

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

Dear Connecticut All-State Treble Choir,

I am sitting in my kitchen on a beautiful February day in Houston where the temperature is 64 degrees. Out of curiosity, I checked the weather in Hartford, Connecticut, and it is 37 degrees. By the time I see you, our Houston air conditioners will have been running for a month, and I will be ready for some cool Connecticut weather!

I am Director of Choral Studies at the University of Houston and am also the Director of the Houston Symphony Chorus, and I have loved choral music since I was nine years old. I hope you like the music we will be working on together, and if not, I hope that you will give me a chance to change your mind. ☺

Music, The Universal Language

- **Henry Purcell (1659 – 1695), British, “Music For A While.”**

This is our opener and the text speaks to the universality of music. The history of the piece also speaks to the universality of the human condition. Henry Purcell was eight years old when London was hit with a terrible plague. (Sound familiar?) The death toll reached 1,000 a day, subsided due to cooler weather in October and was finally eradicated almost a year later when the entire city of London caught fire and burned for five days, destroying most of the city as well as the city’s rat population, which, as it turned out, was the source of that particular pestilence.

- **Two pieces on “Cantate Domino” texts**

Heinrich Schütz (1585 – 1672) German
Rupert Lang (b. 1948) Canadian

We next turn to two works that also speak to the universality of music, this time by showing how two composers, separated by centuries and oceans, can find meaning and beauty in the same “Cantate Domino” text. Yes, they use the same words, but the music is *entirely* different. I hope you like them both.

- **Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947), American, “Sisters”**

Our next piece is tricky, fun and *must* be memorized because it contains hand-patching. The text describes two girls who are such close friends that they call themselves “Sisters.” African American, Lucille Clifton (1936 – 2010), wrote the text and is considered one of the most important poets of her generation.

- **Eric Whitacre (b. 1970), American, “Sing Gently”**

Just as we opened with a piece by a composer who lived through a plague in 17th-century London and who set a text that speaks to the universality of music, we will close with a piece, “Sing Gently,” which carries the same general message and which is closely associated with our own pandemic. You might enjoy watching this 2020 *CBS Sunday Morning* feature about the piece. <https://ericwhitacre.com/news/cbs-sunday-morning-the-largest-virtual-choir-ever-assembled>

My time in Connecticut will mark my return to working with honor choirs after a two-year hiatus, and to say that I am excited to be with you is an understatement. I can’t wait to get to know you and to make music with you!