

## 5.4 Paul Suchan – “Wake the Grain” (2013)

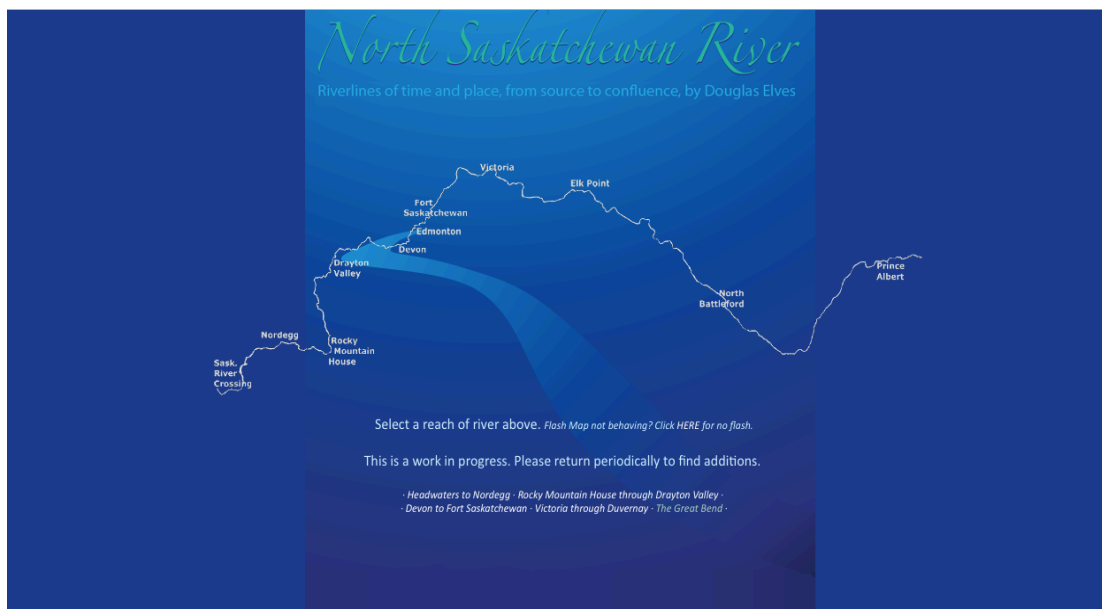
### 5.4.1 About “Wake the Grain”

In 2013, the Kamala Youth Choir, co-directed by Dianne Gryba and JoAnne Kasper, commissioned Paul Suchan to write a Saskatchewan-themed piece for performance while on tour in Vancouver. Accordingly, “Wake the Grain” was first composed for SSA voicing with this tour in mind. During performances, the piece was well received, and as other choirs heard about the piece, Suchan received requests to re-voice it for SATB choir. The version described in the following analysis is the SATB voicing, which was completed in 2015.

“Wake the Grain” is based on the poem “Russian Mennonites arrive at Rosthern, Saskatchewan – July 2, 1923” by Douglas Elves, of Edmonton, Alberta. Because Elves’ poetry is web-based, it is not easily available in print.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Douglas Elves, "North Saskatchewan River: Riverlines of Time and Place, from Source to Confluence," <http://www.northsaskatchewanriver.com>.



**Figure 24. A snapshot of Douglas Elves "North Saskatchewan River" website.**

Elves' website is an interactive map of the North Saskatchewan River, along which he names reach points that are labelled based on both historical events and geographical locations (see Figure 24). Each reach point represents a stretch of water or specific destination that serves as the inspiration for a collection of poems linked to the history of a specific reach point. The poem, "Russian Mennonites arrive at Rosthern, Saskatchewan – July 2, 1923" is the third poem in the collection labelled *The Great Bend*. The text describes the immigration of Russian Mennonites to the Rosthern and Swift Current areas during the 1920s. Elves was inspired to write the poem after reading of the day when the Russian Mennonite immigrants arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, by train. The Mennonite community already living there came to greet them, and while the new arrivals gathered beside the tracks waiting to be organized, they all burst into song.

