

Eric Whitacre

A portrait of Eric Whitacre, a man with shoulder-length light brown hair and a light beard, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed against a plain, light-colored background.

'Sleep'
For SATB Choir

A Music Works Study Guide
by Stephen **Lange**

Eric Whitacre, 'Sleep', A Music Works Study Guide
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www.stephenlange.wordpress.com

Stephen Lange
PO POX 8688
Havelock North 4157
New Zealand

2stephenlange@gmail.com

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Introduction

Welcome to the first Music Works Study Guide, featuring *Sleep* (for SATB chorus) by London-based American composer, Eric Whitacre. In this study guide you will find key data from a huge range of books, webpages, interviews, blogs, videos and other sources brought together into one resource. This guide is full of hyperlinks to the primary sources of the information, so teachers and students can verify the information and delve further into the topic. This material is not designed for a particular curriculum or to prepare students for any particular mode of assessment, but, instead, aims to provide the most valuable information on a given topic in an accessible way.

Eric Whitacre is undoubtedly one of the most popular classical composers of the Twenty First Century with more than 1,000,000 copies of sheet music sold and a huge international following in social media. Whitacre signed on to a rare long-term recording contract with Decca, which came with his own professional choir, the Eric Whitacre Singers made up of some of London's finest choristers. His innovative use of social media, to bring together a 'virtual choir' of strangers from around the globe, captured the imagination of the choral world.

Sleep, Whitacre's best-known and most performed work, was chosen as the Virtual Choir test piece back in 2009, and was used again for Virtual Choir 2.0 in 2011. Whitacre was hoping for many more singers the second time, but instead of the expected 900 singers, some 1752 singers in 58 countries recorded themselves to Whitacre's pre-recorded conductor track and submitted their recordings on YouTube. Now at version 3.0 (with Virtual Choir 4.0 in planning stages at time of writing), Virtual Choir continues to grow beyond anyone's expectations.

As the most popular composition of one of the most popular choral composers today, *Sleep* is well worth investigating. On close study, *Sleep* reveals many of the composer's trademark composition techniques and devices, and at the same time it offers opportunities to delve into a fascinating story and explore the intimate link between poetry and music (which, in this case has an unexpected twist!).

For an introduction to *Sleep* I encourage readers to explore the following links (time indicated):

- ▶ Whitacre talks at TED about his background and Virtual Choir 2.0 [link](#) (14:35)
- ▶ Bob Edwards interviews Eric Whitacre on radio [link](#) (45:09)
- ▶ Eric Whitacre introducing his first album *Light & Gold* [link](#) (5:09)

The score references and bar numbers in this resource refer to the *Sleep* score included in the book "**Light & Gold**" published by **Chester Music** rather than the individual sheet music published by Walton Music. Please note that the bar numbers in these two publications do *not* match! If using the Walton sheet music, please start by renumbering the bars with the first complete bar as bar 1. Also, the Chester score includes a piano reduction which will be of great benefit when studying the harmonic language of this work.

For more resources in support of this unit, including CDs, scores and teacher resources visit the Music Works Study Guides page at www.stephenlange.wordpress.com

