Musical Arrangement of Eric Whitacre's Five Hebrew Love Songs

for Clarinet Choir and Percussion

by Katiana Nicholson

A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

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Abstract

I arranged Eric Whitacre's *Five Hebrew Love Songs*, for SATB Choir and String Quartet, for an ensemble consisting of E-flat clarinet, B-flat clarinet, B-flat bass clarinet, E-flat contra-alto clarinet, and five percussionists. *Five Hebrew Love Songs* for Clarinet Choir and Percussion includes all five movements from the original score. I spent the fall semester and winter break arranging each movement and consulting with Professor Charles Allen Kennedy who gave me critique, conducting feedback, and editorial suggestions. As the spring semester began, I became responsible for rehearsing my arrangement with the MTSU Clarinet Choir, under usual direction of clarinet professor Dr. Todd Waldecker. The premiere performance of movement II. Kalá kallá occurred on March 18th, 2017 and was very successful. The world premiere of *Five Hebrew Love Songs* for Clarinet Choir and Percussion will occur April 8th, 2017.

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I. Whitacre and his Five Hebrew Love Songs

Eric Whitacre was born on January 2, 1970 in Nevada. In high school, he joined a marching band and played in a techno-pop group. Whitacre attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he had the life-changing experience of singing Mozart's Requiem. From there, he studied composition at the Juilliard School of Music, where he received his Master of Music in 1997. His first album as conductor and composer, *Light and Gold*, won the 2012 Grammy® Award for Best Choral Recording. This album includes *Five Hebrew Love Songs* and has since then become a popular piece to perform in the choral world.

There are five existing versions of *Five Hebrew Love Songs*: SATB and string quartet; SATB, violin, and piano; SA and string quartet; SA, violin, and piano; and the original soprano, violin, and piano. The choral parts are exactly the same for the different accompaniments, so that if the choir wants to perform the version with string quartet, the chorus can sing from the piano/violin score and the conductor can lead from the quartet version.

Whitacre speaks fondly of this piece: "In the spring of 1996, my great friend and brilliant violinist Friedemann Eichhorn invited me and my girlfriend-at-the-time Hila Plitmann (a soprano) to give a concert with him in his home city of Speyer, Germany. We had all met that year as students at the Juilliard School, and were inseparable. Because we were appearing as a band of traveling musicians, 'Friedy' asked me to write a set of

troubadour songs for piano, violin and soprano. I asked Hila (who was born and raised in Jerusalem) to write me a few 'postcards' in her native tongue, and a few days later she presented me with these exquisite and delicate Hebrew poems. I set them while we vacationed in a small skiing village in the Swiss Alps, and we performed them for the first time a week later in Speyer. Each of the songs captures a moment that Hila and I shared together. Kala Kalla (which means 'light bride') was a pun I came up with while she was first teaching me Hebrew. The bells at the beginning of Eyze Sheleg are the exact pitches that awakened us each morning in Germany as they rang from a nearby cathedral. These songs are profoundly personal for me, born entirely out of my new love for this soprano, poet, and now my beautiful wife, Hila Plitmann."

II. Interest and Involvement

My interest in pursuing *Five Hebrew Love Songs* for Clarinet Choir and Percussion began when Professor Kennedy mentioned the piece in passing one day my junior year of college. I was toying with the idea of arranging a piece for clarinet choir because I was so inspired by Alayna Cate's thesis arrangement, and I asked Professor Kennedy if he had any ideas on the project. We sat in his office and listened to the entire piece, and I immediately knew it was the piece I was meant to arrange.

I worked that summer as a Governor's School for the Arts music counselor and asked for advice from my boss at the time, who was a choral director at a university in Kansas. He told me I would never get permission from Eric Whitacre to arrange his music because he liked to do all the arrangements himself. Feeling defeated, I put that idea away for the rest of the summer. By the time the fall semester started, I had not found another piece that resonated as deeply as with me as *Five Hebrew Love Songs* had, and so I asked my choral director, Professor Angela Tipps, for her thoughts on asking for permission. She encouraged me to just send the email and the rest is history. This is proof that if you do not ask, the answer will always be no.

