

A DREAM SO BRIGHT
CHORAL MUSIC OF JAKE RUNESTAD



TRUE CONCORD VOICES & ORCHESTRA | ERIC HOLTAN
JEFFREY BIEGEL | PIANO

fresh!
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REFERENCE
RECORDINGS.

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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

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| 1. DREAMS OF THE FALLEN | 25:44 |
| Jeffrey Biegel, piano Poetry by Brian Turner | |
| EARTH SYMPHONY | 32:11 |
| Libretto by Todd Boss | |
| 2. I. EVOLUTION | 4:22 |
| 3. II. AMBITION | 5:52 |
| 4. III. DESTRUCTION | 6:32 |
| 5. IV. LAMENT | 7:01 |
| 6. V. RECOVERY | 8:24 |

Total Running Time: 57:55

true
concord 
voices & orchestra
ERIC HOLTAN | CONDUCTOR
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PROGRAM NOTES

by Jake Runestad

DREAMS OF THE FALLEN

The combined forces of solo piano, chorus, and orchestra provide a formidable challenge, given their size, sonic power, and infinite textural and color possibilities. While planning for this work, I sought thematic material that would allow the piano to embody a character or person who could speak clearly and directly to the listener. I read stories of soldiers returning from war and was drawn into the complexity of their emotional responses and the ongoing impact of their post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). The lasting impact of war was an important story to share and these musical forces could do so in a powerful way. As I searched for the texts, a poet friend of mine suggested the work of Brian Turner, an award-winning poet and veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Brian's raw, immediate, and unbridled words cut to the heart of the sights, sounds, smells, and emotions of war and reveal the burdens that its prey must carry for the rest of their lives. I knew they were perfect for these stories.

Through my research, I found two fundamental needs of returning soldiers: first, a sense of closure to the war experience, and second, continual understanding and support from a community of friends and family.

In his book, *What It Is Like To Go To War* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011), Karl Marlantes recounts his experience as a soldier in Vietnam and how it changed his cognitive and emotional well-being: “When I did eventually face death — the death of those I killed and those killed around me — I had no framework or guidance to help me work out combat’s terror, exhilaration, horror, guilt, and pain into some larger framework that would have helped me find some meaning in them later.” He discusses the importance of a ceremonial “handing over of the gun” to mark an end to the wartime experience as a way of easing the transition back into life at home. Inspired by the words of Marlantes and those veterans with whom I spoke, the goal of *Dreams of the Fallen* is to serve as a ceremony addressing the life-changing experiences of war, and to reveal these stories through music so as to foster compassion and inspire a communal support system for veterans and their families.

A single, continuous movement, the work is structured in three sections based on Brian Turner’s poems as well as the elements of a rite of passage: separation, liminality/transition, and reincorporation. The work opens with the line “and I keep telling myself that if I walk far enough, or long enough, someday I’ll come out the other side,” which returns at the end, contextualizing the pre- and post-war experience. “Here, Bullet,” a violent beckoning to the weapons of war, launches the listener into the world of battle and first section of the work. Chaotic and dissonant music flies through the ensemble as the rhythmic motives in the piano wreak havoc on the soldier’s psyche. Several dream sequences, featuring the solo piano,

serve as musical bridges between sections allowing the soldier to explore his or her emotional responses to the text. The second section, “Phantom Noise,” introduces scarring memories through “ringing” motives with heavy, downward motion and echo effects. “Sadiq,” the third section of the work, calls for the acknowledgment and acceptance of emotion through the line “no matter what crackling pain and anger you carry in your fists, it should break your heart to kill.” Intensified by rhythm and dissonance, that line finally breaks free and we return to the same text found at the opening, now in a new context of understanding.

I am grateful to the veterans who shared their stories with me and hope that this work captures a glimpse of their life-changing experiences. No matter our personal opinions of war, may *Dreams of the Fallen* deepen our awareness of its impact and challenge us to listen, feel, grieve, and seek to understand those who have given of themselves for our country.



