

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 14, 2025**

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## **SKYLARK VOCAL ENSEMBLE RELEASES "SONGBIRD" — A SOARING CELEBRATION OF FLIGHT AND SONG FOR THEIR 15TH ANNIVERSARY**

**Four-Time GRAMMY®-Nominated Ensemble Presents World Premiere Recording of Benedict Sheehan's "Songbird Antiphons" Alongside Beloved Flight-Themed Performances**

BOSTON, MA — Four-time GRAMMY®-nominated Skylark Vocal Ensemble celebrates their 15th anniversary with the release of "Songbird," a magnificent collection of performances exploring the wonder of flight and the beauty of song. Available July 25th on all major streaming platforms and for purchase at [skylarkensemble.org](http://skylarkensemble.org), this album captures some of Skylark's most cherished performances spanning several years, unified by the transformative power of creatures that take to the skies.



Press-only audio files and liner notes available at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1OBKJjCjWoIP0NDmc43QcCt3UU56dODIL?usp=sharing>

Media files and high-resolution images available at:

<https://www.skylarkensemble.org/press.html>

Preview a music video of "The Gallant Weaver" to be publicly released on July 25th:

<https://youtu.be/GVk9txkGxGg>

The centerpiece of "Songbird" is the world premiere recording of Benedict Sheehan's "Songbird Antiphons," featuring original poetry by Charles Anthony Silvestri and Talia Sheehan. This remarkable new work was commissioned by Skylark supporter Molly Schen, a passionate climate activist moved by a powerful art exhibition about birds. The resulting composition serves as both a celebration of the treasure that birds and their songs represent, and a fervent plea for environmental action.

"North America has lost almost 30% of its native songbird population since 1970 due to human activity," notes Artistic Director Matthew Guard. "We believe this poignant and beautiful song cycle will become an important part of the choral canon in the coming years."

## A CELEBRATION OF FLIGHT THROUGH SONG

The album showcases Skylark's signature approach to thematic programming, weaving together works from across centuries and styles. James MacMillan's "The Gallant Weaver" creates its own soaring sound world through a three-part soprano canon—a high-wire act of gorgeous coloratura soprano work that perfectly captures the essence of flight. This is paired with James Erb's timeless arrangement of "Shenandoah," which features its own three-part treble canon and has become one of the most important arrangements of American folk songs in the choral repertoire.

The collection also features Caroline Shaw's "and the swallow," a deceptively simple setting of Psalm 84 that builds to a surprisingly evocative conclusion; Maurice Ravel's haunting "Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis" (one of only three short songs Ravel wrote for a cappella choir); and Ralph Vaughan Williams' touching arrangement of the traditional English folk ballad "The Turtle Dove."

## LIVE PERFORMANCE ENERGY CAPTURED

"The concert experiences for our 'Take Flight' program were among the most rewarding in Skylark's history, generating our best audience survey responses ever," explains Guard. "The profound impact of experiencing this music live with an audience made it clear that we needed to capture and share these performances."

The majority of "Songbird" (13 out of 16 tracks) was recorded live in concert, offering the authentic energy and emotion of actual performances shared with live audiences. This includes a sublime performance of "Bless the Lord, O My Soul" from Rachmaninoff's All-Night Vigil, featuring mezzo-soprano soloist Luthien Brackett. "This may be the Skylark live performance track that I have listened to the most times in my life," Guard reflects. "The combination of Luthien's profoundly simple and beautiful solo with the gorgeous orchestration of Rachmaninoff is truly sublime."

The album also features Shawn Kirchner's arrangement of the bluegrass hymn "Angel Band," which has become a staple of the Skylark repertoire over the last decade and served as their encore at their UK debut at St. John's Smith Square in 2018.

## ABOUT SKYLARK

Four-time GRAMMY®-nominated Skylark, described by BBC Radio 3 as "the cream of the American crop," is a premier vocal ensemble of leading American vocal soloists, chamber musicians, and music educators. Their dramatic performances have been called "gripping" by The Times of London and "exquisite...thrilling" by Gramophone Magazine.

Founded in 2011, Skylark has established itself as one of America's premier vocal ensembles through innovative programming that weaves connections

between musical works spanning centuries and styles. Their recordings have received six GRAMMY® nominations in the past six years, with multiple Billboard Traditional Classical Chart entries.

Skylark's mission is to inspire with the beauty of the human voice, weaving elements of place, art, literature, history, and music into singular experiences that ignite wonder and discovery. Their unexpected themes, surprising connections, and imaginative collaborations draw new audiences to the transcendent power of vocal music.



## ABOUT MATTHEW GUARD

Four-time GRAMMY®-nominee Matthew Guard is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and thoughtful programmers in American choral music. Praised for his "catalyzing leadership" (WQXR) and "musically creative and intellectually rich" programming (Opera Obsession), Guard is passionate about communicating something unique in each concert and recording.



## TRACK LISTING

1. The Gallant Weaver - James MacMillan (5:56)
2. Solo: Clare Brussel, Sarah Moyer, Janet Stone
3. Shenandoah - arr. James Erb (4:13)
4. Blagoslovi, dushe moya, Gospoda from All-Night Vigil - Sergei Rachmaninoff (4:24)
5. Solo: Luthien Brackett
6. and the swallow - Caroline Shaw (4:16)
7. Trois beaux oiseaux du Paradis - Maurice Ravel (2:55)
8. Solo: Fotina Naumenko
9. The Turtle Dove - Ralph Vaughan Williams (3:09)
10. Solo: Sam Kreidenweis
11. songbird antiphons: i. birds of the air - Benedict Sheehan (0:54)
12. songbird antiphons: ii. the carolina wren - Benedict Sheehan (1:55)
13. songbird antiphons: iii. birds on the wind - Benedict Sheehan (1:01)
14. songbird antiphons: iv. the chickadee - Benedict Sheehan (1:24)
15. songbird antiphons: v. the red-winged blackbird - Benedict Sheehan (1:17)
16. songbird antiphons: vi. "three billion birds" - Benedict Sheehan (1:35)
17. songbird antiphons: vii. the northern cardinal - Benedict Sheehan (2:11)
18. songbird antiphons: viii. birds of my youth - Benedict Sheehan (1:06)
19. songbird antiphons: ix. the white-throated sparrow - Benedict Sheehan (3:39)
20. Angel Band - arr. Shawn Kirchner (5:46)

**Total Time: 45:38**

## AVAILABILITY

"Songbird" is available July 25th on all major streaming platforms including Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, and for purchase at [skylarkensemble.org](http://skylarkensemble.org).

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