



# AMERICAN CLASSICS



JAKE RUNESTAD

## SING, WEARING THE SKY



KANTOREI • JOEL RINSEMA



Jake  
**RUNESTAD**  
(b. 1986)  
**Sing, Wearing the Sky**

|           |  |              |
|-----------|--|--------------|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>The Secret of the Sea</b> (2018)<br>(Text: Walt Whitman, 1819–1892; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807–1882;<br>Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961; Uvavnuuk, 19th century) [text edited and adapted by composer]<br>Christine Short, Sarah Whitnah, Violin • Brightin Schlumpf, Viola • Trevor Minton, Cello<br>Jeremy Nicholas, Double bass • Rachel Hargroder, Daniel Kent, Percussion • Mac Merchant, Piano | <b>11:40</b> |
| <b>2</b>  | <b>Alleluia</b> (2013)<br>(Text: Anonymous)  | <b>3:34</b>  |
| <b>3</b>  | <b>Let My Love Be Heard</b> (2014)<br>(Text: Alfred Noyes, 1880–1958)  | <b>5:36</b>  |
| <b>4</b>  | <b>Sing, Wearing the Sky</b> (2014)<br>(Text: Lalla, 1320–1392; English translation by Coleman Barks, b. 1937)<br>Kali Paguirigan, Mezzo-soprano • Sarah Whitnah, Violin<br>Mac Merchant, Piano • Rachel Hargroder, Percussion   | <b>5:24</b>  |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>Live the Questions</b> (2016)<br>(Text: Rainer Maria Rilke, 1875–1926; English translation by Jake Runestad, b. 1986)   | <b>4:51</b>  |
| <b>6</b>  | <b>We Can Mend the Sky</b> (2014)<br>(Text: Warda Mohamed, b. 2000)<br>Juli Orlandini, Soprano • Rachel Hargroder, Percussion  | <b>8:07</b>  |
| <b>7</b>  | <b>Fear Not, Dear Friend</b> (2012)<br>(Text: Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850–1894)<br>Sara Michael, Soprano  | <b>7:03</b>  |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Proud Music of the Storm</b> (2017)<br>(Text: Walt Whitman)<br>Mac Merchant, Piano  | <b>10:00</b> |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>I Will Lift Mine Eyes</b> (2006)<br>(Text: Bible, Old Testament: Psalm 121)   | <b>4:32</b>  |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Ner Ner</b> (2014)<br>Jake Runestad, Conductor  | <b>4:01</b>  |

**Jake Runestad** (b. 1986)  
**Sing, Wearing the Sky**

Jake Runestad is a versatile and prolific young composer of works for orchestra, wind band, chorus, chamber ensembles, and opera. His visceral music and charismatic personality have fostered a busy schedule of national and international commissions, residencies, workshops, and speaking engagements, enabling him to be one of the youngest full-time composers in the world. He earned a Master's degree in composition from the Peabody Conservatory where he studied with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts. The recipient of a 2017 McKnight Fellowship, Runestad has earned numerous awards for his music, including the prestigious Raymond W. Brock Commission from the American Choral Directors Association. He also won the 2016 Morton Gould Young Composer Award from The ASCAP Foundation for *Dreams of the Fallen*, a large-scale work for piano, orchestra, and chorus that was commissioned by a consortium of five American orchestras and featured texts written by the Iraq War veteran and award-winning poet Brian Turner. In addition to composing socially conscious music that aims to initiate positive change, Runestad is frequently engaged as a composer-in-residence and guest conductor with ensembles and institutions across the globe.

Craig Hella Johnson and KI Concerts commissioned *The Secret of the Sea* (2018), originally for choir, piano, percussion, and small string ensemble, which had its premiere at the Sydney Opera House in Australia on 17 July 2018. The subject of the piece was inspired by this venue's proximity to the sea, and to compose it, Runestad searched for texts related to the sea in his own poetry collection and beyond. The resulting libretto incorporates texts by Walt Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and the Inuit shaman Uvavnuuk, and takes listeners on a dramatic musical journey. "This journey of the human spirit," the composer writes, "questions the meaning of existence while evoking the sights and sounds of the sea."



Part I, *The Unbounded Sea*, pairs texts by Whitman and Longfellow. Whitman's words express the unbridled joy of embarking on an ocean voyage, while Longfellow introduces the central image and title of the work: "My soul is full of longing for the secret of the sea." In Part II, *Crash On Crash*, H.D.'s agitated language launches us into a "raging" and "furious" sea that Runestad matches with equally stormy music. Finally, Part III, *The Light that Fills*

*the World*, presents a cultural story that expresses Inuit peoples' intimate relationship to the sea. One evening, upon leaving her home, the Iglulik shaman Uvavuk witnessed light come down from the sky. It entered into her and, inspired, she began to sing a song about the sea, of which the text that concludes *The Secret of the Sea* is a rough translation. Runestad's music is harmonically centered around the Lydian mode as well as the whole tone scale, whose expansive intervals evoke the majesty of the sea, and may bring to mind Claude Debussy's *La Mer*.

The unaccompanied *Alleluia* (composed in 2013, premiered in 2014) ranges freely across the continuum of joyful expression, from communal energy to reflective reverence. Of this work's multifaceted character, the composer writes, "Through history, the singing of 'alleluia' has served as an outward celebration as well as an introspective expression of praise." Similar to a traditional three-part dance form, the work begins by pairing two contrasting sections, then closes with a return to the mood of the first section. Runestad explains, "The work begins with a rhythmic declaration of joy and builds intensity through metric changes, tonal shifts, glissandi, and hand clapping. This lively exultation soon gives way to a reverent meditation with soaring melodic lines and lush harmonies. The dancing rhythms from the beginning return with a gradual build in intensity as one's praises rise to the sky."

*Let My Love Be Heard* (2014) sets Alfred Noyes's *A Prayer*, a poignant outpouring of grief and hope whose narrator beseeches the angels to "Take my own lost bird / On your hearts tonight" and "Let my love be heard / Whispering in your wings." Though originally composed for Choral Arts Northwest, the work became a powerful expression of collective grief and solidarity following terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut. The composer explains,

"Jonathan Talberg, the conductor of the choir at Cal State Long Beach, led his singers in a performance during the memorial vigil for Nohemi Gonzalez, a Long Beach student who was killed in the Paris attacks. The day after the vigil, the choir was supposed to begin rehearsing holiday music; however, Jonathan felt that was not appropriate and wanted time for the singers to grieve this loss. So, at the beginning of rehearsal, he passed out a brand new piece of music (*Let My Love Be Heard*), rehearsed it, and then recorded it."

Posted to Soundcloud and shared in memory of Nohemi, choirs continue to perform, record, and share the work in the spirit of peace, and as a balm to singers and listeners alike in times of darkness.

*Sing, Wearing the Sky* (2014) transports us from 21st-century California to 14th-century India. Runestad writes,

"Lalla, a 14th-century Sufi-mystic poet from the Kashmir region of India, believed strongly in the development of the self while reaching enlightenment. The metaphor of dancing while feeling free or naked exemplifies the beauty of empowerment and self-worth. This work uses influences of classical Indian music and other vocal effects to allow Lalla's message to come to life."

At the beginning of the work, a drone on the notes D and A in the vocal and piano parts recreates the effect of a Sa-Pa (Indian musical syllables equivalent to the Western Do-Sol) drone on the seven-stringed tanpura. As the soloist gives voice to the phrase "Meditate within eternity," ornamental turns recall another distinctive element of Indian classical music, *gamaka*. The word means "ornamented note" in Sanskrit and is a feature that is built into Indian modes (ragas), unlike unadorned Western scales. Finally, as the work nears its conclusion, listen for sliding glissandi reminiscent of Indian vocal techniques. Runestad's title, drawn from the Sufi text, cuts lyrically to the heart of Lalla's simple but powerful message: "Dance Lalla, with nothing on but air. / Sing, Lalla, wearing the sky."