Regards
Stephen Lange
January 2013

Eric Whitacre At a Glance

Born 2 January
1970, Reno, Ne-
vada, U.S.A

Could not
read music until
first formal music
instruction, age
18

His first
choir rehearsal
(singing Mozart)
changed his
life

Composed
and published his
first piece for
choir age 21



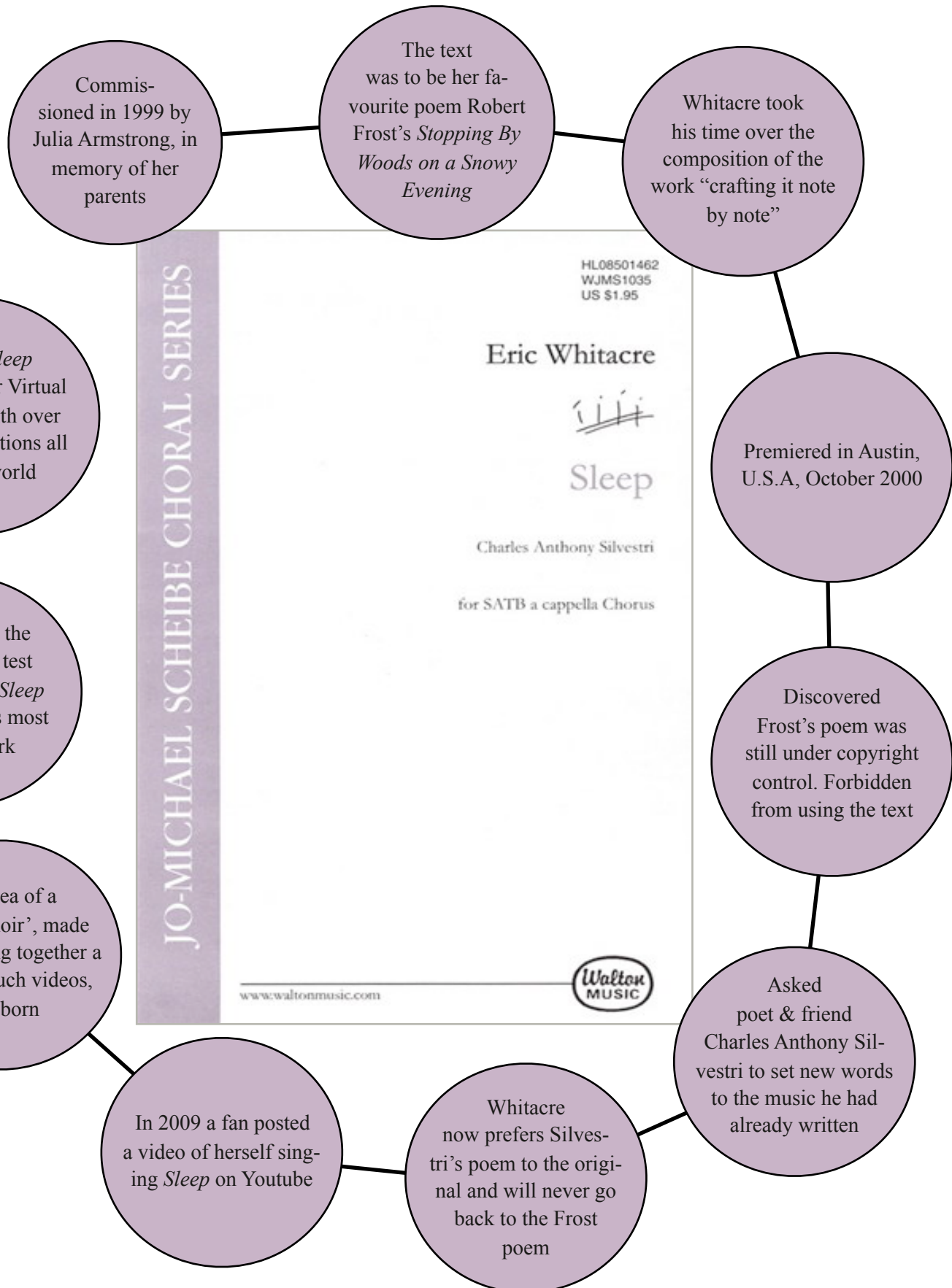
BA in
Music, and
Masters degree in
Composition
(Juilliard)

Became
professional
composer age 27

Influenced by
a wide variety of
music styles and
genres

Critically ac-
claimed and
popular (unusual
to be both)

Sleep Context At a Glance



Eric Whitacre Knowledge Base

1 Early Life

- Born January 2, 1970, Reno, Nevada, U.S.A
- Began playing piano at an early age but with no formal training
- Played trumpet in Junior High Marching Band for a short time (again, no formal training)
- First discovered music when cast in a national [ad for McDonalds](#), age 14. Spent his earnings on a synth (and clothes!)
 - Purchased an Ensoniq ESQ-1 and a EMU Drumulator
 - Whitacre says: "The very first pieces of what would become a lifelong fetish with electronic instruments"
- Played synth in a techno-pop band
 - Wrote many songs influenced by Depeche Mode, Alphaville and others
 - Longed to be a member of these bands (and Duran Duran)

Whitacre received no formal music training early on.

2 Musical Training & Development

- See radio interview with Bob Edwards - [lots of background info](#)
- BA in musical education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (first formal music training)
 - Whitacre unable to read music at start of degree
- Reluctant to join a choir because of the outfits his High School Show Choir was made to wear.
 - Convinced by friends to [join a choir](#), with the promise of cute sopranos and a trip to Mexico
- First choral piece he sang, [Kyrie from Mozart's "Requiem"](#), aged 18, changed his life
- For the rest of his degree he spent many hours in the UNLV library, listening to recordings and following scores
- Studied composition with avant garde Ukrainian composer [Virko Baley](#)
 - and choral conducting with [David Weiller](#).
 - Whitacre credits Weiller with the inspiration that put the young composer on the musical path
- Completed BA in Music, 1995 (took seven years to complete BA, kept dropping out)
- Went on to a Master's degree in composition at the Juilliard School, New York, studying with Pulitzer Prize and Oscar-winning composer, [John Corigliano](#).
- At 21 he wrote his for choir piece, a setting of ["Go, Lovely Rose"](#) for his college choir and presented the composition as a gift to David Weiller, which was then published
- At the age of 23 Whitacre completed his first piece for Wind Orchestra, ["Ghost Train"](#), which has now been recorded over 40 times
- Graduated from Juilliard in 1997 (age 27) and moved to Los Angeles and following the success of "Ghost Train", Whitacre decided to become a full time professional composer

Following the success of "Ghost Train", Whitacre decided to become a full time professional composer.