

2018 marks the 15th anniversary of Great Lake Swimmers. Over seven albums, multiple EPs, live broadcasts, and reissues, the Toronto-based project led by singer-songwriter Tony Dekker has established itself as a beloved indie folk act in their native Canada and beyond. *The CBC* has called them “a national treasure” while their music has taken them around the world, sharing a sound that is at once familiar and distinct, using the tools of folk music as the starting point to delve deeper.

It’s this contrast and evolution that brings them to their latest release, *The Waves, The Wake* – a metaphor for the future ahead, and the past trailing behind. Abandoning the acoustic guitar, this new collection of songs sees the group branching out to include new sounds such as harp, lute, pipe organ, woodwinds, congas and marimbas, alongside the more familiar flecks and chimes of the banjo, piano, and 12-string electric guitar. The stunning acoustics of the historic, 145 year old Bishop Cronyn Memorial Church in London, Ontario lend the atmospheric touch to the album, under the guidance of co-producer Chris Stringer (Union Sound). This record is about the songs, first and foremost, and was made with many of Toronto’s most talented players, including arrangements by Drew Jurecka and electric guitar appearances both atmospheric and spirited by Kevin Kane (Grapes Of Wrath). Long time collaborators Erik Arnesen (banjo, guitar), Bret Higgins (bass), and Josh Van Tassel (percussion) also contribute their considerable musicianship.

“The Talking Wind” opens the album solely with woodwinds and vocals, setting the tone with its scaled back, minimalist approach. Similarly sparse arrangements on “Falling Apart” pair a meditative, layered piano with an appearance by renowned harpist Mary Lattimore alongside Dekker’s haunting, plaintive vocals. Bridging the album to the group’s past work, the lonely jangle of “Alone But Not Alone” is a study in song-craft; “Side Effects” matches lyrical substance to musical motifs with its expressive vibraphone, tempo variations, and vocal effects.

But perhaps the album’s centerpiece is the entirely a cappella “Visions Of A Different World” with its ghostly, longing vocals nakedly bearing its message.

Great Lake Swimmers have twice been nominated for Juno Awards, have been shortlisted for the prestigious Polaris Prize, and won a Canadian Indie Award for Favourite Folk/Roots Artist/Group. They have shared the stage as support for such musical luminaries as Robert Plant, Feist, and Calexico, and have appeared as headliners for many of Canada’s major Folk Music festivals. Their relentless touring schedule and countless live shows have helped them develop devoted fan bases across Canada, the US, Europe, the UK and many points beyond. *Mojo* dubbed them “Ambient Zen Americana” and *Exclaim* has described them as a “cherished blend of folk and orchestral indie pop.”