

Mp3 Nancy Helin - River Running



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This Grand Canyon river guide's creative world-infused Pop is stirring the soul of the west worldwide with soaring Natalie Merchant-like vocals, a richly layered production and songs built to stand the test of time. 10 MP3 Songs POP: Today's Top 40, POP: California Pop Details: One night in the Ethiopian desert, five Grand Canyon river guides sat under the stars. It was a quiet evening except for distant celebratory drumming coming from a small village located across a dry creek bed marking the border with Sudan. Armed with headlamps and water bottles, my friends and I had attempted to join the party. To make a long story short, we eventually found ourselves in the middle of a dirt airstrip where a DC3 would pick us up the next day and return us to civilization. We were settling into a thorough discussion of the 25 day Omo River trip we'd just completed, when someone said "shhh, listen..." We heard footsteps approaching in the darkness. In the middle of open space crossed by lions and, who knows, leopards (if you're lucky) with no refuge in close proximity, we held our breath and awaited our fate. The footsteps increased in volume until the vague forms of three extremely tall Sudanese men took shape before us. They were almost naked, as most folks in this neck of the woods are, their main adornment being elaborate hairdos, and each one held a spear the size of Texas. Sitting in silent anticipation of our imminent death or worse, we were stunned when the middle warrior raised a hand into the sky and said "Hello". "Hello" we cried, erupting in laughter, shouting benevolent greetings of every sort, waving our own hands. "Salaam salaam salaam! Hello! Jambo!" Salaam is a greeting used by all the tribes we encountered on the Omo. Jambo means hello in Swahili which many folks here near the border of Kenya speak. Anyway, we were giggling and saying hello in every language we knew. The warriors were laughing, too. For one brief moment, we understood one another completely, and in that understanding we were united as one. One word one symbol one moment one us one joy one glowing in the warmth of our connection. And then, the moment

passed, our laughter died down. The warriors looked at us, and then one another, and having nothing more to say, walked on into the night. Returning to camp, words and melody describing this brief but meaningful encounter flooded my being. Lyrics scribbled down in my tent that night became the song "Hello Jambo" - the first cut on my debut album "River Running". My love for this song, and my recognition of the need in our world to experience a feeling of connection to one another, gave me the courage I needed to finally commit to making the recording. According to Mom, I sang before I talked, and Dad sang us to sleep each night with cowboy tunes played on guitar and banjo; music, singing and making up songs were part of my every day childhood. I began studying classical piano and music theory in grade school, sang in choirs and musicals in high school, studied voice in college, but could never imagine how I was going to have a career as a singer - and be outdoors. I was raised in Dallas and west-by-god-Texas. As a kid I spent my summers riding the range of my grandparents' ranch, the R-. Days spent out under an open sky became as essential to me as breathing; I was aware but not fully conscious of how essential until I graduated from DePauw University, and headed for NYC to give a singing career, opera or musicals, my best shot. It didn't take long to realize NYC was not the place for me. I couldn't see the stars for the skyscrapers and within my first month on West 12th St three separate events challenged me to hold my ground: my bike was stolen, I was pick pocketed and woke up to find a robber beside my bed. I'm happy I spent two and a half years there, but knew from the get-go I would never call it home. One day at the piano, a song came to me and as I played and sang... I realized I could live anywhere and write songs. Meanwhile, I was a nanny for a family who knew Jazz musician Paul Winter. We were introduced and after singing in the chorus on his "Messa Gaia" album, I was invited to join one of his expeditions in Grand Canyon. Paul was creating his "Canyon" album at the time and I was overjoyed to join the trip. Little did I know the adventure would change my life. My husband Bruce was one of the guides on the trip... we fell in love and were married on the South Rim of Grand Canyon a year and a half later. Downstream and around the bend, I too became a river guide, running rivers around the world but mainly working in Grand Canyon - and I've become especially enamored of singing in the unique spaces of that awesome place, bouncing sound and song off sandstone, limestone and schist. The songs included in "River Running" were born of those spaces and others we encounter on our world travels as guides. They were mostly written to help me bridge a gap between living in today's high-tech world and the natural world I adore. To boot, the process of creating the sound of the album with producer

