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# CHORAL SCHOLAR & AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW

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*The Online Journal of the National Collegiate Choral Organization*

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VOLUME 58 | NUMBER 3 | FALL 2020

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Cyrillus Kreek. *The Suspended Harp of Babel*  
Vox Clamantis  
Jaan-Eik Tulve, conductor  
ECM Records  
ECM4819041  
(2020; 67'01'')

Cyrillus Kreek (1889–1962) is best known in the international choral world for his two Psalm settings, *Taaveti laul nr. 1 Õnnis on inimene* [Blessed is the Man] and *nr. 104 Kilda mu hing Issandat* [Bless the Lord, My Soul]. Although Kreek studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he had great interest in the folk music of his homeland of Estonia and began collecting folk songs from around the country. Because of this work, he is considered one of the influencers in the creation of the Estonian nationalistic music style.

*The Suspended Harp of Babel* allows listeners to explore more deeply the intermingled traditions of Estonian folk and sacred songs that represent the Estonian nationalistic style. This recording showcases a wonderful balance of four psalm settings (*Taaveti laulud*, Psalms of David) written from 1923–1944, four sacred folk tunes from 1917–1919, and four additional forms, including traditional Orthodox vespers and a presentation of the traditional Estonian folk form of regilaul intertwined with the Orthodox vespers. All of these pieces are connected beautifully with introductions and interludes composed by Marco Ambrosini and played on the kannel, a traditional Estonian zither, and the Swedish nyckelharpa, a keyed fiddle used extensively in folk music. Kreek's connection to the Swedish folk traditions stems from time he spent in the Estonian Swedish villages while he was collecting folk incipits. Incorporating the nyckelharpa is a beautiful way to honor that connection.

The album is artistically constructed with great attention to the order and flow of the compositions, creating an overall feeling of a “folk liturgical event.” This order introduces the listener to the three distinct forms of the compositions and then allows the listener to reflect on the similarities and differences as those forms alternate between the tracks.

Grammy-winning Vox Clamantis, founded in 1996, is one of the premiere Estonian choral ensembles. They are known for their clear, full and balanced ensemble sound, and they execute all of these qualities through this recording. Their vocal sensitivity and flexibility are highlighted as they move from lyric folk song melodic lines to beautiful and lush chordal movement in the orthodox vespers and hymn-like portions. Known for their love and interpretation of Gregorian chant and the music of Arvo Pärt, they transfer those skills and focus beautifully to their thoughtful and sincere interpretation of these pieces by Cyrillus Kreek.

*Jacob's Dream / Orthodox Vespers: Proemial Psalm* [Jakobi unenägu/Algulaul] encapsulates the true spirit of the album with the interweaving of the call and response form of the Estonian regilaul (this one is from the Kanepi parish of southeastern Estonia), the free improvisation by both the kannel and nyckelharpa, and the haunting traditional chant and response of the Orthodox Vespers Proemial Psalm.

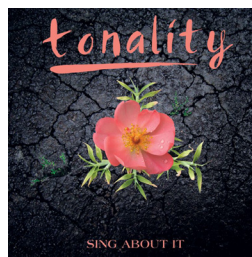
The sacred folk tunes presented have a beautiful comfort in their hymn-like form, but also incorporate folk performance practice elements that create an ethereal experience traversing the sacred and the secular. In *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come* [Ma tulen taevast ülevalt], the juxtaposition of the chorale-like hymn form

with the improvisation of the nyckelharpa is an celestial mixture of sounds: a Renaissance-like viol reflection coupled with traditional Lutheran hymns wrapped together with a slightly raw folk timbre. It is as if the performance spans centuries all within a few minutes.

The juxtaposition of folk and sacred comes to the forefront again in *Awake My Heart* [Mu süda, ärka üles], where lively and energetic interludes by the kannel, nyckelharpa, and percussion are interspersed with the sacred folk tune in a traditional chorale arrangement and verses sung by a cantor, representing a pseudo regilaul leader in this amalgam of the folk and sacred.

This recording is an excellent entry point to the creative world of Cyrillus Kreek, as access to many of Kreek's compositions has been challenging in the past for conductors outside of the Baltic region. For more information on Kreek and his compositions, the Estonian Music Information Centre ([emic.ee](http://emic.ee)) has created a wonderful database of his works that includes a short biography, listing of his compositions and reference information for where the manuscripts are held, what recordings are available, and how to purchase his scores.

