

THE CHORAL ARTS SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON
FIFTY-EIGHTH SEASON, 2022-23



Eric Whitacre's *The Sacred Veil*

Saturday, May 6, 2023

LIVE! AT 10TH AND G





Eric Whitacre's *The Sacred Veil*

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JOEL RINSEMA, conductor

DEVREE LEWIS, cello

BRANDON STRAUB, piano

CHARLES ANTHONY SILVESTRI, poet/lyricist

1. The Veil Opens
2. In a Dark and Distant Year
3. Home
4. Magnetic Poetry
5. Whenever There Is Birth
6. I'm Afraid
7. I Am Here
8. Delicious Times
9. One Last Breath
10. Dear Friends
11. You Rise, I Fall
12. Child of Wonder

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TRUIST 

1. The Veil Opens

Whenever there is birth or death,
The sacred veil between the worlds
Grows thin and opens slightly up,
Just long enough for Love to slip,
Silent, either in or out
Of this our fragile, fleeting world,
Whence or whither a new home waits.
And our beloved ones draw near,
In rapt anticipation, or
In weary gratitude, they stand;
Our loved ones stand so close, right here,
Just on the other side
Of Eternity.

— Charles Anthony Silvestri

2. In a Dark and Distant Year

In a dark and distant year,
A wand'rer ancient and austere,
He surrounds himself with books he's never read.
He was a child then, the world inside his head.

He would often wonder, "Who
Could love a dreamer such as you?"
And so he trusted no one's shadow but his own.
He was a fool then, and he was all alone.

Then quite to his surprise,
Passing there before his eyes,
A girl unlikely, gently laughing by the shore.
She had unlocked his heart and let his spirit soar!

And on that golden, hopeful day
The boy was bold enough to say,
"Come, hold my deepest secrets here among the foam;
You are the world to me, and you... you feel like home."

— Charles Anthony Silvestri



3. Home

You feel like home.

— Charles Anthony Silvestri

4. Magnetic Poetry

*The enormous need
Egg-ache whispers urging
Moon wind chanting like sweet languid honey
Sleep-swimming through sweaty summer
Dream mists*

*The delirious girl
Woman goddess
Not yet a mother
But the spring life force is so near
What a bare symphony here*

*I recall our gorgeous moments together
Beneath my heaving peach skin
Essential you
Like some diamond gift incubating
In love*

— Julia Lawrence Silvestri

5. Whenever There Is Birth

Instrumental

6. I'm afraid

I'm afraid we found something...
[Fifteen centimeter retroperitoneal cystic mass with complex internal septation...
The patient is a twenty-eight-year-old white female, primagravida, in the third trimester of pregnancy.]

I'm afraid we found something...
[Pathology confirms grades I, II, and III mucinous cystic adenocarcinoma with focal carcino-sarcoma consistent with ovarian primary.
Recommend six cycles Taxol and Carboplatin...]

I'm afraid we've found something...
[...two left adnexal cysts and a
septated right adnexal cyst...]

I'm afraid we've found something...
[...exploratory laparotomy and excision of bilateral ovarian dermoids...]

I'm afraid we've found something...
[...uterus, tubes, sacral pain... ovaries... recurrent, recurrent, recurrent...]

[Exploratory laparotomy,
total abdominal hysterectomy,
bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy,
paraaortic lymphadenectomy
Bone scans in sacrum, left ilium, right acetabulum
metastasis...
metastasis...
metastasis...]

I'm afraid we found something...
I'm afraid we found something...
I'm afraid.

— Charles Anthony Silvestri

7. I Am Here

Instrumental



8. Delicious Times

My hair started to fall out at precisely 1:00 on my birthday.

By Thursday it was making a terrible mess, so the kids helped me shave off whatever was left. They'd pick up my hair from the ground and slap it on my head and say, "You need more hair!" and they would laugh and laugh. Then at bath time I wore my wig, and they would beg me to take it off and put it back on again - they howled with laughter.

At bedtime, when my little one plays with my hair, she just stroked my head and said, "It's so soft and clean!" She says, "Mommy, your hair went bye-bye but it'll be back soon!" I was most worried about her because she loves my hair so much, but she is just fine!

Today I visited my oldest at school and he shouted, "Hey everybody! My mom has a wig!" He was the star of the class as all the kindergarten stared, open-mouthed, in wonderment. It's been a very funny week. The kids have been amazing, and we've had some really delicious times together.

