the work was written specifically for them. And they are not only musical, but their diction is superb so that that the fundamental emphasis of the piece, on the works of Charles Darwin, comes over (you can read my original review of this recording [also on this blog](#)).

The Crossing and Donald Nally return for *Entrai, pastores entrai* which is a traditional Portuguese Christmas Carol. The carol is included in a volume of transcriptions made by Fernando Lopes-Graca (1906-1994), the Portuguese composer and musicologist, and Michael Giacometti, and Brown says in his liner notes that he came to know and admire Lopes-Graca's work when he performed it as a singer and that the piece is very much an homage to Lopes-Graca. It opens with an single line, in a highly evocative ornamental chant-like melody and develops into something slow and lovely. The results are rather haunting.

For the final works on the disc we return to New York Polyphony, this time in *Three American Folk Hymns*, each a treatment of an American folk hymn; *The Dying Californian*, *Sweet Hour of Prayer*, *The Morning Trumpet*. Brown's treatments owe something to the sparseness and open harmonies of period arrangements and in these fine performances the three come over as strong and appealing.

Five Women Bathing in Moonlight [5:05]  
Vidi Aquam

- To Stir Up Our Wits [3:02]
- Observing Nature [7:56]
- Asking of Nature [5:00]

Spring [4:51]  
Missa Charles Darwin

- Introitus; Tropus Ad Kyrie [2:16]
- Gloria [3:48]
- Alleluia [3:07]
- Credo [6:14]
- Sanctus [4:10]
- Agnus Dei [2:53]

Entrai, pastores, entrai [5:23]  
Three American Folk Hymns

- The Dying Californian [3:06]
- Sweet Hour of Prayer [4:21]
- The Morning Trumpet [3:51]

The Crossing, conductor Donald Nally  
The Spring Ensemble, conductor Eric Dudley  
New York Polyphony  
The Crossing recorded July 18 2014 at Saint Peter's Church in the Great Valley in Malvern PA  
New York Polyphony recorded September 30, and October 1, 2013 at American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York NY  
NAVONA RECORDS NV5989 1CD [64.58]

#### Elsewhere on this blog:

- Pure entertainment and stunning singing: [Vivaldi's \*L'Oracolo in Messenia\*](#) - opera review
- UK debut at last: [Trio Martinu](#) - concert review
- Feeling the music: [My encounter with Trio Martinu](#) - interview
- Well wrought dialectic: [Trio Appassionata](#) - CD review
- English baroque double: [Purcell and Blow](#) - opera review
- A multitude of influences: [The Origin of Adjustable Things](#) - CD review
- Vivid and imaginative: [Mahogany Opera Group in Brundibar](#) - Opera review
- This Other Eden: [An Encounter with mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately](#) - interview
- Making the music count: [Purcell's \*King Arthur\*](#) - concert review
- Spiritual music in a secular world: [One Equal Music](#) - CD review
- Lyric drama: [Saimir Pirgu at Rosenblatt Recitals](#) - concert review
- Home

Posted by Robert Hugill at 8:48 am



+1 Recommend this on Google

No comments:

Post a Comment

[Santa Fe Opera second view](#) [SJSS South Bank Centre Spitalfields study day review](#) [Temple Music Tete a Tete](#) [The Opera Group](#) [The Sixteen theatre music review](#) [theatre review tv programme review](#) [Vale of Glamorgan Festival video website](#) [Wigmore Hall Wimbledon Music Festival](#) [WNO writing music](#)

#### Search This Blog

#### Blog Archive

- ▼ 2015 (107)
  - ▼ February (48)
    - [Moonstrung Air - Gregory Brown](#)
    - [2015 Aldeburgh Festival](#)
    - [Pure entertainment - Vivaldi's \*L'Oracolo in Messenia\*...](#)
    - [Choral singers get App Happy](#)
    - [UK debut at last - Trio Martinu in Dvorak and Schu...](#)
    - [Feeling the music - an encounter with the Trio Mar...](#)
    - [Room to Play - new classical showcase at Wilton's](#)
    - [gone into night are all the eyes - Trio Appassiona...](#)
    - [English Baroque double bill - Blow and Purcell](#)
    - [Showcasing Chinese talent - Hong Kong Philharmonic...](#)
    - [Orchestras Live celebrates 50th Anniversary](#)
    - [Music for the First Sunday in Lent - Invocabit me ...](#)
    - [The Origin of Adjustable Things](#)
    - [Arensky Chamber Orchestra launches new season at T...](#)
    - [Ambient minimalism: A Winged Victory for the Sulle...](#)
    - [Brundibar at the Imagine Festival](#)
    - [New light on old songs - a final farewell from Ano...](#)
    - [Reader Offer - Free copies of Opera Now](#)
    - [This Other Eden - An encounter with Kitty Whately](#)
    - [Anthony Payne's Piano Quartet](#)
    - [Making the music count - Purcell's \*King Arthur\*](#)
    - [2015 Annual Jacqueline du](#)



Publicly recommend this as Kevin Kr.

