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News

CD to be released June 26, 2012

Grant Park Chorus Presents Panorama of Modern American Songs on its a *Cappella* CD Debut

Decades-Spanning Disc Delivers Works
by Seven Contemporary Composers
Including Ned Rorem, Eric Whitacre
and David Del Tredici

*World-premiere recordings of pieces by Abbie Betinis,
Lee Kesselman, Stacy Garrop, and Paul Crabtree*

Celebrating its 50th season, Chicago's Grant Park Chorus, conducted by Christopher Bell, makes its *a cappella* recording debut with a CD of imaginative, moving, and sometimes whimsical works written between 1974 and 2005 by seven contemporary American composers.

The chorus's new Cedille Records album, *Songs of Smaller Creatures and Other American Choral Works*, takes its name from one of the four works receiving CD premieres: Abbie Betinis's *Toward Sunshine, Toward Freedom: Songs of Smaller Creatures*. Other premieres on the CD, to be released June 26, include Lee Kesselman's *Buzzings: Three Pieces About Bees*; Stacy Garrop's *Sonnets of Desire, Longing, and Whimsy*; and Paul Crabtree's *Five Romantic Miniatures*.

The chorus also performs Eric Whitacre's *When David Heard* and *Sleep*, Ned Rorem's *Seven Motets for the Church's Year*, and David Del Tredici's *Acrostic Song* from *Final Alice* (Cedille Records CDR 90000 131).

The Grant Park Chorus, part of the summer-long Grant Park Music Festival, typically numbers 100 or more singers when it performs outdoors with the Grant Park Orchestra in Millennium Park's Jay Pritzker Pavilion.

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By contrast, *Songs of Smaller Creatures* was recorded indoors at concerts in the park's Harris Theater, with Bell directing a carefully selected ensemble of fewer than 60 voices. James Ginsburg produced the CD, with engineering by Eric Arunas and Bill Maylone.

Recording Premieres

Betinis's three-movement *Toward Sunshine, Toward Freedom: Songs of Smaller Creatures*, written in 2005, comprises miniature tone poems for mixed a cappella chorus about bees, a spider, and butterflies using texts by Walter de la Mare, Walt Whitman, and Charles Swinburne. In "the bees' song," Betinis highlights the buzzing "Z" sounds from de la Mare's poem of the same name. "A noiseless, patient spider" is set for eight-part chorus, with each of the voice parts representing a leg of a walking spider. In "envoi," Betinis uses the nonsense syllables of Swinburne's text to evoke what she describes as "a subtle flapping of tiny [butterfly] wings."

Kesselman's *Buzzings: Three Pieces about Bees*, from 1976, offers whimsical choral vignettes based on Emily Dickenson poems. Kesselman describes "To make a prairie" as a "pastoral musing" to be sung leisurely, "almost tasting the atmosphere the poet paints." The insistent, driving rhythms of "A Bee his burnished carriage" portray the insect's ardent desire for a rose. In "Bee! I'm expecting you!," the Fly "types" a note to its friend the Bee, hopping from key to key.

Stacy Garrop's *Sonnets of Desire, Longing, and Whimsy* explores aspects of love through the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Garrop wrote the three-song set in 2004 for the San Francisco-based choral ensemble Volti. Garrop finds Millay's sonnets "beautifully constructed," with many of them "well suited to be set to music." To date, Garrop has set sixteen of Millay's sonnets for a *cappella* choir.

Paul Crabtree's *Five Romantic Miniatures*, from 1999, is a set of affectionate tributes to characters from *The Simpsons* animated TV series. Crabtree uses texts from the show to explore the lives of Grandpa Simpson, Lisa, Marge, and Homer, in whom Crabtree "uncomfortably" sees traits of his own father.

Whitacre's World

The sound world of Eric Whitacre is represented by two works. *When David Heard*, completed in 1999, is based on the Old Testament words of David, lamenting the death of his son Absalom. Whitacre says he wrote “maybe 200 pages of sketches, trying to find the perfect balance between sound and silence.” He wrote the music for *Sleep* in 2000 for the Robert Frost poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” Unbeknownst to Whitacre, the Frost estate had ceased authorizing the use of the poem. The composer ultimately commissioned Charles Anthony Silvestri to write a new poem to fit the existing music.

Del Tredici's *Acrostic Song* from *Final Alice*, written 1974–75, comes from his career-defining series of works inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. The lyricism, tonality-based harmonies, and glowing sonorities of these works were revolutionary in an era when the serious-music establishment worshipped dissonance and atonality.

Roem's *Seven Motets for the Church's Year* is rarely heard in concert or on recordings. Begun in 1977 and completed in 1986, the beautifully sculpted miniatures exude the peace, joy, and mystery of the Christian Holy Days.

The Grant Park Chorus

Formed in 1962, the Grant Park Chorus is a fully professional ensemble. In addition to their solo appearances and teaching careers, Grand Park Chorus members perform in regular-concert-season ensembles including *Chicago a cappella*, the William Ferris Chorale, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago and Chicago Symphony Choruses.

Christopher Bell is in his 11th season as chorus director of the Grant Park Music Festival. Bell also serves as chorus master for the Edinburgh International Festival, Royal Scottish National Orchestra Junior Chorus, and Belfast Philharmonic Choir.

The Grant Park Chorus, under Bell's direction, made its commercial recording debut in 2011, performing with the Grant Park Orchestra and conductor Carlos Kalmar on the Cedille Records release *The Pulitzer Project*, which attracted international attention. A reviewer for Canada's *La*

Scena Musicale wrote, “The chorus’s incredible precision is worth noting, showing an ability to express subtleties that is remarkable for an ensemble of this size.” For more information, visit <http://grantparkmusicfestival.com>.

The Grant Park Music Festival

Acclaimed by critics and beloved by audiences, the Grant Park Music Festival is the nation’s only free, summer-long outdoor classical music series of its kind. The Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park is the official home of the Grant Park Music Festival. The Festival is led by Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Carlos Kalmar along with Chorus Director Christopher Bell, Executive Director Paul Winberg, and Board President Beth Rodriguez.

Cedille Records

Grammy award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) has been dedicated to showcasing the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area since its launch in late 1989.

In May 2011, audiophile-oriented Cedille began offering new releases in better-than-CD-quality 24-bit music downloads in the “lossless” FLAC format, available directly via its website, www.cedillerecords.org. Cedille albums are also available via the label’s website as CD-quality 16-bit FLAC downloads, extra-high-quality (256 Kbps) MP3 file downloads, and physical CDs.

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*Songs of Smaller Creatures and Other
American Choral Works*
(Cedille Records CDR 90000 131)

Abbie Betinis: *Toward Sunshine, Toward Freedom: Songs of Smaller Creatures* (9:07)

Lee Kesselman: *Buzzings: Three Pieces about Bees* (4:11)

Eric Whitacre: *When David Heard* (11:43)

Stacy Garrop: *Sonnets of Desire, Longing, and Whimsy* (7:45)

David Del Tredici: *Acrostic Song from Final Alice* (4:47)

Ned Rorem: *Seven Motets for the Church's Year* (11:06)

Paul Crabtree: *Five Romantic Miniatures* (6:50)

Eric Whitacre: *Sleep* (4:25)

Grant Park Chorus
Christopher Bell, conductor