

The Ensemble

The North Cheshire Wind Orchestra (NCWO) is a community symphonic wind orchestra based just south of Warrington in Cheshire, England. The membership of around 40 players is drawn from throughout the North West of England and whilst a number of members make their living from teaching music, the group is essentially non-professional. Over the last few years the NCWO has developed to the point where it is now regarded as one of the finest ensembles of its type in the UK.

The North Cheshire Wind Orchestra performs a wide range of music and the band is noted for its adventurous programming and commissioning of new works. In April 2006, the NCWO gave the European premiere of Daron Hagen's opera *Bandanna*, along with soloists from the RNCM and Manchester Chamber Choir. More recently, the NCWO has premiered works by Stephen McNeff, Andy Scott, Emily Howard and Gary Carpenter. The majority of these works have been commissioned by the band through its innovative commissioning scheme whereby band members, family, friends and supporters give regular donations to a fund specifically set up for engaging composers to write new works for wind orchestra.

The Recording

The recording presented here was captured live at a concert given in Bold Street Methodist Church in Warrington on 14th November 2015. This concert titled "Cityscapes", programmed and conducted by Clare Deady, explored the sights and sounds of the city. After all the hustle and bustle of city life, *Sleep* was our chance to find a quiet spot to relax and reflect. The recording was made by Daniel Tackley, NCWO's principal trombonist.

The Work

Grammy-winning composer and conductor Eric Whitacre is hot property. A graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, he recently completed a five year term as visiting fellow and composer in residence at Cambridge University. He is best known for his choral works, many of which he has conducted and recorded with his Eric Whitacre Singers. In 2015 he appeared at the BBC Proms, conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Singers and BBC Symphony Chorus in a programme which featured a number of his works including the European premiere of a new commission, *Deep Field*, based on images taken by the Hubble Space Telescope.

In addition to choral works, Whitacre has written a number of pieces specifically for symphonic winds. These works include *Ghost Train*, conjuring images of a supernatural train that roars throughout the Western United States, and *Godzilla Eats Las Vegas*, a unique film-script-like work described by Whitacre himself as completely ridiculous and really out there!

Sleep, commissioned by a singer in memory of her parents who died within weeks of each other after more than 50 years of marriage, was originally written for choir and used the text of Robert Frost's poem *Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening*. Due to a mix up, permission to use the poem was never secured and after a lengthy legal battle, Whitacre was forbidden from using the poem for publication or performance. He decided to ask poet Charles Anthony Silvestri to set new words to the music, an enormous task requiring the exact structure and even key words from the original poem. The result was a text which found a completely different (but equally beautiful) message in the already written music. Whitacre subsequently made the arrangement for wind orchestra performed here.