Interview with Eric Whitacre

by NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants)

Q= interviewer W= Mr. Whitacre

**Q:** Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. How are you and your family coping with the COVID-19 reality?

**EW:** We are doing OK. Thankfully we are healthy, doing our best to really adhere to the social distancing guidelines. The silver lining is that we have had some delicious moments together, moments that probably wouldn’t have happened in our ‘normal’ lives.

**Q:**What inspired you to do another Virtual Choir—why now?

**EW:**After Virtual Choir 5 I couldn’t imagine we would ever do another one. The theme we chose for that one — the Hubble Telescope’s Deep Field image, and our place in the cosmos — seemed like a grand and fitting way to wrap up ten years of Virtual Choirs.

But with the Covid-19 crisis, with everyone suddenly 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.

**Q:**The lyrics are beautiful, simple, and, well, gentle. What was it like for you to write this song? How did you know when you hit the right “tone”?

**EW:** Thank you. I tried as best I could to keep them straightforward and unadorned, to simply say what I felt needed to be said. I think I knew the lyrics felt right when I wrote the words “sing gently”. These two words captured for me the essence of a life led with compassion and empathy.

**Q:**Please share a bit about your writing process. What’s a day in the life of an Eric Whitacre Composition like?

**A:** It’s not very glamorous. I find myself ‘aching’ to make something, and then I begin to mope around, looking for a way to ‘heal’ that ache. I take long walks, improvise at the piano, listen to other music — waiting for a spark of inspiration. That spark comes in the form of what I call ‘The Golden Brick’, which for me is a chord or a few notes that contain all of the DNA to write the piece of music. Then it is a process of writing, rewriting, rewriting, rewriting, trying to make the music as minimal and elegant as possible.

**Q:**When we reached out to partner with you on a project, we had no idea what would come out of out of it, but we knew it would be special, caring, and artistic. What makes you trust us as a collaborator? And thank you!

**EW:**Because we are members of the same tribe! All of our values align, especially the idea that music is medicine and is an essential part of being alive.

**Q:**So many people are feeling isolated now with stay-at-home orders—how much did that feeling of isolation influence Virtual Choir 6?

**EW:** It is one of the greatest influences on Virtual Choir 6. I feel it — intensely — this need to reconnect with others, to be together again with friends, family, even casual interactions with people on the street.

**Q:**I assume that each virtual choir has a goal, and wonder what do you hope comes out of Virtual Choir 6?

**EW:**This moment in history is going to be remembered as one of great suffering for many people, and also a time of growing division and dissent. My hope for Virtual Choir 6 is that it might give some comfort for those who need it, and that it might point the way to a kind of living where we are simply more gentle with each other.

**Q:** How can folks get involved in VC6? Must they be trained singers? What tips do you have for submitting videos?

**EW:**Everyone can join! And I mean everyone. In our past virtual choir programs we have had singers as young as 2 and as old as 102, with experience ranging from full professionals to people who have never before sung in a group. You don’t have to be a great singer, you simply have to lend your voice to the choir so that together we can create something simple, delicate, and beautiful.