

ERIC WHITACRE'S
VIRTUAL CHOIR 6

Sing Gently

Over 17,500 singers aged 5 to 88 from 129 Countries join Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir 6: "Sing Gently"

Premiere – Sunday, July 19, 2020

[Los Angeles, CA – June 18th, 2020] Moved by the breadth of the pandemic and effect on society, one of the world's most performed composers, Eric Whitacre, composed a new piece especially for his Virtual Choir - "Sing Gently." 17,572 singers from 129 countries, aged 5–88, recorded their videos to be combined to form Virtual Choir 6. Together they found strength in the simple, collective initiative of the project and saw it as a way to not only replenish from within but also to offer hope and relief for the sadness and suffering of others. Virtual Choir 6, the film, will premiere on YouTube Sunday, July 19 at 10:30am PDT.

"With everyone unexpectedly far apart from each other I found myself thinking about the virtues of empathy, community and service, and a new Virtual Choir felt like a deeply human way to address all of those virtues. I tried as best I could to keep the lyrics of 'Sing Gently' straightforward and unadorned, to simply say what I felt needed to be said." Eric Whitacre

This marks Whitacre's largest Virtual Choir to date since his first more than 10 years ago. It is a testament to diversity, accessibility and inclusivity, and much more than a musical project; it's a community.

To make Virtual Choir 6, Whitacre and his managers & producers at Music Productions teamed-up with two organizations that share their commitment to expand access to the performing arts: the Colburn School and The NAMM Foundation. Rising to the technical and creative challenge of combining 17,000+ audio and video files is the Tony & Olivier award-winning 59 Productions (film-makers) and BAFTA-winning, Floating Earth (audio engineers).

Written, filmed and created during lockdown, the website for Virtual Choir 6 was built with attention to accessibility:

- No cost to join.
- Materials provided in multiple formats (AV and audio; online and for download as an alternative to poor streaming connections).
- Materials for singers who wanted to learn by ear rather than read sheet music.
- Braille sheet music for the blind and visually impaired.

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- American Sign Language interpretations for the deaf and hard of hearing.
- Workshops for those with reduced lung capacity hosted by Ashley Ballou-Bonnema – a professional vocalist and voice teacher living with cystic fibrosis.
- Resources for those with physical and psychological disabilities including autism, ADHD, EDD, multiple sclerosis and other conditions.
- A support network for thousands of individuals, some of whom initially felt anxious about the work involved both technically and musically, or self-conscious about their performance.

As part of Virtual Choir 6, Whitacre ran online rehearsals and created ThinkTank – a body of material from educators and performers, including live and pre-recorded sessions with:

- Leading educators to celebrated performers on how to warm up your voice and guided rehearsals on “Sing Gently.”
- Leading laryngologist Dr. Reena Gupta on how the voice works and how to take care of it.
- Singer Joan Beal on how breath exercises calm anxiety.
- Charles Anthony Silvestri with a mini-masterclass on writing lyric poetry.
- Nathaniel Zeisler, Colburn’s Dean for Community Initiatives, with career development advice for artists.
- And interviews with musician Jacob Collier, composers John Powell and Jeff Beal, and Dr Daisy Fancourt (University College London: Institute of Epidemiology & Health).

“Virtual Choir 6 represents some of the best of humanity – a huge global community, supporting one another in all manner of ways through this difficult time, joining their voices in a beautiful new piece from Eric, ‘Sing Gently.’ It’s a privilege to have provided the means for people from 129 countries to come together with a common goal, and to work with the teams who have undertaken the huge task of taking the audio and video to create a legacy for this moment.” Claire Long (Exec. Producer, Music Productions)

Research undertaken in 2018 as part of a collaborative study with Whitacre and University College London into virtual cultural experiences, showed that singing in a Virtual Choir boosts participants’ self-esteem, reduces feelings of social isolation, creates a strong sense of personal agency and promotes better mental health.

“Sing Gently” was written in April 2020 for choir (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) and piano. The piano track was recorded by Sam Glicklich, a student at the Colburn School in Los Angeles. The copyright is administered by Boosey and Hawkes and the sheet music will be available from Hal Leonard later in 2020.

