


**R. MICHAEL WAHLQUIST**  
**WILDERNESS CANTICLES**



*The Sun* | M. K. Čiurlionis | pastel on paper, 1907

 A musical work might gestate for years – or be conceived and born on the same day.

*Wilderness Canticles* is such a work that came to be in just 24 hours. On the night of April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, I lay sleepless and full of new musical ideas. To find rest, I wrote down the outline for a new album. The next morning, as I sat down to record with my home setup, a lawn service began some astonishingly loud work across the street. I thought, *I can't very well make music about enduring trials without showing a little patience*. While waiting, I studied the scriptures and finalized the album's concept. Once I was finally able to record in peace and get to work on my computer, the album was complete by evening. Finishing an album in one day hadn't been on my bucket list, but I'll cross it off anyway!

As with my album *MEGASTRUCTURES*, the twelve tracks here consist mostly of massively multilayered and digitally crafted improvisations. Overall, the textures of *Wilderness Canticles* are less dense and more focused on melodic layering. Once again, I have employed various relatively simple sonic manipulations to obscure, enhance, or otherwise transform the sound of the piano, while never altering the pitch of the underlying improvisation recording. Hand muting, tapping, and scraping techniques were used inside the piano on tracks 4 & 7.

Each track on *Wilderness Canticles* is a contemplative meditation on a different sacred text, reflecting a personal, spiritual journey out of the wilderness and into everlasting light. I held the texts in mind as I improvised the underlying piano recordings. In particular, the repetition of these unsung texts can be heard in the musical texture throughout tracks 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, & 12. While the musical ideas came into being in a very short time, the eternal truths examined are a simply yet another protrusion into my musical work of a lifetime of faith, trials, and hope.

*Soli Deo gloria!*

Thank you for listening.

R. Michael Wahlquist  
Rexburg, Idaho  
April 2024

# WILDERNESS CANTICLES

## BY R. MICHAEL WAHLQUIST, 2024

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### Canticle I - In Thy Sight

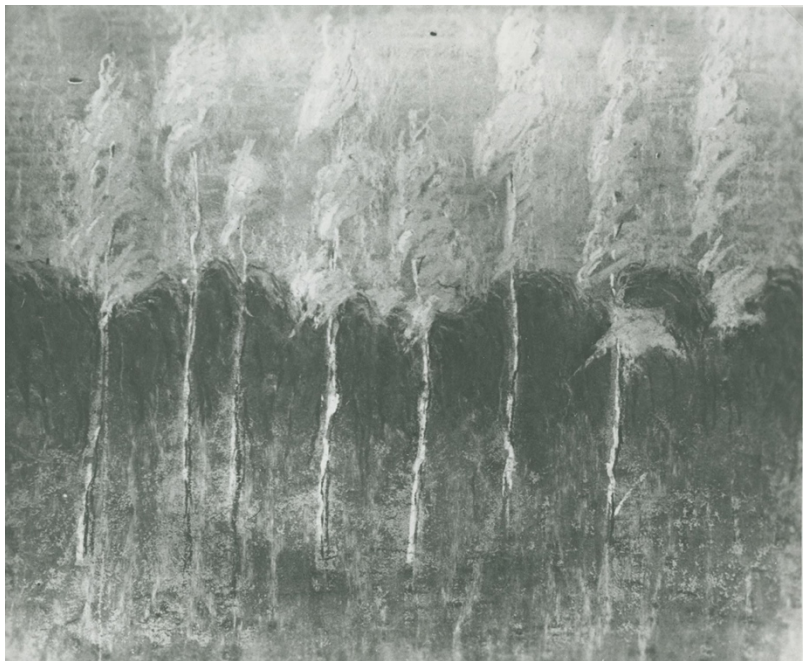
*A series of vast chords march slowly across time – ‘the pillars of heaven’ in ‘the wide expanse of eternity.’*

The wilderness-born prophet Jacob taught that all are “under the glance of the piercing eye of the Almighty God.” (Jacob 2:10)

Returning from his wayward wanderings, the prodigal son of the parable acknowledged: “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” (Luke 15:21) For choosing to return home, he was accepted with love, “for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” (Luke 15:32)

Leading the people out of the wilderness and to the promised land, Moses pled importunately for the abiding presence of the Lord: “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.” (Exodus 33:15-16)





*The Birch Trees* | M. K. Čiurlionis | original lost, date unknown

# Canticle II - Number the Dust

*Musical filigree floats in the air like gently settling dust in the sunlight.*

Dust may be the basest, most humble, and yet omnipresent of substances.

