

Eric whitacre biography

[Literature](#), [Autobiography](#)



Eric Whitacre is one of the most well known, performed, and awarded choral composers in the modern day choral scene. Eric was born on January 2, 1970 in Reno, Nevada, dabbling in piano lessons as a child and later, in junior high, joining marching band, and playing synthesizer in a techno-pop band. Believe it or not, Eric dreamt of becoming a rock star. (Bowen) Although he is not among the likes of Metallica or The Beatles, Eric has won a Grammy for Best Choral Performance for his album " Light and Gold" in the past year, as well as a nomination in 2007 for " Cloudburst and Other Choral Works".

He is the youngest recipient ever of the Raymond C Brock Commission given by the American Choral Directors Association, awarded in 2001, as well as numerous other awards from the ACDA, the Barlow international composition competition, and American Composers' Forum. (Official Website Biography) Although Whitacre is known for his choral works, he also writes and composes for wind ensembles, full orchestras, a full musical titled " Paradise Lost: Shadows and Wings", as well as pieces for solo voice and supporting instrumentals. The most known piece that Eric has composed is the acapella choral piece titled " Sleep". Sleep" is a SATB choral piece. The story behind this haunting song is that Julia Armstrong, a lawyer and professional mezzo-soprano from Texas, wanted commission Whitacre to compose a choral that would be performed by the Austin ProChorus, where she was an avid member of the choir. She wanted the piece to be a memorial of her beloved parents, who died within weeks of each other after fifty years of marriage. She wanted the piece to use the poem by Robert Frost, called Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening. Whitacre agreed to take on her request and was deeply moved by her story.

Unfortunately, after a careful composition by Whitacre and a breathtaking performance of the piece by the Austin ProChorus, Robert Frost's estate forbid Whitacre from using the poem in any way for the piece. The poem will become public domain in 2038, but he did not have that long to wait as other directors were practically begging to use the piece for their choirs. Instead of letting the piece "lie under his bed, dead", as Whitacre said, he talked it over with his wife and decided to ask his friend and poet Charles Anthony Silvestri to compose a poem to set words to the piece. Silvestri was a trusted lyricist for Whitacre, writing lyrics for Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine, Lux Aurumque, Nox Aurumque, and Her Sacred Spirit Soars, all celebrated Whitacre pieces. Tony incorporated a lot of the same ideals of Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening, the biggest being 'sleep'. Whitacre says that he loves Tony's poem more than he ever did Stopping and will never set the words to Frost's poem to his song, even when it becomes available in 26 years. (Whitacre) The piece itself is musically exquisite.

It grabs your attention almost immanently. Whitacre uses this method of stacking voices at crucial points in the plot by splitting every voice part into two parts, so what was a four part becomes an eight part. The texture and the dynamics are meticulously planned and formulated, as if Whitacre were sitting there telling a story about a personal experience, but the choir was doing the speaking for him. There are moments when you can feel the pain and anguish he wanted to express just through the dynamic of the voices. The emotion of this piece is palpable.

The lyrics read: " The evening hangs beneath the moon A silver thread on darkened dune With closing eyes and resting head I know that sleep is

coming soon Upon my pillow, safe in bed, A thousand pictures fill my head, I cannot sleep, my minds aflight, And yet my limbs seem made of lead If there are noises in the night, A frightening shadow, flickering light... Then I surrender unto sleep, Where clouds of dream give second sight. What dreams may come, both dark and deep Of flying wings and soaring leap As I surrender unto sleep As I surrender unto sleep. " (Official Website)

The last few bars of the piece are of the sopranos holding the word " sleep" and the other voice parts singing " sleep" in a two note pattern, growing quieter and quieter into absolute silence. I believe that the song, in its core, is about death. Perhaps, Silvestri wrote the piece with someone in mind who was very sick and their death came as a relief, almost as sleep does at the end of a very long and tiring day. Whitacre does something in his music that is so unique and complex, it is almost hard to believe that he did not know how to read music when he attended the University of Nevada as a Music Education major. Bowen) The way that he builds chords to provide moments of tension is seventh or ninth chords, with or without suspended seconds and fourths and root-position major triads with an added major second and/or perfect fourth. (Shrock) Whitacre also uses unconventional chord progressions, meter changes, and harmonies. He is also known to use hand actions or props, as he does in the piece " Cloudburst" when the singers use snapping, clapping, and stomping to imitate the sound of a rainstorm.

With all of that being said, Eric has almost nothing in common with other composers of our time, and honestly that is what gives him so much of an edge. He is willing to step out of the box and be daring and different and that

risk has paid off. Works Cited: Bowen, Meurig. "Whitacre: Official Biography." Web article. (2006): n. page. Web. . "Official Biography." Official Website. n. page. Web. . Whitacre, Eric. "The Story Behind Sleep". Official Website. Web Article. (The song can be heard on this link) Shrock, Dennis (Mar 2009). Choral Repertoire. Oxford University Press (USA). p. 761. ISBN 978-0-19-532778-6.