

ABSTRACT

In 2003, Julie Silvestri was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. After two years of fighting the disease, she passed away with her husband Tony at her side. She also left behind their two young children and a large community of “prayer warriors” who followed her journey on her blog. Tony, an acclaimed poet and Eric Whitacre’s best friend, struggled to process the unimaginable grief. Twelve years later, he found the words to express himself while writing a eulogy for his aunt. In it, he reflected on the nature of life and death, and how our beloved departed are both here with us, but unreachable, “just on the other side of eternity,” or what Tony calls: “the sacred veil.”

The Sacred Veil is an hour-long work by Eric Whitacre for mixed choir, piano, and cello. Commissioned in 2018, the piece follows Julie and Tony’s life, love, struggles, Julie’s death, and Tony’s reconciliation. The libretto is comprised of texts by Tony, Eric, and Julie. It also contains—verbatim—Julie’s diagnosis, and her blog posts chronicling her journey with cancer.

The Sacred Veil is Whitacre’s most significant work to date: it represents a stylistic evolution in Whitacre’s writing, and draws on several developments from across his career. It is also his longest choral work yet, and—according to the composer—was written with dramatic story-telling structure in mind. In this presentation, I will show how Whitacre’s motives symbolize different characters and ideas in *The Sacred Veil*, and chart how the development and transformation of these motives reflect what is happening in the narrative. First, I will provide a brief biography on Whitacre, and a summary of his stylistic development. Then, I will discuss the genesis of *The Sacred Veil*, including Whitacre’s collaborative partnership with Tony, and the events that inspired the creation of the work. Finally, I will present my analysis of the three themes central to the work, which will be supplemented with recordings of my most recent performance of the work this past January.

PROGRAM

Lecture & Recital

“Eric Whitacre’s *The Sacred Veil*: Motivic Transformation as Narrative Expression”

- I. Introduction
- II. Eric Whitacre – Biography & Early Career
- III. Genesis of *The Sacred Veil*
 - a. Silvestri – A Brief Biography
 - b. Silvestri & Whitacre’s Collaborative Relationship
 - c. Creation of “The Veil Opens”
- IV. Analysis of *The Sacred Veil*
 - a. Julie’s Theme
 - b. The Fate Theme
 - c. The Veil Opens Theme

The Sacred Veil

- I. The Veil Opens
- IV. Magnetic Poetry
- V. Whenever There is Birth
- VI. I’m Afraid
- VIII. Delicious Times
- X. Dear Friends
- XI. You Rise, I Fall
- XII. Child of Wonder

The Choral Collective of Houston
Andreea Muț, piano
Hasmik Vardanyan, cello

Eric Whitacre
(b.1970)

- V. Conclusion

PERSONNEL

THE CHORAL COLLECTIVE OF HOUSTON

Matthew Lyon Hazzard, conductor
Andreea Muț, piano
Hasmik Vardanyan, cello

SOPRANO

Kaitlin DeSpain
Anna Diemer
Mariam Haider
Gabby McCullough
Carly Orr
Tiffany Sau
Katelynn Watson

TENOR

Julian Diaz
Aaron Gonzalez
Kyle Maninantan
Jorge Martinez
Jordan Martinez
Stephen Steward
Phillip Velarde

ALTO

Sadie Chamberlain
Deborah Edquist
Erika Erwin
Karen Lo
Melanie McCreary
Eliza Nicholson
Glydel Obate

BASS

Ryan Brown
Travis Falknor
Chase Gaines
Sean Holshouser
Justin Langham
Cam Michalak
Raymond Pappas
Scott Rogers
James Siarris
Jonathan Talberg

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

KATHRINE G. McGOVERN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
Moores School of Music
Courtney Crappell, Director

DOCTORAL LECTURE RECITAL

MATTHEW LYON HAZZARD, conductor

Assisted by

THE CHORAL COLLECTIVE OF HOUSTON

ANDREEA MUT, piano

HASMIK VARDANYAN, cello

Saturday, April 16, 2022

Dudley Recital Hall

4:00 pm

*Special thanks to Mary Voigt, Michael Dorn, Ken Mathews, and Trinity-Downtown
for graciously hosting and recording our performance.*

From the studio of Betsy Cook Weber

*Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Musical Arts degree.*