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TED 2011: Virtual Choir Joins Voices from 58 Countries

By [Kim Zetter](#)  March 1, 2011 | 6:44 pm | Categories: [TED](#), [TED2011](#)

LONG BEACH, California — Who knows what the sound of one hand clapping is, but a choir of hundreds of singers connected by nothing more than webcams and an internet connection sounds, surprisingly, pretty sublime.

Classical composer and conductor Eric Whitacre unveiled a clip from his new virtual choir project at TED on Tuesday and got the first complete standing ovation at the conference — something generally reserved for speakers much later in TED’s lineup.

It all began when Whitacre received a [video from a young girl named Britlin Losee](#), who was singing one of his choral pieces called “Sleep.”

“I was struck so hard by the beauty, the intimacy of it, the sweetness of it,” he said at the time.

He wondered what it would sound like with 50 singers performing different parts, and sent out a call to choirs and schools around the world to submit videos.

“It was all about connecting ... these individuals alone, together,” [Whitacre wrote on his blog](#). “For me, singing together and making music together is ... a fundamental human experience.”

The music they sang was “Lux Aurumque (Light and Gold),” a composition of Whitacre’s based on a poem by Edward Esch that Whitacre had translated into Latin.



Whitacre was stunned by the response he received. Participants sang to an [instruction video](#) showing Whitacre conducting the music, and all had to cue their video recordings to a tone at the beginning, so their entries could be synced to the music and each other. Contributors chose the parts they wanted to sing -- soprano, alto tenor, bass — and at least one person submitted multiple videos singing every part.

Whitacre and an editor eventually whittled the submissions down to 185 voices from 12 countries. The resulting video (above) was posted on YouTube last year and received 1 million hits in the first month. It became clear that the choir had to continue.

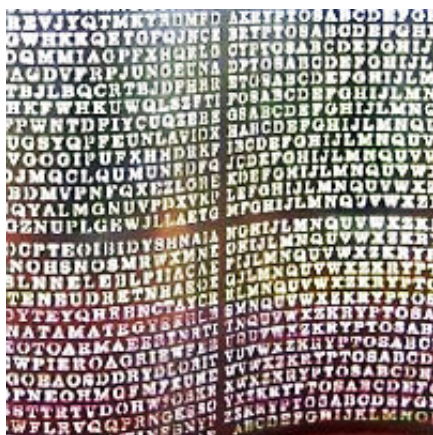
So, late last year Whitacre put out a call for submissions for his second project, this time using “Sleep.” He hoped to get 900 submissions — to beat an MTV record for a similar crowdsourced choir project involving [people around the world singing “Lollipop.”](#) Instead he got 2,051 submissions from 58 countries — among them 637 sopranos, 546 altos, 405 tenors and 463 basses.

About 1,110 submissions came from the United States. Britain provided the second highest number at 277. At least 54 people sang four different parts.

The singers come from high school choirs, university choirs, church choirs and the Czech Boys Choir.

Whitacre showed just three minutes of the video, which is still being edited. The full video will debut online in April.

Whitacre said that what he took away from the experience was that “human beings will go to any lengths necessary to find and connect with each other.”



Kim Zetter is a senior reporter for Wired covering [cybercrime](#), [civil liberties](#), [privacy](#), and [security](#).

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Paisley Beebe

Eric Whitacre what a prince among men :) can't wait to see it..I interviewed him in Second Life...a

virtual World interview for a virtual choir and then I sang for the upcoming Sleep choir...you can see the interview here...its quite fun..he was such a dork love him :) Paisley Beebe

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