



THE HOPE OF LOVING

Choral Music of Jake Runestad

Conspirare
CRAIG HELLA JOHNSON



DE 3578



THE HOPE OF LOVING

Choral Works of Jake Runestad

Waves

American Triptych

Reflections • The Peace of Wild Things • Come to the Woods

**Why the Caged Bird Sings • Spirited Light • Let My Love
Be Heard • And So I Go On**

The Hope Of Loving

**Yield to Love • Wild Forces • Wondrous Creatures • The Heart's
Veil • My Soul Is a Candle • The Hope of Loving**

Flower into Kindness

Conspirare

Craig Hella Johnson, conductor

Total playing time: 79:12

The Hope of Loving

Choral Works of Jake Runestad

1. Waves (7:28)
Michael Jones, tenor

American Triptych (23:49)

2. Reflections (7:14)
3. The Peace of Wild Things (5:14)
4. Come to the Woods (11:21)
5. Why the Caged Bird Sings (9:06)
Alissa Ruth Suver, soprano
6. Spirited Light (5:02)
Jason Awbrey, bass
Dann Coakwell, tenor
7. Let My Love Be Heard (5:07)
8. And So I Go On (7:00)
Mela Sarajane Dailey, soprano
Wilson Nichols, tenor

The Hope of Loving (16:19)

9. Yield to Love (2:15)
Stefanie Moore, soprano
10. Wild Forces (2:01)
11. Wondrous Creatures (00:58)
Dann Coakwell, tenor
12. The Heart's Veil (3:28)
13. My Soul Is a Candle (4:46)
Stefanie Moore, soprano
Simon Barrad, baritone
14. The Hope of Loving (2:51)
15. Flower into Kindness (from *Into the Light*) (5:19)
Kathlene Ritch, soprano

Conspirare

Craig Hella Johnson, conductor

Total Playing Time: 79:12

Composer's Note

Growing up in Northern Illinois, I was immersed in a family dedicated to serving others. My parents made it a priority to volunteer our time, give of our resources, and show my sister and me that nature is to be valued, and that the world is made up of a beautiful variety of people from myriad backgrounds who should be heard and respected.

When I began to find my truest voice as a composer, moving beyond the imitative works of a budding youth, I found that speaking to social issues and authentic human experiences was what lived closest to my heart. The works included in this album are a representation of what drives me as an artist: a desire for beauty, for allowing compelling texts to inspire the music, and for telling authentic stories in a way that might foster compassion for our shared human experiences.

Why the Caged Bird Sings (2014) was my first collaboration with Craig Hella Johnson, who commissioned the work for the Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble. Paul Laurence Dunbar's text (from which Maya Angelou found the title for her famous autobiography), conveys the complexity of life as a post-Civil War black man born to previously enslaved parents. Musically, there is a tension between black and white pitches

(as seen on a piano keyboard) as the work progresses through Dunbar's metaphor of a caged bird wishing to be free.

One of the greatest joys in my life has come from my friendship with the phenomenal poet Todd Boss. Todd and I met seven years ago when I first moved to Minneapolis, on the recommendation of a friend. Todd has become one of my dearest friends and most frequent collaborators. His lyrical voice packs a punch with its directness, approachability, vivid imagery, and attention to the depths and complexity of humanity. Todd is a craftsman and delights in the collaborative experience—creating a new work with Todd is a joyful, illuminating, and fulfilling experience.

Waves (2015) is the first work on which Todd and I collaborated. I remember sitting at an outdoor café on a warm, summer evening and discussing what I look for in a text for music (clear and succinct language, open vowels for climactic moments, intentional use of consonants for percussive effects, a narrative form...). The resulting piece uses double choir to explore a wash of sound, moving back and forth between choirs like waves on the shore, as we move through the heaviness of sadness into a consoling sunrise.

And So I Go On (2015), another collaboration with Todd, has a very special origin. When choral director Germán Aguilar

passed away unexpectedly in the summer of 2014, it was a huge loss to our world. Germán had a love for life, teaching, and the people around him—especially his fiancé, Jon Talberg. After Germán’s death, Jon was cleaning out Germán’s wallet and found that the only business card inside was mine. I had given it to Germán when we met in January of 2014. Jon soon contacted me and asked if I would write a piece of music in memory of Germán, and I was honored to do so. Scored for double choir, this piece is a conversation between two lovers as one struggles through the intense experience of loss.