**Table 5: Texts of the original poem by Douglas Elves and the adapted poem by Paul Suchan**

<p>“Russian Mennonites arrive at Rosthern, Saskatchewan - <i>July 21, 1923</i>” Original poem by Douglas Elves</p>	<p>“Wake the Grain” Adaptation of a poem of Douglas Elves by Paul Suchan</p>
<p>One by one they step from train to earth and feel the soil's assent. Plants blossom in the chest, expelling melody.</p> <p>Like flung grain, voices disperse across the land and germinate <i>a cappella</i>. In turned soil the seeds intone a level harmony. Wheat stalks in the wind are vocal cords.</p> <p>From this new ground grow hymns that hint at peace, white armies only of December blizzards.</p> <p>Break ground and bread will come. Wake the grain, and choirs in the close cathedral of the mind will sing: there is no king but work, no god but peace.</p>	<p>One by one they step to the earth, And hoping for prairie's birth, Plant blossom within the breath, grow song.</p> <p>With song the seeds intone a level harmony.</p> <p>Voices disperse throughout the land, Like flinging grain from our hand, And spring up within the breath, grow song.</p> <p>We'll wake the grain and choirs will sing: Alleluia! There is no king but work, no god but peace.</p> <p>White armies only winter storms, From this new ground grow hymns that hint at peace.</p> <p>Now home, now home, Grow hymns that hint at peace.</p>

Suchan's adaptation of the original poem maintains the musical language, metaphors, and overall perspective of the original poem (see Table 5). In an interview, Suchan mentioned that his search for a text took some time. The poem by Elves was selected because of the subject matter, the regional themes, and because the text itself was very musical.<sup>313</sup> While Suchan's adaptation of the poem is slightly shorter than the original, it adds figurative language and imagery to depict the vulnerability and strength of the Mennonite families who came to the Prairies in search of religious freedom and a better life.

### Details

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<sup>313</sup> Suchan.

Instrumentation: SATB, piano with optional Cello and Violin

Range:



Duration: 4'59''

Publisher: Self published by the composer; please email:  
[paulsuchan@gmail.com](mailto:paulsuchan@gmail.com) or visit [www.paulsuchan.com](http://www.paulsuchan.com)

Recording: Recorded by the Prairie Chamber Choir, 2015, Regina, SK

**Table 6: Analysis of “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan**

Measures	Tempo	Form	Meter	Dynamics	Pitch Centre	Melody	Text	
1-14	w/ liveliness ♩=116- 126	A	4/4	<i>p</i>	D+, D mixolydian	Conjunct chant like theme 1 sung in unison by Sop. & Alt.	One by one they step to the earth	
15-27		A <sup>1</sup>		<i>pp mp</i> , <i>p</i>		Counter-theme sung in unison by Ten. & Bass while Theme 1 is imitative in upper voices	Voices disperse throughout the land . . . Counter text: Song the seeds intone a level harmony . . .	
28-36		B		<i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i>	Tonicization that features a series of secondary dominants: V/V, V/iv, V/V, D+	Alt. & Bass sing Theme 2 in unison. It develops into ascending sequence in Sop. & Ten.	We'll wake the grain and choirs will sing	
37-47		A <sup>2</sup>		<i>ff</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>p</i>	D+	Theme 1 sung in unison by Alt. & Bass while Sop. & Ten. Sing a counter-melody	Voices disperse throughout the land . . . Counter text: There is no king but work no god but peace . . .	
48-66		C		4/4, 2/4	<i>p, mf</i> , <i>f</i>	A+	Theme 3 sung in unison by Alt. & Ten. Legato line contrasts previous section	White armies only winter storms . . .
67-76		B		4/4	<i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i>	Tonicization that features a series of secondary dominants: V/V, V/iv, V/V, D+	Alt. & Bass sing Theme 2 in unison. It develops into ascending sequence in Sop. & Ten.	We'll wake the grain and choirs will sing
77-87		A <sup>3</sup>			<i>ff</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>p</i>	D+, D mixolydian D+, D mixolydian	Theme 1 is imitative in lower voices & sustained counter-melody in lower voices	Voices disperse throughout the land . . . Counter text: There is no king but work no god but peace . . .
88-110		Closing Material			<i>ff</i> , <i>mp</i>		Homophonic material. Melody in upper voices & supporting	Wake and sing Alleluia

Measures	Tempo	Form	Meter	Dynamics	Pitch Centre	Melody	Text
	♩ = 100			<i>p, pp</i>		harmony in lower voices	

## 5.4.2 Melody

There are three main melodies that appear to have a thematic role in the music. The first theme is located in measures 4-14, wherein Suchan introduces a syllabic and chant-like melodic line.

Figure 25. An example of Theme 1 from “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan

Theme 1



Theme 1 is the most prominent theme of this piece (see Figure 25). This theme is comprised of a narrow range that outlines D major. Suchan treats the theme like a refrain or chorus; it recurs four times. In Measure 4, Theme 1 is introduced for the first time by the upper voices singing in unison. The unison line draws attention to the melody and the text by providing an opportunity to hear Theme 1 clearly and without distraction. In measure 15, the lower voices chant a countermelody: “song the seeds intone a level harmony” (see Figure 26).

