

James Grant

LISTEN TO THE EARTH

Cantata for Earth Day

for baritone solo, mixed chorus, children's chorus and chamber orchestra
with video

an original libretto written and compiled by the composer, inspired by the writings of
Mercury, Gemini, Apollo and Space Shuttle astronauts, and astronomer Carl Sagan
Including N.A.S.A. transcripts from the Apollo 11 mission
and texts from the United Nations Environmental Sabbath Program

LIBRETTO

VIDEO

1 min 20 sec film of the Apollo 11 launch from Cape Kennedy, July 16, 1969
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yjed4F3Jg94>
from 5:53 – 6:20

SOLO

thunderous rocket boosters lift us from the pad
with astounding vibration
releasing us from home
hurling us into the endless mystery of space

CHORUS

Apollo 11, Houston. You're good at 1 minute.

SOLO

Roger.

CHORUS

Stand by for mode 1 Charlie. MARK. Mode 1 Charlie.

SOLO

One Charlie.

CHORUS

Apollo 11, this is Houston. You are GO for staging.

SOLO

Inboard cut-off.

CHORUS

We confirm inboard cut-off.

SOLO

Staging. And ignition.

CHORUS

11, Houston. Thrust is GO, all engines. You're looking good.

SOLO

Roger. You're loud and clear, Houston.

CHORUS

This is Houston. Roger. Out.

11, Houston. Your guidance has converged; you're looking good.

SOLO

Roger. We're doing 6 minutes.

CHORUS

Roger, 11. You're GO from the ground at 6 minutes.

SOLO

Apollo 11 is GO at 7 minutes.

CHORUS

Apollo 11, Houston. You are GO at 8 minutes.

. . . at 9 minutes.

11, Houston. You are GO for staging. Over.

SOLO

Understand, GO for staging...
Staging. And ignition.

CHORUS

Ignition confirmed; thrust is GO.

SOLO

and now
in space, weightless
orbiting a rotating planet orbiting a distant star

looking out my window
I catch my first glimpse of Earth

the vast expanse of blue ocean
is streaked with random wisps of lacy white clouds

familiar shapes of continents
show no borders
I see but one nation: Earth

the long sloping curve of the horizon
is wrapped in a thin veil of pale blue

a halo of life-giving gases — our atmosphere
shielding us from a solar explosion 93 million miles away

and so Earth sustains life
Earth sustains us

countless systems in delicate balance
dancing together, merging as one

and now
in space, weightless
orbiting a rotating planet orbiting a distant star

I gaze upon a living, breathing, precious
four-and-a-half-billion year old miracle

CHORUS

Apollo 11, this is Houston. You are GO for Trans-Lunar Injection. Over.

SOLO

Apollo 11. Thank you. Ignition.

CHORUS

...and the thrust is GO.

SOLO

there in the pitch-black void of space
 this beacon of blue and brown, green and white
 holds the summary of my life
 all has happened there, on Earth

[SYV – Sarasota Young Voices]
 We live in all things
 All things live in us

[Chorus]
 We live by the sun
 We move with the stars

[Solo]
 every soul I've ever met
 every taste of food, sip of wine
 every dance step
 all has happened there, on Earth

The following text is adapted from portions of the United Nations Environmental Sabbath Program

[SYV]
 We live in all things
 All things live in us

[Chorus]
 We eat from the earth
 We drink from the rain
 We breathe from the air

[Solo]
 every sunrise and sunset
 my every hope, every dream
 my work and play
 all has happened there, on Earth

[Both Choruses]
 We live in all things
 All things live in us

[SVY]

Let us join with the earth

[Chorus]

To bring new life to the land

[SYV]

Let us join with each other

[Chorus]

To restore the waters

To refresh the air

[SYV]

Let us join with the earth

[Chorus]

To renew the forests

[SYV]

Let us join with each other

[Chorus]

To care for the plants

To protect the creatures

To celebrate the seas

To rejoice in the sunlight

[SYV]

Let us listen to the earth

[Chorus]

We must listen to the earth

[SYV]

We must listen to the earth

[Chorus]

Let us listen to the earth

[SYV]

Let us listen to the earth

[Chorus]

We must listen to the earth

[Both choruses]
Let us sing the endless song of the infinite stars

1. [SYV]
We must listen to the earth

[Chorus]
We must remember the children

2. [SYV]
We must listen to the earth

[Chorus]
Let us remember the children

3. [SYV]
We must listen to the earth

[Chorus]
Let us remember the children

4. [SYV]
We must listen to our earth

CHORUS
Apollo 11, Houston. We're GO for undocking. Over.

SOLO
Roger. Eagle is undocked. The Eagle has wings. We got the Earth right out the front window.

CHORUS
Eagle, Houston. You're GO for lunar landing. Over.

SOLO
Roger. Understand. GO for lunar landing.
Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.

SOLO

four days ago
I climbed into a capsule atop a rocket thirty stories high
I flew into space
leaving behind all I had ever known
on Earth

now I am here
standing in cosmic dust
orbiting a rotating planet orbiting a distant star

. . . [orchestra] . . .

as a child I had wondered
when I stared up at the moon
is it cold
is it lonely
would I be scared up there
what would I see

. . . [orchestra] . . .

now
it is Earth I see
my home, our home
just there
hovering above the lunar horizon
one-quarter million miles away

it is Earth I see
my home, our home
an isolated fertile garden
alive with light
radiant with color
a fragile, defenseless sphere floating gracefully through space and time

< Choral Meditation >