*Live the Questions* (2016) is based on a selection from *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929), a series of ten letters written by the Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Rilke to Franz Kappus, who published them three years after Rilke's death. Kappus was a 19-year-old cadet in the Austrian army seeking the established poet's advice on the quality of his writing and on whether to pursue a military or a literary career. Rilke encouraged Kappus to trust his own judgment and to be patient in the midst of uncertainty. "There's so much life wisdom in them," Runestad says of the letters. "It's just a stunning collection." The choice of a text written by a mentor to a student was particularly appropriate for this piece, as Robert Bode, the conductor of the commissioning ensemble Choral Arts Northwest, mentored one of the composer's friends, and in turn became one of Runestad's early champions. The composer translated the text used in the piece, in which Rilke gently counsels his young reader not to seek the answers to life's questions from others, but rather to "live the questions now." The music reflects both the open-endedness of life's biggest questions and the experiences that answer them (or not), wandering harmonically through many different key centers, led by melodic lines that transport listeners from one musical moment to another.

Inspiration for *We Can Mend The Sky* (2014) came from Runestad's sister, who taught English at the Minnesota International Middle School in Minneapolis. Many of the students with whom she worked emigrated with their families from Somalia to escape violent civil war in their country. "Seeking a better life for their children," Runestad writes, "these students' parents risked their lives to come to the USA – a valiant act of love. I wanted to tell their story through music and so I asked my sister to have her students write poems about their experiences leaving their home and coming to the USA." The words of 14-year-old Warda Mohamed anchor the composition, with the additional text of two Somali proverbs. The composer envisioned *We Can Mend The Sky* as "a musical depiction of one's journey as an immigrant and affirmation of hope as we all embrace the diversity around us." The work's wide-ranging moods and styles, as well

as its inclusion of bass drum and djembe (a rope-tuned skin-covered goblet drum originally from West Africa), capture both the drastic changes inherent in the immigrant experience and enduring pride in one's history and identity.

*Fear Not, Dear Friend* (2012) sets the poem *Fear Not, Dear Friend, But Freely Live Your Days* by the 19th-century Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson. Although better known for his novels *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stevenson published several volumes of poetry during his lifetime, and in 1901 the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams famously wrote a song cycle based on his *Songs of Travel*. Runestad's choral work sets Stevenson's words to emphasize their bittersweet meaning. Echoing the shifting moods and thoughts of the poet, the music moves through several distinct sections divided by caesurae, and reaches a dramatic climax with the exclamation, "From all the selfish cankers of our souls," immediately tempered by the solo soprano assurance, "And we would see you happy, dear, or die." The work both begins and ends with the title phrase, but what starts as an admonition to "freely live your days / Though lesser lives should suffer" concludes with a lullaby-like meditation on the phrase "Fear not, dear friend." Initially this phrase is staggered between two voices, but as the work draws to a close, it emerges one last time as a tenor murmur amid a wordless sea of sound, giving the impression of one "well anchored in some port of rest."

With text by Walt Whitman, *Proud Music of the Storm* (2017) was commissioned by the Dallas Symphony Chorus in celebration of their 40th anniversary season. It had its world premiere on 8 October 2017, conducted by Joshua Habermann, and in June 2018 was premiered in an orchestral version with instrumentation matching that of Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*. More than just shared instrumentation connects Bernstein's 1965 choral work with Runestad's new one: both are songs of praise, and praise of music. Compare, for instance, the opening text of the *Chichester Psalms* from Psalm 108 ("Awake, psaltery and harp: I will rouse the dawn!") with Walt Whitman's lyrical second stanza of *Proud Music of the*

*Storm* ("Ah, from a little child, / Thou knowest, Soul, how to me all sounds became music"). In Runestad's words, his piece is an "ode to all sounds that make up Whitman's world and how they inspired him to create." Nature is a recurring and important theme for the composer, who finds great meaning in "connecting with trees and plants and water and rocks," and who infuses his love of the outdoors into his music by selecting texts that exalt the natural world and advocate for its protection. Because Whitman's poem is an ode to the sounds that comprise our world, from nature to music, the composer wanted the piece to sound familiar to listeners. The middle section, for instance, is a lullaby. In the orchestral version of the work, a glockenspiel recalls the sound of a child's music box, and attentive listeners will hear an homage to Johannes Brahms' famous lullaby.