A recurring theme in my work is the importance and beauty of the natural world. I am passionate about being outside amidst trees, mountains, lakes, skies, and about hiking, camping, and basking in the glory of our world. **American Triptych** (2013, 2015) is a collection of three works with texts that span the USA from east to west featuring authors Henry David Thoreau (Massachusetts), Wendell Berry (Kentucky), and John Muir (California). Each movement expresses an aspect of our human connection with the natural world, and journeys through a rushing river, a peaceful lakefront, and a windstorm in the Western Sierra Nevada mountains.

The Alfred Noyes poem that inspired **Let My Love Be Heard** (2015) is a grief-filled plea that I found in a collection of poetry

that belonged to my grandfather and was given to me after his death. The main melody of the work, first stated in the tenors, slowly ascends onto the wings of angels as the plea is lifted into the sky.

I am a hoarder of poetry, and one of my favorite collections is *Love Poems From God*—mystical poems by Daniel Ladinsky inspired by famous writers from around the world. This book is a composer’s dream with colorful, powerful, and succinct writings that talk of living fully, deep spirituality, self-contemplation and love. When starting my work on this new composition, I opened Ladinsky’s book to find a treasure trove of quaint parables and sage advice for us all. **The Hope of Loving** (2015) for chorus, soloists, and string quartet, uses a selection of writings inspired by spiritual mystics throughout history to explore the idea of love and its manifestation in our lives.

My hope is that this music might introduce you to meaningful texts, connect you with an element of your own human experience, and foster your compassion for the story of another. I am thrilled to be collaborating with Craig Hella Johnson and Conspirare, and to be sharing in this concert and recording experience together.

—Jake Runestad

Waves (Track 1)

O my soul, where do you go sometimes?
Why have I come brooding for you
here where the ocean writes its tidelines
on the endless sand?
Waves come, waves go.
Waves know nothing but tossing and
crossing and crashing and thrashing.
My sadness is enormous as the sea.
Birds are made of bones of air but I
am water, drawn by my nature to drown.
Light—O, magnanimous light! Find me!
Blind me with sight! Sweep free
and steep me in the serenity that saves—
sunlight washing over me in waves—!

— *Todd Boss*

American Triptych (Tracks 2-4)

I. Reflections

We live but a fraction of our life.
We do not fill all our pores with our blood;
we do not inspire and expire fully and
entirely enough,
so that the wave of each inspiration
shall break on our farthest shores,
rolling 'til it meets the sand which bounds us,
and the sound of the surf comes
back [to us].
Why do we not let on the flood,
raise the gates,
and set all our wheels in motion?

There is the calmness of the lake
when there is not a breath of wind;
so it is with us.
Sometimes we are clarified and calmed
as we never were before.
We become like a still lake of purest crystal
and without an effort
our depths are revealed to ourselves.
All the world goes by us
and is reflected in our deeps.
Such clarity!
Obtained by such pure means!
By simple living,
by honesty of purpose.
To be calm, to be serene!

— *Henry David Thoreau*

II. The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's
lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the
great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— *Wendell Berry*

III. Come to the Woods

Another glorious day, the air as delicious
to the lungs as nectar to the tongue.
The day was full of sparkling sunshine,
and at the same time enlivened with one of
the most bracing wind storms.
The mountain winds bless the forests
with love.
They touch every tree, not one is forgotten.
When the storm began to sound,
I pushed out into the woods to enjoy it.
I should climb one of the trees for a
wider look.
The sounds of the storm were glorious with
wild exuberance of light and motion.
Bending and swirling backward and for-
ward, round and round,
in this wild sea of pines.
The storm-tones died away, and turning
toward the east,
I beheld the trees, hushed and tranquil.
The setting sun filled them with amber
light, and seemed to say,
"Come to the woods, for here is rest."

— John Muir

Why the Caged Bird Sings (Track 5)

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the
springing grass,

And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first
bud opens,
And the faint perfume from its
chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!
I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the
bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!
I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his
bosom sore,
When he beats his bars and he would
be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer...
I know why the caged bird sings!

— Paul Laurence Dunbar

Spirited Light (Track 6)

*Spirited light! On the edge
of the Presence your yearning
burns in the secret darkness,
O angels, insatiably
into God's gaze.
Perversity could not touch your beauty;
you are essential joy.*

But lost your companion,
angel of the crooked wings.
He sought the summit,
shot down the depths of God,
and plummeted past Adam —
that a mud-bound spirit might soar.

— *Hildegard von Bingen,*
translated by Barbara Newman

Let My Love Be Heard (Track 7)

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.