Steve Parrish of Desert Coast Music was a total blast. I hope the results of our Pop/Adult Contemporary creation carry you away on a sweet adventure you'll enjoy time and again. Oh yeah: WARNING!!!! - my songs deal with subjects not typically addressed in the pop genre, but which I find fun and fascinating. "Heavy Snow Evergreen" and "Was A Weed" are two songs that came to me pulling weeds, gardening in my backyard here in Flagstaff. Both offer philosophical perspectives that came to me on the wind, out there in my back yard, and cracked me up. They delight and uplift. And images of water and rivers can't help but flow through my work. "Crystalline Condition" was born when I flipped in Crystal Rapid in Grand Canyon in 2000. Incorporating all I learned from that event led me to feel I was undergoing a "metamorphosis". I looked up the word in the dictionary and immediately heard a melody... "pressure, heat and water making me some other human". The flip knocked me into an aspect of myself I'd needed to change, though tried to ignore and a clear sense of my place in the universe. But the best part of the entire learning event was that no one in my raft had been hurt. No one in any of the rafts had been hurt; that day, running together, 3 out of 7 boats had gone over! It was another bonding experience as everyone had a role to play - you were either in need of rescue or being a complete hero! "An extraordinary thing - handed to me on a plate like a big ole hunkin chunk of German chocolate cake - yay". The final chorus repeats "It's gonna be okay", a phrase we can all appreciate hearing these days and which, when I take the time to listen, I hear the ancient walls of schist whisper to me, over and over. Turns out, for me anyway, writing songs is a lot like running rivers: it's best to go with the flow, content not to know, allow the song to reveal itself and enjoy the ride. It's a mysterious journey, a lot like life. For instance, the second cut on River Running, "A Lone Ranger Rides", came to me months before the event I later identified as the subject of the song. Vietnam Vet, fellow river guide and friend, Curtis Hansen (or "the Whale") committed suicide one late summer day. I knew I needed to take the time to tell him, to show him I loved him... but I never did. If I had, and especially if all of us who loved him had, perhaps he'd still be around. A portion of the proceeds from the album goes to the Whale Foundation, created after Whale's death to provide among other services, confidential counseling to the Grand Canyon guiding community. If you'd like more information on this organization, check out their website at whalefoundation.org. "Dust In The Rain" was originally written as an exploration of my feelings when my cowboy grandfather, Poppy Ray, passed away. The song went on to incorporate my feelings at the loss of friends, especially kayaker Dugald Bremner, whose story is told in the second and third verses. (He loved to surprise folks by

jumping off a 40' ledge into the blue green pools of Havasu.) In my experience, each song has a life of its own and "Dust...", being no exception, continued to evolve into the production of "River Running". When Steve created the unusual and wonderful percussive tracks, with the strangely cool middle eastern/Celtic guitar riffs, it was far cry from what I'd expected for the song, but impossible not to follow the extraordinary sound. Spending time in Grand Canyon, surrounded by nearly 2 billion year old rock formations, one contemplates the eternal. "Dust..." combines feelings from the loss of a loved one and the recognition of mortality with the realization "there's an unbroken connection between us is weathering every change, changes everything, Dust In The Rain...I'm good to go on and walk the footsteps of your love". I am grateful to say, my loved ones and my time on the planet, especially in Grand Canyon, have led me not only to a recognition that in living, in making the choices we make, we touch one another at the deepest levels, but also to a tangible sensation of an eternal sense of myself that has "been rolling along forever". This "beingness" is in everything and everywhere... but we don't really have a vocabulary for discussing or describing it... though I attempt to do so in the last song of the disc... I think "All We Are" is the perfect ending for the recording. Steve and I were trying to choose the tenth song from a long list of possible tunes when he suggested I write a new song, tying all the themes of the collection together in a very simple way. I think the song has an ability to comfort others and may be much appreciated in this post September 11th world. "We are made of all that was and what was will always be playing a part in all there is at the heart of you and me". My adventures outdoors have given me a clear sense of being connected to all that is. This sense is often difficult to maintain in "the real (supposedly civilized) world", and I'm grateful to the song for reminding me of that feeling. "Underneath the open sky where all we are is all there is, there's no need to say goodbye..." May "River Running" connect you to landscape, to your fellow man, to comfort, to the joy of being alive and the weird wonder of being human. We would greatly appreciate hearing your responses, feedback and descriptions of the music. All righty then, have fun out there! Love, Nancy

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