I have always loved Eric Whitacre's music. While I never sang in choir in middle or high school, I have always listened to choral music for personal enjoyment. My brother showed me Whitacre's *Lux Aurumque* when I was in sixth grade and it has since remained the piece that inspired me to pursue music. I was fortunate enough to play the

band arrangement in high school and always remember that experience fondly. So, when Professor Kennedy mentioned Whitacre's name, I knew I had to pursue this piece seriously – it seemed as though fate had played its hand.

My original plan was to arrange *Five Hebrew Love Songs* for Women's Chorus and Clarinet Choir, but upon further research and discussions with my advisors, I learned the existing five versions all have voice in them, and I wanted to create something completely different. Thus, I dropped the idea of having vocalists and decided to let the clarinet choir "sing." I have played all of the members of the clarinet family at one point or another and have taken Orchestration and Arranging, so I was very familiar with the ranges, tendencies, capabilities, and colors the clarinet can achieve. I am also a member of the Women's Chorale at MTSU, so I have received vocal instruction and feel confident in my singing abilities. Therefore, I applied both to this project and truly believe that I have created something unique to both of my loves in music.

III. Methodology

The preliminary steps I took to begin arranging *Five Hebrew Love Songs* were ordering the score version for soprano, violin, and piano; setting up weekly meetings with project advisor Professor Allen Kennedy to study the score and to brainstorm instrumentation ideas; and seeking permission from the composer, Eric Whitacre, to arrange his work. My favorite memory from the fall semester of this project was receiving a reply to my email twenty minutes after sending it stating that I was free to pursue my arrangement. I immediately exclaimed with delight and startled several people in the Wright Music Building lobby, and sought out my mentors Dr. Todd Waldecker, Professor Allen Kennedy, and Professor Angela Tipps to share the good news – but that was just the beginning of nearly a year's hard work.

As I began the arranging process, I utilized Finale, a popular music notation software. According to my timeline, I was due to start with movement IV, but since I was new to the software, I decided to start with a simpler movement so that I could familiarize myself with the program. Learning the software took many hours, lots of baby steps, and even more patience. I am now quite familiar with the program, which will go a long way in my future endeavors as a music educator.

The way I approached each movement was by listening for something that made each unique from the others. For movement I. Temuná, the opening and closing features a quartet of clarinetists. Movement II. Kalá kallá utilizes many rhythmic percussion lines, including the tambourine. Because movement III. Lárov is the shortest movement and

full of moving melodic lines, I decided to make it strictly clarinet voices-only so that I could showcase the versatility of all the ranges of each member of the clarinet family. My favorite movement to arrange was IV. Éyze shéleg, which incorporates singing and the use of handbells at the beginning. Finally, movement V. Rakút features the Eb clarinet and the bass clarinet, with the recapitulation of the solo quintet voices at the end, tying the piece back to the first movement. From there, I arranged the piece around those unique features, and the notes just fell into place like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Coming up with the initial ideas for each movement was the hardest part, but because the vocal lines transcribed so easily to clarinet, the arranging process was relatively simple. I was able to take the rough drafts into rehearsals with the MTSU Clarinet Choir to put the music into live context, because MIDI sounds do not always reflect real life sounds. My peers were patient with me and were very helpful to the process. For the percussion parts, I met with several percussionists to test out sounds and to seek out guidance in how to write those parts clearly. I was very fortunate to have so many people willing to answer any and all questions I had throughout the semester.