—Heather MacLaughlin Garbes



*Sing About It*  
Tonality  
Alexander Lloyd Blake,  
director  
B07N416K1J  
(2020; 60'09")

Shortly after their inception in 2016, LA-based professional choir TONALITY elected to focus on presenting concerts and events that feature a diverse array of music centered around underrepresented topics in choral music. Recent concerts have focused on issues of social justice, homelessness, refugees, and more. In 2018 TONALITY presented a concert called *Democracy in Action* where, in addition to performing many of the songs that appear on *Sing About It*, they helped concertgoers register to vote. In 2020, they were honored with the Chorus America/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, and their innovative 2020–2021 virtual season features premieres of virtual recordings coupled with Q&A sessions with composers.

*Sing About It* is TONALITY's first album, and true to their mission, features a diverse array of music performed beautifully around the aforementioned themes. Dr. Alexander Lloyd Blake, the Founder, Executive Director, and Artistic Director, skillfully draws a variety of genre-authentic and -appropriate tone colors and expressions out of his singers. TONALITY sounds just as authentic performing vocal jazz (*Democracy*) as they do performing modern classical choral works (*No More!*, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*) and pop (*True Colors*). The album appropriately opens with an extended pop-folk influenced riff in Moira Smiley's "Sing About It."

The work of LA-based composers Dr. Zanaida Robles and Shawn Kirchner features heavily on *Sing About It*. Robles' "Can You See" is a dense,

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**Corie Brown** is assistant professor of choral music education at San José State University. Prior to graduate studies at the University of Colorado Boulder and University of Oregon, Dr. Brown taught in Colombia with the Fundación Nacional Batuta. She is active nationally and internationally as a clinician and guest conductor, most recently with the Kula Kāko‘o Virtual Choral Conducting Institute in Hawai‘i, the Virtual Festival Coral de Santander, and Festival Mar de Voces in Colombia.

**Andrew Crow** is director of choral activities at Ball State University where he leads ensembles, teaches conducting, and mentors students in the graduate program. He has contributed scholarship on topics such as intonation, score study, and rehearsal technique. Crow is also an experienced singer, orchestral conductor, and piano technician. Dr. Crow is an associate editor of *The Choral Scholar & American Choral Review*.

**Caron Daley** is director of choral activities and ensembles coordinator at the Mary Pappert School of Music at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. Choirs under her direction have performed across the Northeast, including an invited performance at the 2019 National Collegiate Choral Organization Conference. Caron’s research explores embodiment in choral learning through the lens of Dalcroze Eurhythmics. She is published in *Anacrusis*, *Canadian Music Educator*, *Research Memorandum Series* of Chorus America, *Teaching Music through Performance in Choir Vol. 4 and Vol. 5*, *Choral Journal*, and upcoming in *Journal of Singing*. Caron currently serves as president of the American Choral Directors Association of Pennsylvania.

**Heather McLaughlin Garbes** is affiliate assistant professor in the University of Washington, where she is the curator of the Baltic Choral Library. Dr. MacLaughlin Garbes co-authored the chapter “Baltic Languages: Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian” in *The Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in the Choral Rehearsal*, (Scarecrow Press, 2012). She is artistic director for the West Coast Estonian Days Song Festival (2022) and also currently conducts the Finnish Choral Society.

**Joshua Harper** is Director of Choral Activities at Yavapai College in Prescott, Arizona. He will join the Arizona Philharmonic as Guest Conductor for their 2021 season. His scholarly edition of Franz Schubert’s “Die Einsiedelei” is published by Colla Voce Music LLC. He holds the D.Mus. in Choral Conducting from the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University.

**Cheryl Frazes Hill** is director of choral activities at Roosevelt University’s Chicago College of Performing Arts, since 2002. During her years of teaching, she has earned numerous awards, including the Illinois Governor’s Award, the Northwestern University Alumni Merit Award, the Outstanding Teaching Award from the University of Chicago, and the Roosevelt University Presidential Award for Social Justice. Frazes Hill is currently completing a biography on the life of Margaret Hillis, with the anticipated publication date October, 2021, and has served on the National Board for NCCO since 2018.