

The Sacred Veil Resources

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Program Note

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



ERIC WHITACRE

COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR, SPEAKER

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."

For any resources for Charles Anthony Silvestri please visit <https://www.charlesanthonyilvestri.com/>

If you have any questions or would like any other assets, please email Meg Davies at Music Productions on meg@musicprods.co.uk.