I learned the hard way the importance of time management and allowing "cushion room" for unforeseeable obstacles that may occur. For example, the Finale program was too much for my last computer to handle, so I was out of commission for a week while I tried to revive my computer. Eventually my father just bought me a new computer, but if I could go back or offer any advice to anyone pursuing this type of project, I would make sure my technology could handle whatever software I needed to be successful. My timeline was also adjusted from the original plan because of my class load and extracurricular responsibilities. I allowed for extra time to complete my arrangement by

setting the deadline very early, so I still finished with plenty of time to make any changes I desired.

While working on the arrangement, I had to gather all the personnel for the performance. I already had the MTSU Clarinet Choir involved in rehearsals since the beginning of the spring semester with special permission from Dr. Waldecker, who was gracious enough to share rehearsal time with me on Wednesdays during class. I contacted the MTSU Percussion Studio for five volunteers at the beginning of the semester and I was able to quickly recruit them. In order to really make this performance special, though, I decided to invite several high school and middle school clarinetists to join us, most of whom I teach or have been a Governor's School music counselor for the past two summers. Five outside students have committed to the performance on my senior recital and I could not be more excited to share this experience with them.

My time during rehearsal was spent teaching the clarinetists how to think like vocalists. We spent a lot of time singing the music before playing it. I spent the most time on movement II. Kalá kallá because it is the longest and involves the most people. I felt very successful in my rehearsal techniques and in conducting how I wanted the music to sound. I received feedback from Professor Kennedy on ways to conduct certain passages to get the results I wanted. At times it was nerve-wracking leading my peers and I would get very nervous on Wednesdays before rehearsal, but once I actually got in front of them, all my worries went away and I felt right at home. This experience really solidified my desire to pursue a career in music education.

The most difficult task of this creative thesis project was the administrative task of organization. I had to set up outside rehearsals to incorporate the guest clarinetists and

the percussionists since our Wednesday rehearsals were spent in a room that could not accommodate the large keyboard instruments. My peers were flexible in accommodating the extra rehearsal time, but it was still difficult to schedule times for thirty one people. I also had to communicate a lot via email and had to keep track of many different threads. I feel I was successful and know this experience will only help me in the future because it gave me a taste of the type of responsibilities I will have.

The world premiere of *Five Hebrew Love Songs* for Clarinet Choir and Percussion will be on my senior recital scheduled for Saturday, April 8th, 2017. I will have arranged, rehearsed, and conducted my arrangement for my creative honors thesis project. This has been quite the educational experience and I am proud of the finished product.

IV. A Discussion on Conducting

In preparation for rehearsing the MTSU Clarinet Choir, I met with Professor Kennedy to discuss conducting techniques and to practice effective gestures to communicate how I wanted the music to sound to my ensemble. In the fall semester we met weekly, and over the winter break we were able to meet a few times during the break when Professor Kennedy found himself on campus. Some of the subjects we discussed were how to start the different movements, what patterns to use to help the musicians with time while still remaining musical, and whether baton was appropriate for this piece. During rehearsal, I did not always use the baton, because I wanted to really "dig into" the music with the ensemble, which involved clapping the beat to maintain a certain tempo. During performances, I used my baton.

Getting up in front of my peers and conducting them was nerve-wracking at first. I was worried my conducting would not be clear, or they would judge me for how I chose to conduct my arrangement. However, I had a very receptive and supportive ensemble. Many of my peers would come up to me and compliment me and encourage me that I was doing well and they were understanding me. This was valuable experience for my future as a music educator because more often than not, students in my shoes do not get experience in front of an ensemble before they get out in the field. I was able to learn how planning rehearsals worked and what was or was not effective with an ensemble in terms of conducting and order of pieces for rehearsal.