Cast out of the garden, Adam was told: “cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:17-19)

At the end of his long trial, Job repented “in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:6)

After a lifetime in tents, Abraham and his family “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Hebrews 11:13)

And what were the promises? God spoke to him of the countless stars or of the innumerable sands of the sea, but also of dust: “I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.” (Genesis 13:16)

And why would this posterity innumerable as the dust matter? “In thy seed after thee... shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.” (Abraham 2:11)

## Canticle III - ☾ Sorrow and Sighing

*Rolling across the distant years between, the refrain of the ancient promise rings: "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away."*

His prophecies full of visions of the return of the chosen people from their long dispersal, Isaiah foretold: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isaiah 35:10)

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## Canticle IV - ☽ And My Soul Hungered

*A deep soul hunger given voice in the rustling, restless, endless susurrations of the forest and its denizens.*

Seeking to connect with the God of his father (Jacob, son of Lehi), Enos resorted to the forest: "And I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins. Behold, I went to hunt beasts in the forests; and the words which I had often heard my father speak concerning eternal life, and the joy of the saints, sunk deep into my heart. And my soul hungered; and I kneeled down before my Maker, and I cried unto him in mighty prayer and supplication for mine own soul; and all the day long did I cry unto him; yea, and when the night came I did still raise my voice high that it reached the heavens." (Enos 1:2-4)

Enos found satiation for his soul-hunger in Christ: "And there came a voice unto me, saying: 'Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed.' And I, Enos, knew that God could not lie; wherefore, my guilt was swept away. And I said: 'Lord, how is it done?' And he said unto me: 'Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.'" (Enos 1:5-8)







*Funeral Symphony III* | M. K. Čiurlionis | pastel on paper, 1903

# Canticle V - My Voice Shall Forever Ascend

*Resounding again, a vow without end, "My voice shall forever ascend..."*

Before he began his journey into the wilderness, Lehi "saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God." (1 Nephi 1:8)

This vision defined for his posterity a sense that heaven in part includes a blessed duty to praise God. His descendant Benjamin expressed his longing that his "immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God." (Mosiah 2:28)

At the end of his long wilderness wanderings, Lehi's son Nephi ended his 'psalm' with the declaration, "Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God." (2 Nephi 4:35)

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# Canticle VI - Hosanna Tapestry

*Hear from our mouths perfected praise, woven tight in layered waves: "Hosanna in the highest."*

One of the prayers that resounds around the heavenly throne of God is that of "Hosanna," a Hebrew word meaning 'save now' or 'please save us.' During his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Christ was greeted with shouts and waving palms. "Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." (Mark 11:9-10)

The obligation to let this perfect praise ring out is found in the Lord's approval: "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." (Luke 19:40) "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." (Matthew 21:16)

# Canticle VII - God Be Merciful to Me a Sinner

*The thumping beat is the sinner's plea: "God be merciful to me a sinner."*

In one of his many profound parables, Christ gave voice to all who hesitate to come "boldly to the throne of grace, that [they] may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'" (Luke 18:9-14)

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# Canticle VIII - Show Me Now Thy Way

*With the ancient prophet may we say: "Show me now thy way."*

"Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee..." (Genesis 33:13)

"Jesus saith unto him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.'" (John 14:6)

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)



*Forest* | M. K. Čiurlionis | pastel on paper, 1907



*Forest* | M. K. Čiurlionis | tempera on cardboard, 1906

## Canticle IX - Fruit of the Spirit

*Tendrils of fresh growth sprout from the musical soil.*

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8-10)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:22-23, 25)

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## Canticle X - Encircled About

*Myriad melodic encirclements lead towards a place of quiet rest.*

Father Lehi proclaimed at the end of his wilderness journey: “the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.” (2 Nephi 1:15)

“...they are encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love...” (Alma 26:15)

# Canticle XI - Alleluias Before the Throne

*With all the hosts around the throne, let us each make this praise our own: "Alleluia!"*

Alleluia means 'Praise ye the Lord.' "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, 'Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments...' And again they said, 'Alleluia...' And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, 'Amen; Alleluia.' And a voice came out of the throne, saying, 'Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.' And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.'" (Revelation 19:1-6)

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# Canticle XII - Thousandfold Amen

*"Amen" the parting praise of song, the tolling of our hymn, the sacred sound our hearts prolong: "Amen, amen, amen!" - RMW 2019, from the hymn "Amen" We Pray with One Accord*

Christ declared himself to be "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." (Revelation 3:14)

"He which testifieth these things saith, 'Surely I come quickly. Amen.' Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20)

"And all the angels stood round about the throne... and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, 'Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.'" (Revelation 7:11-12)





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M. K. Čiurlionis, 1875-1911

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