— Julia Lawrence Silvestri

9. One Last Breath

In a dark and distant year
The wand'rer weary, full of fear,
Confronts a fated force more powerful than life —
A carriage made of sea
Has come to take his wife.

The waves too dark and deep to swim,
He hears his love cry out to him,
Her piercing anguish rising high above the foam.
"Please don't let go of me
For you, you are my home!"

From the shore he sees his bride
As she fights hard against the tide.
He swears a sacred vow that every loved one keeps.
He steels himself,
Takes one last breath, and leaps.

— Eric Whitacre

10. Dear Friends

Dear friends: tonight I feel that I must ask you to pray.

I just got out of the hospital tonight and I received some bad news. The scan showed that I had numerous liver and peritoneal metastases. My doctor said this meant I most likely had about two months to live.

I am now asking you to pray as you have never prayed before. Please don't pray that I will have a peaceful death. Please don't feel pity for me. Just pray hard. Pray that I will be healed in a miraculous, supernatural way. Pray that God will give me wisdom as to what to do next. Fight with me, don't give up on me.

— Julia Lawrence Silvestri

11. You Rise, I Fall

Listening to your labored breath,
Your struggle ends as mine begins.
You rise; I fall.

Fading, yet already gone;
What calls you I cannot provide.
You rise; I fall.

Broken, with a heavy hand
I reach to you, and close your eyes.
You rise; I fall.

— Charles Anthony Silvestri



12. Child of Wonder

Child of wonder
Child of sky
Time to end your voyage
Time to die.

Silent slumber calls you
Dark and deep
Child of soft surrender
Child of sleep.

Child of sorrow
Child of rain
There is no tomorrow
No more pain.

Turn your silvered sail
Toward the light
Child of mourning
Child of night.

Child of iridescence
Child of dream
Stars and moons will guide you
Down the stream.

Stretched on ocean waves
Of endless foam
Welcome home my child
Welcome home.

— Eric Whitacre

Program Notes

In 2016, after a visit from his closest friend and longtime collaborator - lyricist, poet and historian Charles Anthony Silvestri (Tony) - composer Eric Whitacre found a poem that Tony had left for him sitting on his piano. Tony had lost his wife to cancer 12 years previously, losing his soulmate and leaving him to bring up their two young children. He hadn't felt able to talk about her loss but encouraged by Eric, he started to share his experience through poetry.

The Sacred Veil is a 12-movement work - dedicated to Tony's late wife Julia Lawrence Silvestri (Julie) - which includes text written by Silvestri, Whitacre, and Julie herself, capturing the human experience through a story of love and loss.

"Whenever there is birth or death" are the first words of the poem that Silvestri brought to Whitacre, which the composer read over and over before immediately sitting at the piano and writing music. Eric decided to write this entire work centered on Silvestri's idea of a "veil" that separates the world of the living and those who have passed. This first poem, "The Veil Opens," became the first movement of the larger work.

Whitacre states: "I knew that I would repeat texts and phrases three times every time I wanted to meditate on an idea, to 'formalize' the poetry and to create a sense of stasis in the music. I decided early on that the 'veil' would be represented by a middle C (the third letter of the alphabet), and that moments or even entire movements would 'cross' the veil, oftentimes up a third or down a third. And I knew that Julie's theme would be based on three notes starting on middle C, up a third to E flat, then back down again to C."

Whitacre and Silvestri crafted a structure for *The Sacred Veil* that follows the journey of a soul across the threshold between finitude and eternity into and, ultimately, out of this life. It follows the trajectory of Tony and Julie's story from beginning to end. The two halves of the piece bridge the gap between "before" and "after" learning that Julie was diagnosed with cancer.

Following "The Veil Opens," the pair wrote what would become the penultimate movement, "You Rise, I Fall." Whitacre comments, "Before I had a note of music written I jotted down the words 'You rise, I fall,' thinking that it perfectly encapsulated the culmination of Tony and Julie's journey together."

The third movement, "Home," centers around the moment Silvestri knew he was in love with Julie. "He said he remembered looking at her while she was talking and that a single thought filled his mind as he watched her speaking: 'You feel like home.' When he told me that I said, 'That's it,' knowing that was all the poetry we needed for this movement."

The Sacred Veil allows the listener space to grieve and acknowledge that it is okay to do so. Silvestri notes, "We all have pain. We all have experienced loss. We all long for catharsis and closure, even as we grieve."

