

# **BAD BOY' OF CHORAL MUSIC FEATURED ON SALT LAKE CHORAL ARTISTS' CONCERT**

Posted on February 16, 2011 by Edward Reichel  
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Over the last two decades Eric Whitacre has been garnering a reputation as one of today's foremost choral composers. Since the 1990s he's been honing his craft to the point where he's a favorite not only of audiences but also musicians. There is a pop element to his music, but there is also a level of sophistication that raises his music beyond the merely superficial. His works have depth and substance. And bottom line, Whitacre has made choral music fun, cool and fresh.

His music will be featured at the Salt Lake Choral Artists' upcoming Feb. 19 concert. Music director Brady Allred has done his music in the past, both here and in Pittsburgh when he was with Duquesne University, but this concert will be devoted exclusively to Whitacre's music. Allred doesn't worry for a moment that it's going to be overkill. "There is a lot of variety in his music and it appeals to many different people," he said. "Some people like his music because it has a new age flavor. Others like it because of the sounds he creates. It can be very evocative."

One might think that Whitacre's music is difficult to sing because of the dense tonal clusters, but Allred said it's not that demanding. "His music is usually well suited to the voices. The voice leading is good, even in the clusters."

And audiences seem to think that Whitacre's music is easy to listen to. "His music can be very dissonant, but not to the point where people feel uncomfortable," Allred said. "It's distinctive and appealing."

All of the different ensembles that make up the Salt Lake Choral Artists will perform at the concert. And they'll be joined by the choirs from five area high schools: Alta, Bingham, East, Hillcrest and Syracuse. "These were the schools that participated in our summer choral institute last year," Allred said. Having the opportunity to sing at this concert was one of the benefits of taking part in the institute.

The program that SLCA will sing will give an excellent overview of Whitacre's music. "We're doing a lot of different things," Allred said. Among the pieces are "Cloudburst," "Leonardo Dreams of His Flying Machine" and "Sleep."

"Cloudburst" is one of Whitacre's earliest pieces. "I've used it for the last 15 years," Allred said. "I've taken it on tour and to competitions. Audiences and juries go crazy over it." Allred will have the combined SLCA and high school choirs singing it. "We're going to place everyone around the hall and surround the audience. It's going to be really effective."

“Leonardo” recounts the story of the great Italian Renaissance painter building an airplane. “It’s very pictorial,” said Allred.

“Sleep” has an interesting story behind it. “Whitacre approached Robert Frost’s estate to get permission to set ‘Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening.’ The estate wasn’t interested in another musical setting of the poem and refused to allow him to use it.” So Whitacre commissioned a poet to write new words to the music.

Whitacre’s big contribution to choral music is in his approach. Not content with just setting texts to music he incorporates special effects to make the words come alive. “He’s not exactly a bad boy, but he’s certainly a non conformist kind of guy,” Allred said. And Whitacre has been able to use that image to his advantage and cash in on it. “He has a rock star image,” Allred said, “and he controls every part of his works. He has his own choir in England, the Eric Whitacre Singers, and he has his own publishing company.”

Allred knows Whitacre’s music well. Allred’s choirs have sung a lot of his music over the years. “I like to think that I and my choirs have helped him get the recognition he has today.”

#### CONCERT INFO:

Location: Libby Gardner Concert Hall

Time and Date: 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Feb. 19

Tickets: \$25 general, \$10 students and children

Phone: 801-953-1793

Web: [www.saltlakechoralartists.org](http://www.saltlakechoralartists.org)