- Ends -

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VIRTUAL CHOIR OVERVIEW

Ten years ago, composer and conductor Eric Whitacre created his first Virtual Choir as a simple experiment in social media after a young woman recorded a video of herself singing one of his compositions and shared it on YouTube. Moved by her performance, he sent out a call asking singers to record their voice-parts and in 2010 the first Virtual Choir was created. Whitacre was invited by the curator of TED, Chris Anderson, to speak at the annual TED Conference and that TED Talk alone has had close to 10m views; the Virtual Choirs have well over 40m views online and millions more through live events and television broadcast. Whitacre's Virtual Choir has grown from 185 singers in Virtual Choir 1 to more than 17,000 singers aged 5–88, from 129 countries, in Virtual Choir 6.

ERIC WHITACRE

Grammy award-winning composer and conductor Eric Whitacre is one of today's most popular and performed musicians. His works are programmed worldwide, while his ground-breaking Virtual Choirs have united singers from 129 countries. A graduate of the prestigious Juilliard School of Music, Eric served two terms as Artist in Residence with the Los Angeles Master Chorale concluding in 2020, following five years as Composer in Residence at the University of Cambridge, UK.

His compositions have been widely recorded and his debut album as a conductor on Universal, *Light and Gold*, went straight to the top of the charts and earned them a Grammy. A popular guest conductor and communicator, he has drawn capacity audiences to concerts with leading orchestras and professional choirs around the globe. Insatiably curious and a lover of all types of music, he has enjoyed collaborations with legendary Hollywood composer Hans Zimmer and British pop icons Laura Mvula, Imogen Heap and Annie Lennox among others. Eric's orchestral work *Deep Field* became the foundation for a pioneering audio-visual collaboration between NASA, the Space Telescope Science Institute, Music Productions and film-makers 59 Productions.

A charismatic speaker, Eric has given keynote addresses for many Fortune 500 companies and global institutions, from Apple, [TED.com](https://www.ted.com) mainstage and Google to the World Economic Forum in Davos and the United Nations Speaker's Programme.

Countries represented in Virtual Choir 6:

Antigua and Barbuda	Cameroon	El Salvador	Hong Kong
Åland Islands	Canada	England	Hungary
Argentina	Cayman Islands	Estonia	Iceland
Armenia	Chile	Faroe Islands	India
Australia	China	Fiji	Indonesia
Austria	Colombia	Finland	Iran
The Bahamas	Democratic Republic of Congo	France	Iraq
Bahrain	Costa Rica	Georgia	Ireland
Belarus	Croatia	Germany	Isle of Man
Belgium	Cuba	Ghana	Israel
Bermuda	Cyprus	Greece	Italy
Bolivia	Czech Republic	Guam	Jamaica
Brazil	Denmark	Guatemala	Japan
Brunei	Dominican Republic	Guernsey	Jersey
Bulgaria	Ecuador	Guyana	Kazakhstan
Burkina Faso	Egypt	Haiti	Kenya
Cambodia		Honduras	Kosovo

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Kuwait	Nicaragua	Russia	Taiwan
Latvia	Nigeria	Rwanda	Thailand
Lebanon	Northern Ireland	Saint Helena,	Trinidad and Tobago
Liberia	Northern Mariana	Ascension and Tristan	Turkey
Lithuania	Islands	da Cunha	Ukraine
Luxembourg	Norway	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates
Macau	Oman	Scotland	United States of
Macedonia	Panama	Serbia	America
Madagascar	Paraguay	Singapore	Uruguay
Malaysia	Peru	Slovakia	Uzbekistan
Malta	Philippines	Slovenia	Vanuatu
Mexico	Poland	South Africa	Venezuela
Morocco	Portugal	South Korea	Vietnam
Myanmar	Puerto Rico	Spain	Wales
Namibia	Qatar	Sri Lanka	Zimbabwe
Netherlands	Réunion	Sweden	
New Zealand	Romania	Switzerland	

MUSIC PRODUCTIONS

Music Productions is an artist management and production company. As Eric’s managers and business partners for over a decade, they have produced five of his Virtual Choirs, in addition to the Virtual Youth Choir and the Walt Disney World of Honor Choir. With Eric they run a joint-venture record label, handle his live bookings, present concerts & workshops, coordinate publishing, media, education, speaking and creative/event productions. More widely, Music Productions has been instrumental in establishing and running foundations to support music on both sides of the Atlantic; third party charity beneficiaries of recent events & projects include UNICEF, Save the Children and Maggie’s Cancer Charity. As artist managers, the team is proud to work with a small number of hugely talented and versatile individuals.