Of *I Will Lift Mine Eyes* (2006), the composer writes,

"I came across Psalm 121 from the Bible and found great beauty in the admiration for natural creation linked with a promise of guidance and support from a higher power. I find such peace in the splendor of the natural world and I wanted to capture that serenity with this work. I carefully shaped the melodic lines to mimic that of a mountainous landscape and the tone colors to the bold hues of where the hills meet the sky."

"One of the joys of composing is to create sound combinations in hopes of finding something completely original," Runestad writes of *Ner Ner* (2014), which features nonsense syllables rather than a conventional text, emphasizing the many vocal techniques on display. "The voice can make a variety of sounds, from traditional Western singing styles to overtone singing, vocal percussion, and many more," the composer continues. "I find the use of these sounds and techniques to be exhilarating – especially when they are grouped together, overlapped, mixed and matched, and put into the context of a choir!" Commissioned by the Wooster Chorus, the piece was intended to "reflect the energy of this dynamic ensemble by giving them the opportunity to vocally express their infectious joy and diverse membership," and is dedicated to the memory of Molly Bennett, a former member of the Wooster Chorus.

Dr. Leah Weinberg

## 1 The Secret of the Sea

*Texts edited and adapted by Jake Runestad*

I. The Unbounded Sea  
Lo, the unbounded sea!  
On its breast a ship starting, spreading all sails,  
the pennant is flying aloft as it speeds,  
below emulous waves press forward,  
they surround the ship with shining curving motions  
and foam.

*Walt Whitman, 1819–1892*

My soul is full of longing  
for the secret of the sea.

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807–1882*

II. Crash On Crash  
Crash on crash of the sea,  
raging against the world,  
furious, the deep roar hailing you,  
the very gods,  
rearing their mighty length  
on the unharvested sea.

*Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961*  
*Reproduced with permission.*

III. The Light that Fills the World  
The great sea  
moves me, sets me free.  
The winds of the earth  
carry me away,  
and my soul is filled with joy.  
When I drifted out  
and thought myself in danger,  
my fears captured me —  
all of the things I had to get and to reach.  
But there is only one great thing,  
the only thing:  
to live to see the light that fills the world.

*UvavnuK, 19th century*

## 2 Alleluia

Alleluia.

*Anonymous*

## 3 Let My Love Be Heard

Angels, where you soar  
Up to God's own light,  
Take my own lost bird  
On your hearts tonight;  
And as grief once more  
Mounts to heaven and sings,  
Let my love be heard  
Whispering in your wings.

*'A Prayer' by Alfred Noyes, 1880–1958*

## 4 Sing, Wearing the Sky

Meditate within eternity.  
Don't stay in the mind.  
The soul, like the moon,  
is new, and always new again.  
Since I scoured my mind and my body,  
I, too, Lalla, am new, each moment new.  
My teacher told me,  
live in the soul.  
When that was so,  
I began to go naked, and dance.  
Dance, Lalla, with nothing on but air.  
Sing, Lalla, wearing the sky.  
Look at this glowing day!  
What clothes could be more  
beautiful, or more sacred?

*Lalla, 1320–1392*  
*English translation by Coleman Barks, b. 1937*  
*Reproduced with permission.*

## 5 Live the Questions

Have patience with all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions like locked rooms or books written in a foreign tongue. Do not search for the answers now, for they cannot be given to you; you would not be able to live them. The point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday in the future, without noticing it, you will live your way into the answer.

*From a letter from Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)  
to Franz Kappus on July 16, 1903.  
Translated from the original German by Jake Runestad.*

## 6 We Can Mend the Sky

*Naftu!* [Life!]