Figure 26. An example of the counter theme from “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan



The counter-melody adds interest, musical texture, and reinforces the interval of a perfect fourth; the interval from A to D outlines and anchors the dominant of the home key. In measure 19, and above the counter-melody, is the second statement of Theme 1. This time, however, Theme 1 is stated in a canonic manner. Suchan inserts a third statement of Theme 1 in measure 37 (see Figure 27).

**Figure 27** An example of Theme 1 in “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan, m. 34-38.

The musical score for measures 34-38 of "Wake the Grain" by Paul Suchan is presented for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "wake the grain and cho-irs sing! Al - le - lu ia! There" for Soprano, Tenor, and Bass; and "wake the grain and cho-irs sing! Al - le lu Voi - ces dis - perse through - out the land like" for Alto and Bass. The score shows a counter-melody in the Soprano and Tenor parts, consisting of sustained octaves. The main melody is in the Alto and Bass parts. Dynamics include *f* and *ff*. A bracket labeled [37] is above the Soprano staff at measure 37.

Similarly to the introduction, the theme is sung in unison between the alto and bass voice, but Suchan adds texture to this statement by including a countermelody in the soprano and tenor voice. The counter melody consists of sustained octaves and functions similarly to a *cantus firmus* of the Baroque period. The final statement of Theme 1 occurs in measure 77, where it is paired with the cantus firmus-like countermelody but restated as a canon.

## Theme 2

The second theme provides an opportunity for modulation and contrast.

**Figure 28.** An example of Theme 2 in “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan, m. 29 – 37.

The musical score for Theme 2 is presented in three systems. The first system shows the Soprano and Alto parts. The Soprano part has a rest for the first four measures, followed by Statement 2 (measures 34-37) in a red box. The Alto part has a rest for the first four measures, followed by Statement 1 (measures 29-33) in a red box. The second system shows the Soprano (S) and Alto (A) parts. The Soprano part has Statement 3 (measures 38-41) in a red box. The Alto part has a rest for the first four measures, followed by Statement 3 (measures 38-41) in a red box. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4.

Measure 29 – 37 employs secondary dominants, deviating from the home key in order to strengthen a return to the tonal centre. Suchan uses Theme 2 sequentially to tonicize the key of D (see Figure 28). The first statement of the second theme is in the key of E+ (V of V), the second statement modulates to the key of F+ (V of vi), and lastly, the final statement modulates to the key of A+ (V of I). The last statement concludes with a V-I cadence in the home key of D+.

## Theme 3

**Figure 29.** An Example of Theme 3 from “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan, m. 51-54.

The musical score for Theme 3 is presented in a single system. The Soprano part has a rest for the first four measures, followed by Statement 1 (measures 51-54) in a red box. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4.

Theme 3 provides contrast to themes 1 and 2. In measure 51, Theme 3 is characterized by a smooth, stepwise arch-like melody comprising longer note values than those found in previous themes (see Figure 29). Former melodic themes consisted of a triplet rhythm, that implied a skipping feeling to match the “steps” described in the text. Theme 3 comprised of a quarter note pattern, gives the melodic line a feeling of augmented expansion and a change in mood as indicated by the poetry.

### 5.3.2 Word Painting

Suchan uses melodic thematic material to reinforce the figurative imagery of the text. The opening theme musically characterizes a stepping motion, and captures the emotions of hope, strength, and determination of the people described in the text (see Figure 30). When Theme 1 is repeated in measure 19, the canonic triplet rhythm depicts the action of “flinging grain from our hands” as shown in measure 21 -24 below.

**Figure 30. An example of Theme 1 as an imitatively developed melody and the Counter theme as an anchor to the melody. This example is found in measure 21-24 of “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan.**

The musical score for measures 21-24 of "Wake the Grain" by Paul Suchan is presented in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "fling-ing grain from our hands, and spring up with in the breath, like fling-ing grain from our hands, with breath, song the seeds in-tone a le-vel har-mo-ny with song the seeds in-tone a le-vel har-mo-ny". The piano part features a prominent triplet rhythm in the right hand, which is imitated by the vocal parts. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.



Measure 29 features a rising sequence with text that repeats the phrase, “We’ll wake the grain and choirs will sing.” While dotted rhythms in Theme 1 portray the action of “flinging,” the rhythms and repeated statements of theme 2 imply a sense of empowerment. Each time the phrase is repeated, the key rises. One could interpret the sequential rising vocal line as alluding to growth, as if to achieve increasingly higher heights.

Theme 3 provides the most contrast in the way that text is presented.

Figure 31. An example of word painting in “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan, m. 50 -56

The musical score for measures 50-56 of "Wake the Grain" by Paul Suchan is presented for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The score is in 4/4 time and features a rising vocal line. The lyrics are: "White arm-ies on-ly win-ter storms, White arm-ies on-ly win-ter". The dynamics range from piano (*p*) to mezzo-piano (*mp*). The score includes a box with the number 51 and a measure number 50. The vocal lines are written in a homophonic style, with the lyrics underlined. The Alto and Tenor parts have a trill marked with a '3' and a slur. The Bass part is mostly silent in this section.

