

## John Luther Adams □ – The Wind In High Places (2015)

Written by bluesever

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The Wind In High Places 1 *Above Sunset Pass* 7:25 2 *Maclaren Sunset* 4:56 3 *Looking Toward Hope* 6:11  
Canticles Of The Sky 4 *Sky With Four Suns* 4:24 5 *Sky With Four Moons* 4:24 6 *Sky With Nameless Colors* 4:26 7 *Sky With Endless Stars* 4:32 8 *Dream Of The Canyon Wren* 7:41

The Northwestern Cello Ensemble (tracks: 4 to 7) The JACK Quartet (tracks: 1 to 3, 8) Hans Jørgen Jensen - conductor (tracks: 4 to 7)

The Wind in High Places: "I've long been enamored with the ethereal tones of Aeolian harps—instruments that draw their music directly from the wind. The Wind in High Places treats the string quartet as a large, sixteen-stringed harp. All the sounds in the piece are produced as natural harmonics or on open strings. Over the course of almost twenty minutes, the fingers of the musicians never touch the fingerboards of the instruments. If I could've found a way to make this music without them touching the instruments at all, I would have." (John Luther Adams)

Four Canticles of the Sky: "In the Arctic sky, the low angle of the sun and heavy ice crystals in the air often produce vivid halos, arcs, and sundogs. Sometimes these phenomena create the illusion of multiple suns. 'Sky with Four Suns' is a musical evocation of such an apparition, from sunrise to sunset. Similar visions also occur at night, which is the image behind 'Sky with Four Moons.' 'Sky with Nameless Colors' and 'Sky with Endless Stars' were inspired by the skies of the Sonoran Desert." (John Luther Adams)

Dream of the Canyon Wren: "For forty years the song of the hermit thrush has been for me the quintessential voice of my home in the boreal forest of Alaska. In recent years I've found a new home in the desert, where the song of the canyon wren evokes for me similar feelings of deep tranquility and longing." ---John Luther Adams, discogs.com

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The music of Alaska-based John Luther Adams is minimal, but not minimalist, produced with a great economy of sound resources but showing definite shapes. This pair of string quartets and one piece for "cello choir" makes a good introduction to the music of this Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, whose works often show a strong connection to the natural world. The title work, *The Wind in High Places*, relies exclusively on harmonics and on tones played on open strings; the composer said he "treats the string quartet as a large, 16-stringed harp," adding unhelpfully that if he could have found a way to make the music without having the players touch the instruments, he would have. More effective than this rather gimmicky concept is *Four Canticles of the Sky*, the cello work, depicting sundogs and other celestial phenomena, and played here by the 45 cellos of the Northwestern University Cello Ensemble. These four short pieces use the dense polyphony involved to great effect, as does the final string quartet *Dream of the Canyon Wren*, introduced by a very unusual birdsong appoggiatura that is developed over the course of the work and sharply delineated by the members of the JACK Quartet. Despite its simplicity, the thematic material in Adams' music is not neutral, and listeners will tend to remember these pieces, especially the last two, long after they're heard. Recommended for anyone interested in new directions in contemporary chamber music. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

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