In my dream I saw  
a world free of  
violence  
hunger  
suffering

a world  
filled with  
love

Now awake in this world  
I beg, let my dream come true.

*Soo baxa.* [Let's go]  
*Naftu orod bay kugu aamintaa.* [To save your life, run  
with all your might]

If we come together, we can mend a crack in the sky.

*'Let My Dream Come True' by Warda Mohamed, b. 2000  
Reproduced with permission.*

## 7 Fear Not, Dear Friend

Fear not, dear friend, but freely live your days  
Though lesser lives should suffer. Such am I,  
A lesser life, that what is mine of sky  
Gladly would give for you, and what of praise.  
Step, without trouble, down the sunlit ways.  
We that have touched your raiment, are made whole  
From all the selfish cankers of our souls,  
And we would see you happy, dear, or die.  
Therefore be brave, and therefore, dear, be free;  
Try all things resolutely, till the best,  
Out of all lesser betters, you shall find;  
And we, who have learned greatness from you, we,  
Your lovers, with a still, contented mind,  
See you well anchored in some port of rest.

*Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850–1894*

## 8 Proud Music of the Storm

Proud music of the storm!  
Blast that careers so free, whistling across the prairies!  
Strong hum of forest tree-tops!  
Wind of the mountains!  
Blending, with Nature's rhythmus, all the tongues of nations;  
You undertone of rivers, roar of pouring cataracts;  
Trooping tumultuous, filling the midnight late,  
bending me powerless,  
Entering my lonesome slumber-chamber –  
Why have you seiz'd me?  
Ah, from a little child,  
Thou knowest, Soul, how to me all sounds became music;  
My mother's voice, in lullaby;  
The solemn hymns and masses, rousing adoration,  
All passionate heart-chants, sorrowful appeals,  
Song of lost love – the torch of youth and life quench'd  
in despair,  
The measureless sweet vocalists of ages,  
Of winds and woods and mighty ocean waves;  
Give me to hold all sounds,

Fill me with all the voices of the universe,  
The tempests, waters, winds – operas and chants –  
marches and dances,  
pour in – for I would take them all.  
Then I woke softly,  
And pausing, questioning the music of my dream,  
I said to my silent, curious Soul,  
Go forth,  
Cheerfully tallying life, walking the world, the real,  
What thou hast heard, O Soul, was not the sound of winds,  
Nor dream of raging storm,  
But, to a new rhythmus fitted for thee,  
Poems, bridging the way from Life to Death,  
vaguely wafted in night air, uncaught, unwritten,  
Which, let us go forth in the bold day, and write.

*Walt Whitman*

## 9 I Will Lift Mine Eyes

I will lift mine eyes unto the hills.  
From whence comes my help?  
My help comes from the Lord  
The maker of the heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved.  
He who keeps you will not slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is thy keeper  
The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.  
The sun shall not harm you by day nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all evil.  
He will keep your soul.  
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in.  
From this day forth forever more.

*Psalms 121, New American Standard Version*

Kantorei



Kantorei is a Denver-based choral ensemble comprising volunteer singers under the direction of managing artistic director Joel M. Rinsema. Kantorei's choral artists reside throughout the greater Denver area and have studied at schools with strong music programs across the United States. Some serve as choral music educators, church choir conductors, and vocal instructors. Others are doctors, social workers, clinical psychologists, accountants, realtors – all brought together in weekly rehearsals for shared artistic excellence and community. Kantorei frequently performs at major choral conventions, has toured around the world, and works with composers and conductors of international renown. Its first international recording, released in January 2018, Kim André Arnesen's *Infinity: Choral Works* (Naxos 8.573788) climbed to the No. 2 best-selling classical album on iTunes, No. 6 on the Billboard Traditional Classical Albums Charts and No. 19 on the overall Billboard Classical Albums Chart. Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Inc. publishes the Kantorei Choral series. Kantorei's mission is "to elevate the human experience through choral excellence."