COLBURN SCHOOL

A world-class performing arts school in Los Angeles, the Colburn School, provides music and dance tuition for students from beginners to those about to embark on professional careers. “At Colburn, we believe that the arts are essential to the life of a community and that all should have access to an outstanding performing Arts education,” said Colburn President Sel Kardan. “We share Eric’s commitment to breaking down barriers and making music available to as many people as possible.”

NAMM FOUNDATION

The NAMM Foundation is a nonprofit supported in part by the National Association of Music Merchants and its 10,400 members around the world. The NAMM Foundation works to advance active participation in music-making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs. The Foundation is the presenting sponsor of Make Music Day celebrated in 1000 cities in 120 countries on June 21st; a day where everyone is encouraged to make music and share free, live music virtually or in-person, from balconies to rooftops.

59 PRODUCTIONS

59 Productions are a design studio and production company that specialize in story-driven design. From architectural projection mapping to exhibitions; from Virtual Reality experiences to events; from theatrical design to technical consultancy, 59’s company of writers, directors, architects, animators, visual artists and technologists produce artistic work that seeks to amaze audiences of all kinds. Building on a decade of experience making theatrical work for some of the world’s greatest venues – including Olivier and Tony award-winning work for the National Theatre, West End and Broadway, and for many of the major cultural organizations of the world – the company has more recently become renowned for creating spectacular public artworks, projection-mapping some of the world’s most iconic buildings, including the Sydney Opera House, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, the Washington Monument in DC and the United Nations Headquarters in New York. 59 Productions is also known for projects such as the *David Bowie Is* exhibition at the V&A museum, which it designed, and for its own multi-award-winning work in Virtual Reality.

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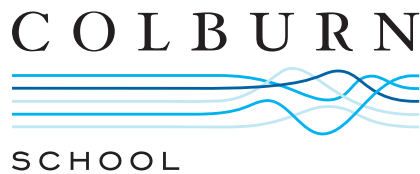
"It was thrilling for us at 59 Productions watching the number of submissions mounting towards the deadline. The final count of 17,572 was astonishing and we couldn't wait to get stuck in. To give you a sense of the scale of the project, in order to fit this many people onto a single high-definition TV screen they would have to be 21 pixels each. Over almost 600 hours our ten-strong team worked to line up, fix, arrange and scale every single individual file. Once this preparation was complete making the film itself was arguably the easier part! We can't wait to share it with audiences across the world and hope that it moves and inspires them". Rebecca Collis, Producer for 59 Productions

Eric Whitacre and Music Productions collaborated with 59 Productions, NASA and the Space Telescope Science Institute to make the film, *Deep Field: The Impossible Magnitude of our Universe*, featuring Virtual Choir 5, which received its premiere at the Kennedy Space Center in 2018.

FLOATING EARTH

Floating Earth is Europe's leading independent recording and production company specialising in Classical Music. Formed in 1987 and operating from its West London base, it undertakes a variety of projects for CD, DVD, digital consumption, broadcasts and installations offering recording, production, post production and consultancy services. A host of International awards include Grammy Awards, BAFTAs, RPS Awards, Emmys and even an Oscar. Projects undertaken can be as diverse as The BRIT Awards, The Queen's Diamond Jubilee concert and The Royal Wedding (Prince William and Kate Middleton).

"We have worked on a number of Eric Whitacre's virtual choirs and they are always interesting. Trying to get over seventeen and a half thousand voices singing 'as one' is a challenge we don't come across every day, that's for sure. We look forward to seeing and hearing the impact of this incredible project". Steve Long, Floating Earth



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