

The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus welcomes Eric Whitacre

by Mike Telin

“What if our departed loved ones are not truly gone, but are closer than we think? How can we mourn those we have lost while still moving forward? We have all experienced the loss, in one way or another, of someone or something we have loved deeply. How do we know when it’s time to move forward?”

-Charles Anthony Silvestri



Written in 2018, *The Sacred Veil* — with music by Eric Whitacre (pictured left) and text by Charles Anthony Silvestri — tells a story of love, loss, and grief. Silvestri’s wife, Julie, died of ovarian cancer at age 36 in 2005, leaving behind two young children. “It’s an extensive, twelve-movement work that is just beautiful,” Lisa Wong, The Cleveland Orchestra’s Director of Chorus, said during a telephone conversation.

On Friday, October 20 at 7:30 pm at Severance Music Center, Whitacre will lead the 140-member Cleveland Orchestra Chorus and 14 singers from the College of Wooster in *The Sacred Veil* for SATB choir, solo cello, and piano — his most recent collaboration with Silvestri. The concert also includes Reena Esmail’s *When the Violin* for chorus and cello, based on a 14th-century text by Persian poet Hafiz, conducted by Wong. Tickets are available [online](#).

Wong, who is an Associate Professor of Music at The College of Wooster, said that she’s happy to include her Wooster colleagues Mingyao Zhao (cello) and Daniel Overly (piano) in the program. “Mingyao is a wonderful player and Daniel is just amazing.”

Regarding Indian-American composer Reena Esmail’s *When the Violin*, Wong noted that the work’s many wordless passages allow the listener to meditate on the text. “She has a

substantial output of choral works. I've done a few of them and they are always different in the way she combines Indian and Western classical music."



Wong (pictured Left) said that Friday's concert will mark the culmination of a week-long residency with Whitacre, who in addition to working with the Orchestra Chorus will also work with the Youth Chorus as well as high school choirs and four college and university choirs. "It's always great to be able to connect with the composer. I'm so happy it worked out to bring him here. He is a bit of a unicorn in the choral world. He was doing his Virtual Choir project long before the pandemic forced choruses to adapt that style."

(The Grammy award-winning American composer's symphonic work *Deep Field* serves as the soundtrack to the film *Deep Field: The Impossible Magnitude of our Universe* and features a Virtual Choir of over 8,000 voices aged 4 to 87 representing 120 countries.)

Wong noted that the Chorus had a busy summer and early fall performing as part of the Orchestra's movie nights, which she said are always fun. "We have two weekends of holiday concerts coming up in December and I will conduct on each performance. And we're all looking forward to being part of *The Magic Flute* in the spring. But this week's concert is special because it's an opportunity for the Chorus to sing music they wouldn't normally get to do. And to get to perform it at Severance!"

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 17, 2023.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)