Jeffrey Biegel and Jake Runestad
conferring on *Dreams of the Fallen*

EARTH SYMPHONY

Over hundreds of years, composers developed the symphonic form into a potent, large-scale framework for exploring profound ideas. The sheer number of musicians involved and duration of the work allow time, space, and sonic possibilities for a significant musical journey. For this commission from True Concord Voices & Orchestra, I knew that creating a large work for these forces would necessitate a significant story to tell — one of relevance and power, drawn from beautiful and complex human experiences. Every day we hear of fires, floods, hurricanes, droughts, tsunamis, extinctions, and diseases that impact life around the globe. The earth is changing, due to human behavior, and how we respond to these changes will determine the survival of our species.

Through brainstorming with my frequent collaborator, poet/librettist Todd Boss, we decided that giving voice to Mother Earth would be a powerful approach. Todd created a sweeping, gorgeous, compelling five-part monologue of a mother telling the history of her children — how they admired her, harmed her, and ultimately, how she recovered.

Her story begins in a pre-life genesis that tracks the evolution of humans, whose apprehension of Earth's laws endear them to her as nothing short of miraculous (her beloved “Mirabilia”).

Movement 1: “Evolution” hints at the musical themes of each subsequent section and establishes a sonic relationship between Earth (D Major) and humankind (E♭ Major), which is explored throughout the work.

Movement 2: “Ambition” dramatizes humanity’s fall from grace by retelling the Greek myth of Icarus, recalling ancient instruments and melodies (including the Seikilos Epitaph — the oldest, complete musical composition yet discovered).

Movement 3: “Destruction” rages through a series of ecological cataclysms — forest fires, storms, earthquakes — illustrated by growling brass, raging percussion, and shrieking woodwinds.

Movement 4: “Lament” expresses Earth’s grief in a loving farewell to humanity that echoes Henry Purcell’s 17th-century aria, “When I Am Laid in Earth” (Dido’s Lament), and its iconic descending bass-line chaconne.

Movement 5: “Recovery” finds Earth restoring balance and moving on, into a deep spacetime like the one from which she emerged. By anthropomorphizing Earth herself, drawing on the familiar earth-mother trope, “Earth Symphony” enables entry into our own ecological shame, guilt, responsibility, potential, and redemption, all from a wide-angled, time-telescoped lens, thereby asking our most immediately pressing environmental questions in an entirely new way.

voices of dust these years ringing
ringing these children their gravestones
their limbs gone missing
this eardrum this rifled symphonic this
ringing of midnight this
threading of bullets in muscle and bone this ringing
hum this ringing hum this
ringing

It should make you shake and sweat,
nightmare you, strand you in a desert
of irrevocable desolation, the consequences
seared into the vein, no matter what adrenaline
feeds the muscle its courage, no matter
what god shines down on you, no matter
what crackling pain and anger
you carry in your fists, my friend,
it should break your heart to kill.

And I keep telling myself that if I walk far enough
or long enough someday I'll come out the other side.

*All poems © 2005, 2010 by Brian Turner and Alice James Books.
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EARTH SYMPHONY

Libretto by Todd Boss

I. EVOLUTION

Forever alone —
four billion years of empty
space and dormant stone.

Then you were born: Humankind!
and soon upon your face
there dawned a trace of mind!

You scorned the odds
to be reborn as gods of reason,
authors of wonder,

inventors of alchemy,
chemistry, astronomy.
You alone unwound
the helix of my chi. You
mirrored me to me.

Mirabilia!

You were my light.
Never shall I dare to dream
another dream so bright.

II. AMBITION

And how are you fallen so soon?

Do you remember Icarus,
whose father gave him
wings of wax and feathers
for a toy?

There he is — in memory's eye —
canary of a boy!

[Icarus:] O, joy — so much
at hand! — to soar
the strand, over sea
and shore! Whee! — to taste
ambition pure!

Two wingbeats more,
and I can see the patterns
on the ocean floor.