[Spiritual music in a secular world - One Equal Mus...](#)

[Philippe Graffin and Friends - celebrating 20 year...](#)

[Saimir Pirgu at Rosenblatt Recitals - charm and ly...](#)

[More than just a concert hall - Wigmore Hall goes ...](#)

[Opera North Ring Cycle on](#)

Enter your comment...

Comment as: Google Account ▾

Publish

Preview

### Links to this post

[Create a Link](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: Post Comments (Atom)

[tour](#)

[Emotional blast - Elizabeth Zharoff debuts in La T...](#)

[Etude - Clare Hammond](#)

[Opera and more on South Bank during 2015/16](#)

[The Psalms of David - the Cardinal's Musick at Ca...](#)

[The Mastersingers of Nuremberg at the London Colis...](#)

[Valentin Molitor's Epinicion Marianum](#)

[Swinging out loud – the London a cappella festival...](#)

[Joyce DiDonato at the Stonewall Inn](#)

[Ensemble Plus Ultra](#)

[Minimalism Unwrapped – Satie, Stravinsky, Cage and...](#)

[London Philharmonic Orchestra new season](#)

[Plainsong vespers for Henry VI](#)

[2015 Southwell Music Festival preview](#)

[Going wild in East London with the NLCC](#)

[Celebrating women in baroque music](#)

[Robin Tritschler and Graham Johnson at the Wigmore...](#)

[Granados - Danzas Espanolas](#)

[The Metropolitan Opera - Les Contes d'Hoffmann - H...](#)

[Macbeth by design](#)

[Academy of Ancient Music - 2015/16 Season](#)

► [January \(59\)](#)

► [2014 \(812\)](#)

► [2013 \(849\)](#)

► [2012 \(622\)](#)

► [2011 \(212\)](#)

► [2010 \(201\)](#)

► [2009 \(241\)](#)

► [2008 \(250\)](#)

► [2007 \(270\)](#)

► [2006 \(334\)](#)

► [2005 \(167\)](#)

### Pages on this site

[Links](#)

[Performance reviews](#)

[CD reviews](#)

[Interviews](#)

[Contact Us](#)

### Summer Festival coverage

[BBC Proms](#)

[Grimeborn Festival](#)

[Tete a Tete: The Opera Festival](#)

[Opera Holland Park](#)

[Buxton Festival](#)

[Grange Park Opera](#)

[Spitalfields Festivals](#)

### Popular Posts



[Kaufmann as Andrea Chenier](#)

#### Barbican battiness



Swinging out loud – the London a cappella festival



Spiritual music in a secular world - One Equal Music

#### Monthly Newsletter

Sign up to our mailing list and receive our monthly newsletter :-

Email
<input type="text" value="you@example.com"/>
Name
<input type="text"/>
<input type="button" value="Sign up!"/>

#### Subscribe To

 Posts

 Comments

#### Never miss a post - follow us by Email

<input type="text" value="Email address..."/>	<input type="button" value="Submit"/>
---	---------------------------------------

#### Popular Posts



##### Kaufmann as Andrea Chenier

Act one of Andrea Chenier at Royal Opera House - © ROH. Bill Cooper 2015 Giordano Andrea Chenier ; Kaufmann, Westbrook, Lucic, dir...

#### Barbican battiness

We went to see the Sixteen performing Handel's Saul on Tuesday (a review will appear eventually). It started at 6.30pm (!) and finished...



##### Swinging out loud – the London a cappella festival

Swingle Singers A Cappella Festival; Swingle Singers, Anuna, Accent, Alexandre L'Estrange; Kings Place Reviewed by Hilary...



##### Spiritual music in a secular world - One Equal Music

Harris, Bairstow, Rachmaninov, Part, Jackson, Beamish, Lauridsen, McMillan, Moore, Parry; St Peter's Singers, Simon Lindley ...



##### The Mastersingers of Nuremberg at the London Coliseum

Quentin Hayes, David Stout, Iain Paterson, Gwyn Hughes Jones photo credit Catherine Ashmore Wagner Die Meistersinger Nürnberg ( The...



##### Showcasing Chinese talent - Hong Kong Philharmonic in UK for first time in 10 years

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra The last year has been a good one for catching foreign orchestras in London, with a number coming to th...



##### English Baroque double bill - Blow and Purcell

Purcell Dido and Aeneas , Blow Venus and Adonis ; Opera Lyrica, dir: Cuffolo, cond: Cole; St Paul's Church, Covent Garden R...

Making the music count - Purcell's King Arthur



Early Opera Company perform Purcell's King Arthur at the Wigmore Hall. Photo credit Charlotte Burke Harvey, Lawson, Boden, Pri...



[The Tempest restored - Matthew Locke's music and more](#)

Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, Globe Theatre A Restoration Tempest; devised and directed by Elizabeth Kenny, Orchestra of the Age of En...



[Macbeth by design](#)

Keel Watson (Macbeth) and Banquo's Ghost English Pocket Opera Company - Photo Emily Bestow Verdi Macbeth ; English Pocket Opera...