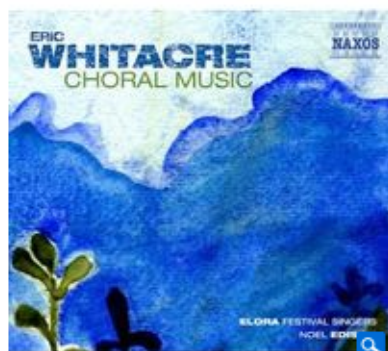


Album of the Week

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Eric Whitacre: Choral Music

Saturday, June 26, 2010



Eric Whitacre is as close to a rock star as a composer of choral music will probably ever get. At a recent Carnegie Hall concert, screaming girls and camera flashes greeted his entrance on stage before a 425-member chorus, which premiered his musical theater work *Paradise Lost*. Whitacre's *Lux aurumuque*, comprised of 185 spliced together videos recorded and posted on [Youtube](#), became a viral hit, with more than a million views to date. The handsome, charismatic 40-year-old recently signed a deal with Decca and has a busy touring schedule as a conductor through the next several seasons.

This week's **Full Rotation** selection offers some clues to Whitacre's popularity. The Elora Festival Singers, one of Canada's finest professional choirs, present eleven of his most popular works based on a mix of sacred and secular texts from Rumi, Octavio Paz, e. e. cummings, the Bible and Charles Anthony Silvestri. The pieces are as much about atmosphere as music.

His sonic alchemy can be heard in the opening *Her Sacred Spirit Soars*, a shimmering, Impressionistic score with swelling lines and harmonies that fluctuate between great tension and release. Whitacre can make a simple and ear-catching statement like the two-and-a-half minute *This Marriage* (based on a Rumi poem), just as he can build a large choral edifice like the wrenching, 13-minute *When David Heard that Absalom Was Slain*. While at times his music comforts like a warm sonic bath, it can surprise, as in *Little Birds*, which brings crunchy tone clusters and hints of Messiaen birdsong along to a text by Octavio Paz. *Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine* is another fascinating work that suggests Renaissance madrigals by way of British composer John Tavener.

One drawback of the recording is the lack of texts, especially when the words are often hard to make out in the first place (printed lyrics are [available online](#), however). Nevertheless, conductor Noel Edison brings judicious pacing to each of the selections on this fine introduction to this one-of-a-kind composer.

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Elora Festival Singers

Noel Edison, conductor