— ericwhitacre.com



Featured Artists

Joel Rinsema *Conductor*

Joel M. Rinsema joined Kantorei (Denver, Colorado) in 2014, becoming the second conductor in its 25-year history. A frequent collaborator and champion of new works for chorus, Joel has commissioned and premiered works by many of today's leading composers, including Kim André Arnesen, Mason Bates, René Clausen, Jean Belmont Ford, Ola Gjeilo, Jocelyn Hagen, Mark Hayes, Cecilia McDowall, Sarah Quartel, Jake Runestad, and Eric Whitacre. In the summer of 2022, Joel conducted the Central American premiere of Jake Runestad's *El Último Hilo* (The Last Thread) in Guatemala City and Antigua, Guatemala with Kantorei and the Guatemalan choir Vocalis. He is returning in May of 2023 to conduct Eric Whitacre's *The Sacred Veil*.

Joel led Kantorei in performances at the 2019 National Convention of the American Choral Directors Association, and prepared Kantorei as the primary chorus for the Aspen Music Festival for Maestro Robert Spano in the summers of 2021 and 2022. More recently, he conducted Kantorei along with the Canadian Brass in December of 2022, and he commissioned and prepared Kantorei for the world premiere of the string orchestra version of Eric Whitacre's *The Sacred Veil*, conducted by the composer.

Joel is a passionate advocate for the professional choral art form, and he frequently consults with choral arts organizations around the country. Because of his leadership in his field, he received the Louis Botto Award for "Innovative Action and Entrepreneurial Zeal" from Chorus America, the industry's advocacy, research, and leadership development organization for choruses, choral leaders, and singers.

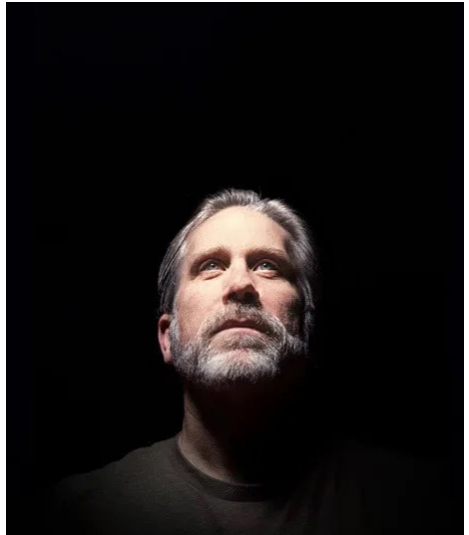
Joel holds music degrees from Arizona State University and Whitworth University and he is a member of the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (Grammys), American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) and Colorado Music Educators Association (CMEA).

He came to Kantorei from the Grammy Award-winning Phoenix Chorale. Throughout his 23-year tenure with the Phoenix Chorale, he served in nearly every capacity with the organization, including his last 15 years as President & CEO and Assistant Conductor. He negotiated an ongoing recording contract with the prestigious U.K.-based Chandos Records, and Phoenix Chorale recordings received a total of eight Grammy nominations and two Grammy awards during his tenure. In addition to his work with the Phoenix Chorale, he was the founding chorus master of the Arizona Musicfest Chorus.



Charles Anthony Silvestri ***Poet/Lyricist***

Poet, author, composer, and speaker Charles Anthony Silvestri has worked with other artists from all over the world to create texts tailor-made for their commissions and specific artistic needs. He enjoys the challenge of solving these creative problems and has provided custom choral texts, opera libretti, program notes and other writing for composers including Eric Whitacre, Ola Gjeilo, Kim Arnesen, and Dan Forrest, and for ensembles ranging from high schools to the Houston Grand Opera, from the King's Singers to the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, from Westminster Choir College to Westminster Abbey.



As a clinician, Silvestri speaks to choirs, classes, and concert audiences about his works, the creative process, the marriage of words and music, and about his collaborative relationships with composers. He is the author of three books, including *A Silver Thread* (GIA 2019), a retrospective of almost 20 years of his lyric poetry. He teaches Ancient and Medieval History at Washburn University and lives in Lawrence, KS.



Devree Lewis **Cellist**

Devree Lewis is a cellist, arranger, and concert producer based in the D.C. metro area. Principal cellist of Amadeus Orchestra, she also performs with Cello, World and Philadelphia-based Mill Race Collective as well as several regional orchestras.

Ms. Lewis and Susanna Mendlow formed Cello, World in 2019; they perform their own arrangements of world and classical music for two cellos, voice, and percussion. Most recently, Cello, World performed free neighborhood concerts across five wards of D.C., funded through D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities Artist Fellowship Grant.