— *Alfred Noyes*

And So I Go On (Track 8)

My lovely one

though you are gone
taken from me
I cannot leave you
I am not free

I burn in snow

and thirst in rain
there is no sea
that can drown my pain

but you want me to live
and love again

and so I go on

always
wherever you are
lovely one
My lovely one

I am gone
taken from you
mine in your suffering
mine in your joy

my snow will kiss you
pouring down my love
there is no sea
that can drown your pain

I want you to live
and love again

and so I go on

always
wherever you are
lovely one

— *Todd Boss*

The Hope of Loving (Tracks 9-14)

I. Yield to Love

I know about love the way the fields know
about light,
the way the forest shelters us.
We are vulnerable like an infant.
We need each other's care or we will suffer.
How will you ever find peace unless you
yield to love?

— *Rabia*

II. Wild Forces

There are beautiful, wild forces within us.
Let them turn millstones inside
filling bushels that reach to the sky.

— *St. Francis of Assisi*

III. Wondrous Creatures

O wondrous creatures, by what strange
miracle do you so often not smile?

— *Hafiz*

IV. The Heart's Veil

V. My Soul Is a Candle

My soul is a candle that burned away the veil;
only the glorious duties of light I now have.
The soul is a candle that will burn away
the darkness;
only the glorious duties of love we will have.
Tenderly, I now touch all things, knowing
one day we will part.

— *St. John of the Cross*

VI. The Hope of Loving

What keeps us alive, what allows
us to endure?
It is the hope of loving, of being loved.
We weep when light does not reach
our hearts.
We wither like fields if someone close
does not rain their kindness upon us.
My soul has a purpose, it is to love.

— *Meister Eckhart*

Flower Into Kindness (Track 15)

The soul is made of love and must ever
return to love.
There is nothing so wise,
nor so beautiful,
nor so strong as love.

— *Mechthild von Magdeburg*

Above all, love.

— *Peter the Apostle*

I shed my words on the earth
as the tree sheds its leaves.
Let my thoughts unspoken
flower into kindness.

— *Rabindranath Tagore,
adapt. Runestad*

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Conspirare is a professional choral organization under the leadership of Craig Hella Johnson. Inspired by the power of music to change lives, this ensemble engages singers from around the world who join voices to deliver world-class, extraordinary live musical experiences and recordings. Their discography includes 13 commercial albums and 19 self-produced live albums. Johnson and Conspirare were awarded a 2014 Grammy for Best Choral Performance for *The Sacred Spirit of Russia* album and have been nominated seven other times. Conspirare was awarded the Texas Medal of Arts in 2019. Based in Austin, Texas, they perform an annual concert series and tour in the United States and abroad. Conspirare also consists of Conspirare Symphonic Choir, boasting more than 100 auditioned volunteer voices, and Conspirare Youth

Choirs, an educational program for singers in second through twelfth grade.

conspirare.org

Craig Hella Johnson is the Founding Artistic Director and Conductor of Conspirare and Music Director of Cincinnati's Vocal Arts



Ensemble. Known for crafting thought-provoking musical journeys that create deep connections between performers and listeners, Johnson is in frequent demand as a guest conductor of choral and orchestral works. He joined the faculty at Texas State as Artist in Residence in fall 2016 and is currently Professor of Practice. Johnson is a published composer and arranger, guest conductor and educator. His first concert-length composition *Considering Matthew Shepard* was premiered and recorded by Conspirare for a 2016 CD release.

Johnson's accomplishments have been recognized with numerous awards and honors. Notably among them, he and Conspirare won a 2014 Grammy for Best Choral Performance, Chorus America awarded him the Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art in 2015, and the Texas State Legislature named him Texas State Musician for 2013.
craighellajohnson.com

Jake Runestad (b. 1986) is an award-winning and frequently performed composer of "highly imaginative" (*Baltimore Sun*) and "stirring and uplifting" (*Miami Herald*) musical works. He has received commissions and performances from leading ensembles and organizations such as Washington National Opera, VOCES8, the Swedish Ra-



dio Symphony, the Netherlands Radio Choir, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Seraphic Fire, the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philippine Madrigal Singers, Craig Hella Johnson and Conspirare, and many more. Jake's visceral music and charismatic personality have fostered a busy schedule of commissions, residencies, workshops, and speaking engagements, enabling him to be one of the youngest full-time composers in the world. Considered "one of the best of the younger American composers" (*Chicago Tribune*), Jake Runestad holds a master's degree in composition from the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University, where he studied with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts. He has also studied extensively with acclaimed composer Libby Larsen. A native of Rockford, IL, Mr. Runestad is currently based in Minneapolis, MN, and his music is published by JR Music.
JakeRunestad.com

CONSPIRARE

Craig Hella Johnson, Artistic Director and Conductor

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Craig Hella Johnson and Jake Runestad

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