[www.kantorei.org](http://www.kantorei.org)

Kantorei

Joel M. Rinsema, Artistic Director

Soprano

Mary Christ  
Kim Dunninger  
Beryl Fanslow Wilson  
Christina Graham  
Heather Gunnerson  
Stacie Hanson  
Jade Howard  
Shannon Lemmon-Elrod  
Paige Lewkow  
Sara Michael\* (soloist 7)  
Juli Orlandini (soloist 6)  
Erin Pettitt  
Pearl Rutherford  
Christianna Sullins

Violin

Christine Short 1  
Sarah Whitnah 1 4

Viola

Brightin Schlumpf 1

Alto

Emily Alexander  
Lindsey Aquilina  
Allison Barber-Pasternak  
Lyn Berry-Helminger  
Sarah Harrison\*  
Melissa Menter  
Erin Meyerhoff  
Jennifer Moore  
Kali Paguirigan (soloist 4)  
Tegan Palmer  
Andrea Ware-Medina

Cello

Trevor Minton 1

Bass

Jeremy Nicholas 1

Tenor

Kai Berry-Helminger\*  
Matthew Eschliman  
Keith Ferguson  
Mason France  
Matthew Gierke  
Keith Harrison  
Jason Hindman  
Steve Howie  
Justin Kerr  
Alex Menter  
Jonathan Von Strohm  
Ryan Wright

Percussion

Rachel Hargroder 1 4 6  
Daniel Kent 1

Bass

John Bartley  
Michael Bizzaro  
Michael Boender  
Michael Bradford  
Garth Criswell  
Andrew Halladay  
Scott Horowitz  
Brad Jackson  
Karl Johnson  
Brad Larson  
John Ludwig  
John Schaak  
Kirk Schjodt\*  
Griffin Sutherland  
Matt Weissenbuehler

\* Section Leader

Piano

Mac Merchant 1 4 8

### **Joel M. Rinsema**



Managing artistic director Joel M. Rinsema joined Kantorei in 2014, becoming the second conductor in its history. A frequent collaborator and champion of new works for chorus, Rinsema has commissioned and premiered works by many leading contemporary composers including Kim André Arnesen, Mason Bates, René Clausen, Ola Gjeilo, Mark Hayes, Cecilia McDowall, Jake Runestad and Eric Whitacre. He is a passionate advocate for the professional choral art form, and he frequently consults with other choral arts organizations locally and around the US. For leadership in his field, Rinsema received the Louis Botto Award for Innovative Action and Entrepreneurial Zeal from Chorus America. He is an accomplished conductor of major works for choir and orchestra and was one of 18 conductors chosen in the US through audition to participate in masterclasses and workshops presented by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association and Chorus America. He also serves as the North American choral promotion manager for Oxford University Press. Prior to Kantorei, Joel Rinsema enjoyed a 23-year tenure with the GRAMMY award-winning Phoenix Chorale, serving in nearly every capacity within the organization. As assistant conductor, Rinsema contributed to all aspects of artistic planning and leadership.

Jake  
**RUNESTAD**  
(b. 1986)

**Sing, Wearing the Sky**  
**Choral Music**

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**\*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**



**Kantorei**  
**Joel Rinsema**

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

The sung texts are included in the booklet, and  
may also be accessed at [www.naxos.com/libretti/559892.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/559892.htm)

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Engineering, mixing and mastering: Brandon Johnson

Booklet notes: Dr. Leah Weinberg

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**AMERICAN CLASSICS**

The prolific young composer Jake Runestad has won numerous awards for his music, which ranges from opera to works for chamber ensemble. He is particularly valued for his choral compositions which exemplify a desire to write expertly crafted, socially conscious and emotionally potent music. On this album, Runestad explores a profound sea/life journey in *The Secret of the Sea*, and projects a powerful expression of grief in *Let My Love Be Heard*. Nature is a recurring theme for the composer and he employs texts that exalt the natural world, as well as finding seldom heard sound combinations in the exhilarating *Ner Ner*.

**[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)**

Playing  
Time:  
**65:20**