O, me!
I'm free as albatross! Stronger
than ever with a father so
clever with beeswax and

feather! I flap them together
and higher and higher I rise! —
I am a dream!
I'll touch the moon!

How small she is — the blue-
green planet far below...
I belong to her no longer.
Who am I, without her?

The sun.
The sun grows.
The sun grows ever hotter...

[Earth:] Yes I remember Icarus,
who flew too near the sun.
Waxen wings undone,
he tumbled, thrashing, and
came crashing into the sea!

So fell humanity.

So fell I.

III. DESTRUCTION

Terrore atmosphaera!

You make your
mother torturer!
Twist me against
my nature,
waste me to tinder,
roast me under the
torches of the sun
till I'm undone.

You dam my
waters,
bleach
my corals, flood me,
strangle me,
slaughter each other,
set me
on fire!

I am rage! I am war!
Where are your gods
now?

Mirabilia!

What have you done,
over-blessed one?
Briefest of species,
what have you done?

IV. LAMENT

Sleep now, my children, now your days are done.
Nevermore shall you adore the setting of the sun.

Sleep now, forever, lofted in time.
No seraphim to rouse thee, no carillons to chime.

Mirabilia!

Never shall I dare to dream a dream so bright.
Sleep now, my children, my wonder, my light.
Never shall I dare to dream another dream so bright.

Mirabilia!

Never shall I dare to dream a dream so bright.

Sleep now, my children, though the cradle fall.
You rest among the yesterdays, the softest place of all.

Mirabilia!

V. RECOVERY

Alone forever, the mirror dims.
Empty space. Dormant stone.

No. I shall not go alone.
Ivy shall recover every avenue,
seaweed swallow every drain,
and forestry sow a sorcery
over every human stain.

None shall weep,
and none shall witness,
while my wordless work is done.

Slowly, in the shell of a factory,
a gray whale, circling aimlessly,
writes a disappearing history
in the shadows of the deep,
and none shall weep.

There shall come a day
like the first day,
so heavenly,
so clear.

Mirabilia,
you would love it here.

THE ARTISTS



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Founded in 2004, Tucson, Arizona-based **TRUE CONCORD VOICES & ORCHESTRA** made its New York City debut at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in September 2015 with Mozart's *Requiem* and Stephen Paulus's *Prayers and Remembrances*. That same year, True Concord debuted on the international stage with its first album on Reference Recordings®,

Far in the Heavens: Choral Music of Stephen Paulus, which received a GRAMMY® nomination for Best Choral Performance, while the late Stephen Paulus won the GRAMMY® for Best Classical Contemporary Composition posthumously.

True Concord is committed to creating experiences through the performance of celebrated masterworks and music of today's leading composers that move, enrich and inspire. Recent performances and premieres include Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B Minor*, Mozart's *Requiem* and *Mass in C Minor*, Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Jake Runestad's *Earth Symphony* and Jocelyn Hagen's *Here I Am*. Other commissions and premieres have involved Stephen Paulus, Gerald Near, Ola Gjeilo, Paul Crabtree, and Sheldon Curry. After the tragic death of Stephen Paulus, True Concord launched the annual *Stephen Paulus Emerging Composers Competition*, a national initiative to honor Paulus's legacy of nurturing young composers.

During the pandemic, True Concord refused to go silent in spite of the huge challenges posed by COVID-19. It nimbly adapted, creating a safe "bubble" for artists, strict health protocols for audiences, and two concentrated seasons of live, outdoor and video-streamed concerts that reached long-standing devotees and new audiences across the globe — a feat recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts in its special report "The Art of Reopening: A Guide to Current Practices Among Arts Organizations During COVID-19."



ERIC HOLTAN, Founding Music Director and Conductor of True Concord, launched his professional music career at age 12 as a church organist. A native of Minnesota, he studied organ, voice, and conducting at Gustavus Adolphus College, earning a Master of Music in Choral Conducting from the University of Iowa and the Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral and Orchestral Conducting from the University of Arizona.