Ms. Lewis arranged for and performed with metal cello band Primitivity from 2009-2014 and can be heard on their 2013 album *Evolution*. The National Symphony of Cuba premiered Ms. Lewis's arrangement of "Ni Pelota: Milonga" by E. Trifilio in 2017; her tango arrangements have also been performed at venues including San Francisco New Music Center and Tanglewood Music Festival by members of the NSO, invoke quartet, and others.

Ms. Lewis co-founded, performed with, and arranged music for Trifilio Tango Trio from 2015-2018. "Milonga de la Ausencia," featuring Ms. Lewis on cello, is the soundtrack for the short film "Vuelve con nosotros" and was nominated as best original score at Milan's 2016 MOFF Film Festival. In addition to performing several U.S. and international tours, Trifilio Tango Trio released three albums of original tango music, recorded and produced in Argentina.



Brandon Straub ***Associate Conductor and*** ***Pianist***

Associate Conductor Brandon Straub joined the Choral Arts Society of Washington in 2012 and founded the Choral Arts Youth Choir in 2015.

When I was young, my family didn't have a piano, so I built one. I sat for hours on the living room floor with wooden toy blocks stacked skillfully across my legs, singing my favorite songs and pretending to play along. My parents got the hint. Music has always ignited my passion and stirred my imagination; I still recall early formative experiences of being swept up in a climactic symphonic moment or hearing the sound of choral music wafting through a cathedral. Throughout my multifaceted career as an educator, conductor, keyboardist, and singer, I continually summon the awe and curiosity with which I encountered each new sound world for the first time.



I am passionate about the deep work involved in preparing music and bringing it to life. The rehearsal process can be as thrilling as the performance itself. As a conductor and educator, I am dedicated to helping musicians of all ages and levels of experience find their voice and develop their musical agency. Inspired by this vision, I founded the Choral Arts Youth Choir to provide meaningful, high quality musical opportunities for the area's most capable and engaged young musicians.

From leading the complete Brandenburg Concertos at the harpsichord to singing the national anthem with Stephen Colbert, musical collaboration has afforded me a variety of incomparable opportunities for connection and understanding. This breadth of experience continues to influence how I approach my roles preparing choruses for collaborations with a growing list of world-class ensembles, conductors, and soloists.

In addition to my positions at Choral Arts, I have been fortunate to direct programs at several schools and churches, among them St. John's Church Lafayette Square (the "Church of the Presidents") and St. Alban's and National Cathedral School, where I currently serve as Director of Choral Music and Chair of Music for the coordinate music program.





The Choral Arts Society of Washington

Experience. Passion. Harmony. Space. This is choral music – a story that soars from a composer's intention to a conductor's interpretation, from a chorus' passion to an audience's moment of awe. Leaping from the page to the lungs to the air, it reverberates in the chambers of the heart. Transporting us out of ourselves. Ushering us into ourselves. Mind. Breath. Sound. Heart. Choral singing is an elemental human experience, a sound with the power to crack open new worlds.

Choral Arts imbues every single performance with the promise of this experience. Based in the nation's capital, we weave our shared passion, world-class repertoire, and radiant voices into a sound that changes people. We sing for a city with little time and high expectations, which compels us to transform a night out into a lifelong memory. We defy preconceived notions – exploring styles, arrangements, spaces, and collaborations that reimagine traditions and create surprising new ones.

At Choral Arts, we sing the music we love as a balm to frenzied days, an antidote to solitude, a union in an often-fractured world. As our conductor raises their baton, a moment is born. As our melody rises, spirits rise with it. As our notes weave intricate harmonies, the bonds between people are strengthened. And as our last note fades, in the heartbeat before the ovation, you will suddenly hear the story singing within you – a small awakening to take back into the world.

Founded in 1965 by Norman Scribner (1936-2015), Choral Arts has a rich history of bringing the power of the human voice to audiences large and small. We weave our shared passion, world-class repertoire, and radiant voices into a sound that changes people. We advance the story of choral music by partnering with musicians, composers, and ensembles from all walks of life.

Choral Arts. Awaken your world.

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Choral Arts gratefully acknowledges His Excellency Stavros Lambrinidis, Ambassador of the European Union and Mrs. Phoebe Kapouano, for their honorary patronage of our 42nd Annual Holiday Concert and Gala that took place on December 19, 2022. Furthermore, Choral Arts deeply appreciates the outstanding efforts of Gala Chairs Nicholas Smith and Deborah Jacobs, along with the extraordinary work of the members of the Host and Silent Auction Committees. We graciously acknowledge the many contributors to this event:

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