In measure 48, the text reads, “White armies only winter storms, from this new ground grow hymns that hint at peace” (see Figure 31).<sup>314</sup> The legato nature of the musical line is likened to the Prairie zephyr that accompanies most wintry days on the vast Prairie. Additionally, Suchan’s homophonic writing in this section points to a chorale style or “hymns that hint at peace,” as referenced in the poetry.

<sup>314</sup> "Wake the Grain " (paulsuchan@gmail.com: Paul Suchan, 2013).

### 5.3.3 Piano Accompaniment

The piano accompaniment performs a functional role in “Wake the Grain” and appears to serve three main purposes. The first purpose is to depict the space and vast openness of the landscape. Suchan achieves this goal by using intervals of octaves, fifths, and fourths throughout the piece. Suchan’s compositional palette spans the entire range of the piano providing an open sound (see Figure 32).

**Figure 32. An example of the piano accompaniment from measure 97-110 in “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan**

In most cases, the piano accompaniment plays octaves that are occasionally filled in with the fifth and generally without a third. The lack of the mediant gives an expansive quality to the voicing in the piano. The openness of the sound alludes to the vast, and seemingly infinite space of the Prairie landscape.

The second purpose of the accompaniment is to create rhythmic freedom within the context of a structured meter. Suchan often ties the last beat of one bar to the downbeat of the following bar, in essence, displacing the downbeat (see Figure 32).

Although the meter of the piece is  $\frac{4}{4}$ , the tie in measures 107-110 suggest the feel of  $\frac{3}{4}$

time. At times, the right hand triplet rhythm places an accent on beat 2, and other times on beat 1. These subtle shifts in the placement of the beat make it easy for the ear to become rhythmically unfettered. Although the music is clearly “in time” and in a defined meter, there is a feeling of being “out of time” and unmetred. On a musical level, these syncopations may be a nod to Suchan’s background in jazz. On a metaphorical level, perhaps Suchan uses rhythmic displacement to depict the sense of new-found freedom that many Mennonites likely felt as they established their new homes on the Prairie.

**Figure 33. An example of the piano accompaniment adding texture to the overall timbre of “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan.**

The image shows a musical score for the song "Wake the Grain" by Paul Suchan. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "wake the grain and cho-irs sing! Al - le - lu - ia! There", "wake the grain and cho-irs sing! Al - le lu voi-ces dis-pers-e through-out the land like", "wake the grain and cho-irs sing! Al - le lu ia! There", and "wake the grain and cho-irs sing! Al - le lu ia voi-ces dis-pers-e through-out the land". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings of *f* and *ff*, and features triplet rhythms in both hands. A rehearsal mark [77] is placed above the piano part.

Lastly, Suchan uses the accompaniment to create texture. Sometimes the accompaniment can be extremely thin, consisting mainly of open intervals as described above. At other times, the accompaniment doubles the vocal line, adding passing tones or filling in the harmony to thicken the texture and overall timbre (see Figure 33).

### 5.3.4 Additional Notes

“Wake the Grain” is a work that is accessible and enjoyable for both youth SSA and adult SATB choirs. The narrow range, singable melodies, and short phrases provide opportunities to teach staggered breathing and legato singing. Accessibility is in part obtained by doubling between similar voices (see Figure 34).

Figure 34. An example of doubling between the voices in “Wake the Grain” by Paul Suchan.

The musical score for "Wake the Grain" by Paul Suchan is presented in a SATB format. It features five staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 30. The Soprano part has lyrics: "We'll wake the grain and cho-irs will sing" (measures 30-33) and "wake the grain and cho-irs sing!" (measures 34-37). The Alto part has lyrics: "sing" (measures 30-33) and "wake the grain and cho-irs sing!" (measures 34-37). The Tenor part has lyrics: "We'll wake the grain and cho-irs will sing" (measures 30-33) and "wake the grain and cho-irs sing!" (measures 34-37). The Bass part has lyrics: "sing" (measures 30-33) and "sing" (measures 34-37). The Piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and chords, with dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and accents.

The soprano voice doubles the tenor, or the alto the bass, providing opportunities for the choir to listen across vocal lines. In essence, the music offers an occasion to perfect musical skills including tuning octaves, matching vowels, and a sense of good rhythm.

Suchan is careful about the treatment of text and clarity of musical lines in his music. His articulations and markings are clear and deliberate. While the meter does not change, the placement of the downbeat moves. This technique presents a challenge for conductors as they must be able to show a downbeat without a consistent main pulse on beat one.