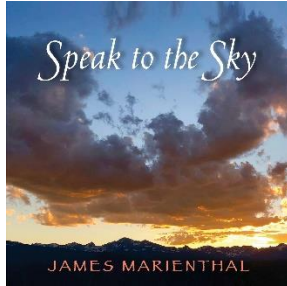


James Marienthal  
Speak to the Sky



With all the religious variations that mankind has embraced, we sometimes forget that long before the white man came to the Americas, the indigenous peoples of those lands had their own ways, their own belief systems, and their own Gods. They believed in the power of the Creator and of the Earth. For some it was One God. The Great Spirit. For others it was many Gods, animal totems, and other heavenly bodies. The elements of the planet were revered. For centuries the white man denied, forbade, and outlawed these religious practices. Freedom of religion was the basis of the constitution, but it never seemed to apply to Indigenous Americans until hundreds of years later. **James Marienthal**, on his latest release, **Speak to the Sky** offers up a collection of achingly beautiful prayers that celebrate that freedom. And the freedom is for all. The album has eight musical entreaties of gentle instrumentation, soft voice, and rich Native American flute.

The album opens with a single, moderate tone. **First Breath** is a primal declaration. You can feel and hear the earth's breathing changing into wind upon the land. At first gentle, then it gains strength to give the wind a louder voice. James' use of many flutes combines to give the sound an omnidirectional entity, and that is how the wind is.

**Speak to the Sky**, the title tune, comes alive with a strong, clear voice. A quaver of sound in the background lays the foundation of the morning prayer thanking the Great Spirit for the use of the day with a promise to give it the care it deserves. Steel guitar by Tom Wasinger adds the wailings of a ghostly voice to compliment the multiple flutes on this awe-inspiring tune.

James imparts a simple melody to the fascinating tune **Escondida** or Hidden. A soft voice as delicate as the wind reverberates within the tune. There is beauty and magic in everything around us, sometimes it is hidden. Sometimes you must close your eyes and open your heart to find it.

**Navajo Twilight** is the thoughtful announcement that night is on its way. The moon will soon rise with a silver light. It is said that the stars were created when coyote tried to steal them and scattered them among the sky. Marienthal's song is blissfully reverent as if the notes from his lucid flute paints one star at a time on the darkness.

Can you believe in the wind? Can you see the silence? The tune **Silence Seen** is a slow, spinning piano tune with a barely there, hushed vocal that blends seamlessly into quietude. It has nuanced classical elements that make it old world, but the sentiment is universal. It suggested to me that silence is one of the things we should appreciate more. The silence within and without.

**Returning Home** uses a sweet, subdued voice as a call and response tune of such delicacy as to be sung in whispers. The gentle melody flows like a forest brook, washing your spirit with sound and energies. Marienthal's flute has a tender expression, while the ephemeral female vocal by

**Arwen Ek** echoes a sense of empathy. Getting back to the starting point is always a cause for celebration.

A **Terraplace of Time** is a very light, ambient tune on *Speak to the Sky*. It is where you are at this time. A mindful interpretation, but the music is transporting and spatial. Sympathetic tones echo like some kind of otherworldly xylophone that float about in undefined space. A drifting point on some introspective map. The song is completed with quavers of bansuri flute notes that resonate and travel like water over rocks. Very meditative.

Since this is my first encounter with James Marienthal's work I was pleasantly surprised a number of times. His use of different instrumentation, his tightly woven compositions, and his pure, respectful themes were a breath of fresh air. I liked every track. I understand he did another album recorded in a gigantic water tank out in the desert. I need to hear that one too. Highly listenable. – R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews.