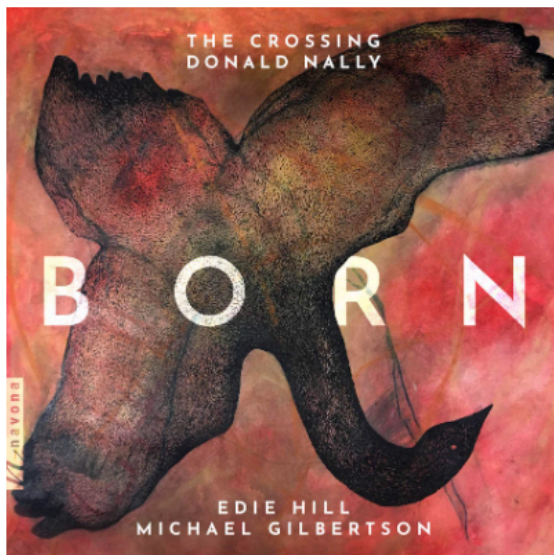


Americana Newly Recorded by Clive Paget



The Crossing and conductor Donald Nally are one of the most fruitful commissioners of new choral music around. Not only can they boast an exceptional hit rate when it comes to producing new work, you can imagine other choral outfits queuing up to perform the score. The latest disc, *Born*, features work by Minneapolis-based composer Edie Hill and Iowa-born Michael Gilbertson [onetime [Musical America New Artist of the Month](#)] that teems with ideas as well as being simply beautiful music.

Hill's *Spectral Spirits*, which premiered in Philadelphia and New York in 2019, addresses the plight of endangered or recently extinct birds in a 30-minute meditation on nature and loss, shot through with flashes of humor and an occasional dash of hope. Hill takes four poems from *Passings* by Holly J. Hughes: "Passenger Pigeon," "Carolina Parakeet," "Eskimo Curlew," and "Ivory-Billed Woodpecker." For each bird, she fashions a musical "ceremony"

by framing the Hughes poems with eyewitness accounts written by people who experienced the birds firsthand as well as sequences riffing on their official Latin names and more commonly used nicknames.

It's ear-ravishing music, full of bare harmonies and melismatic solo lines, and the poetry is to die for (listen to eyewitness Henry David Thoreau on the "Passenger Pigeon," or any of Hughes's evocative poems). The performances are typically precise but also emotionally charged with the composer's urgent message. "Why, if we see something alive, vibrant, with striking color, do we want to possess it to the point of oblivion?" Hill asks in a reflective sleeve note. "In the end: we all lose."

Framing *Spectral Spirits* are two pieces by Gilbertson. Opening the disc is *Born*, based on a tender poem by Wislawa Szymborska and commissioned by the conductor and his spouse Steven Hyder in memory of Nally's mother. Warm, glancing harmonies and meticulous word setting together create a moving contemplation of birth, motherhood, and familial relationships. The disc ends with *Returning*, with texts by Kai Hoffman-Krull, a delicate, two-part meditation laced with pungent dissonances exploring passionate love, absence, and longing through the biblical story of David and Jonathan.