Holtan's principal conducting teachers include Karle Erickson, William Hatcher, Bruce Chamberlain, and Thomas Cockrell, with additional studies with Donald Portnoy, Otto-Werner Mueller, Christoph Eschenbach, David Hayes, Duain Wolfe, Vance George, and Dale Warland. Eric is also Director of Music and Liturgical Arts at Dove of Peace Lutheran Church in Tucson.



JEFFREY BIEGEL's career reflects an unprecedented journey creating the most diverse commissioning projects and recordings of his generation. In 2024, Biegel was the featured artist in the Naxos recording of Peter Boyer's *Rhapsody in Red, White & Blue* with the London Symphony Orchestra — part of Biegel's 50-state Rhapsody National Initiative. Recent premieres include Biegel's *Three Reflections: Freedom (JFK), Justice (RBG), Equality (MLK)* for piano and orchestra, with orchestrations by Harrison Sheckler; Jim Stephenson's *Piano Concerto*; Daniel Perttu's *A Planet's Odyssey* for piano and orchestra; and Farhad Poupel's *The Legend of Bijan and Manijeh* for piano, orchestra, and chorus. In 2021, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra featured his *Reflection of Justice: An Ode to Ruth Bader Ginsburg*, and in February 2025, Biegel will premiere Adolphus Hailstork's new *Piano Concerto* with the Pacific Symphony, Carl St. Clair conducting.



Considered “one of the best of the younger American composers” (*Chicago Tribune*), EMMY®-winning and GRAMMY®-nominated composer and conductor **JAKE RUNESTAD** has received commissions and performances from leading ensembles and organizations such as Washington National Opera, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, Pacific Symphony & Chorale, True Concord Voices & Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Choir, Philippine Madrigal Singers, Seraphic Fire, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, and many more.

The Hope of Loving — the first album dedicated to Jake’s choral music and recorded by the American choir Conspirare, received a GRAMMY® nomination. In 2019, Jake became one of the youngest

composers ever awarded the prestigious Raymond C. Brock commission by the American Choral Directors Association. *Earth Symphony*, Jake's groundbreaking choral symphony written with librettist Todd Boss, earned a 2022 EMMY® Award for musical composition. Jake's visceral music and charismatic personality have fostered a busy schedule of commissions, residencies, workshops, and conducting engagements, enabling him to share his passion for creativity, expressivity, and community with musicians around the world.

Dubbed a “choral rockstar” by American Public Media, Jake is one of the most frequently performed composers of concert music. His thoughtful and compelling works “that speak to some of the most pressing and moving issues of our time” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*), have been heard in thousands of performances across the globe.

Jake Runestad holds a Master's degree in composition from the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where he studied with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts.

Find out more at: JakeRunestad.com

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Laura Cásarez
Emily Chao

VIOLIN II

Ellen Chamberlain
Freya Creech
Anna Gendler
Meghan Ruel

VIOLA

Ann Weaver
Christina Beasley
Sarah Bromberg
Rebecca McKee

CELLO

Theodore Buchholz
Robert Chamberlain
Diana Yusupov

BASS

James Karrer
Philip Alejo

FLUTE

Alexander Lipay
Paula Redinger

OBOE

Sara Fraker
Rachel Messing

ENGLISH HORN

Rachel Messing

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Andrew Braden

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Nathan Mitchell
Michael Mesner
Kathleen Demlow

TRUMPET

Hayato Tanaka
Betsy Bright

TROMBONE

Charles Hopkins
Neal Romberg
Michael Becker

TUBA

David Morgan

PERCUSSION

Homero Cerón
Frederick Morgan
Delgado
Paul Gibson

HARP

Carla Fabris

PIANO

Alexander Tentser



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Hailed as “Tucson’s savior of classical music” by the Arizona Daily Star, her support of True Concord has been nothing short of transformational, for which everyone in the organization continues to be immensely grateful.

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