- October 8, 2016: I started this log today because I wanted to be able to keep track of my progress on this thesis project. As I approach the day where I begin composing my written component in the spring, this is what I will be referencing and/or including. I have already made an adjustment to my original game plan. Instead of arranging movement IV first, I will be arranging movement III. Though I knew exactly what instrumentation I wanted for IV, I am not yet familiar with Finale to be able to successfully complete that movement and still stay on track with my timeline. Movement III is clarinet voices only, therefore it is simpler to complete, and it is also the shortest movement of the five.
- November 2, 2016: I have not updated this log in quite some time, so I'm taking a moment to do so before this percussion ensemble concert tonight to describe my iourney thus far. I have completed movements I and III so far, and my next goal will be movement V. I actually got two weeks ahead of schedule, which was really a blessing in disguise, because it allowed me to focus on the busiest part of this fall semester. This thesis project has been quite easy so far, because I started so early, and I did a little at a time. So my advice to anyone wanting to pursue this type of creative project would be break it down and chip away at it bit by bit. It can be easy to be overwhelmed, but I know this will be a labor of love and I am proud of the work I have done so far. It was incredibly simple to get rights to this piece and I cannot believe I almost didn't ask Eric Whitacre, because last semester someone said he would never reply. This all goes to prove that if you don't ask, the answer will always be no! I hope to update this more frequently, now that my computer is back up and running. That's a long story too; for a few days there, my computer simply would not turn on nor hold a charge. That was really the only obstacle I have had to overcome so far. Other than that, I've just been able to familiarize myself with Finale and proper clarinet choir arranging. I'm so glad I chose to do this! Now I just have to turn in my revised thesis proposal by this Friday, November 4. I am adding a few paragraphs on my academic component.
- December 19, 2016: Once again, life has caught up with me and I have just now started seriously pursuing my thesis again. I am definitely behind schedule now. I was supposed to finish the remaining three movements of my thesis before winter break commenced, but I decided to finish my semester strong, so I put my thesis on hold. I knew I would have a month and a half of break to finish so I didn't stress too much. I also started to avoid working on my arrangement because I had a sort of "arranger's block" and was at a loss as to how to continue my work. But recently I gained some inspiration and just started adding notes. I need to change the key of my movements to Bb but have no idea how... I think I may just wait until I see my Finale friends again and ask for their help and just keep it in this key. Right now I am in Florida and I have my clarinet, so I plan to get the app

- "Acapella" and play through all of these parts and put them together to see how they sound in real life to really gauge where I am in my progress. I have been messaging with Professor Kennedy about all my worries and concerns and he has been great at keeping them at bay and making me feel confident in my ideas and skills. It is so important to find the right advisor for this type of project. At first I was a little nervous that I didn't pick a composer, but to have a conductor I think will be more valuable to achieving what I set out to do in the long run. I am hoping to focus more on rehearsal techniques and he will definitely be the best resource for that next semester, and as far as figuring out the Finale program, I know people and it is good for me to have to figure out the ropes myseif anyway. It is definitely challenging me in ways I have not yet been since starting college. I have never been technologically savvy so it is good exposure for me.
- December 20, 2016: Hey, two entries in a row! Today I have primarily focused on cleaning up movement II and figuring out the last "adagio, espressivo" section's voicing. Specifically, measures 55 and 56. Man, I tell you, two measures have never been so absurd to deal with. Right now I have three of the five available versions of Whitacre's piece in front of me and two recordings I like, and being the indecisive person I am, I have spent hours deciding which version to use. My advice to anyone wanting to pursue an arranging creative thesis project would be to just try something and get it down, and if you don't like, then change it later, but just get something down and don't keep staring at a blank computer screen. That can stifle your creativity for other parts of the piece and you have to keep moving if you want to get anything done. Today, thanks to the graduate student in my clarinet studio, Michaela Cundari, I figured out how to change the key of my arrangement! For some reason it changed the octaves of some of my parts, probably because the notes became out of range... I didn't look long enough because I'm just going to finish the arrangement in the original key and change it to Bb later. It definitely sounds better which makes me feel better. I took out my clarinet today and braved playing through some of my parts for the first time... what a feeling. It definitely cannot remain in this key, I already know the tuning will be horrible because some of the worst notes on the instrument are played too often if I keep it here. I'm three fourths of the way finished with Kalá kallá - PRAISE JESUS -
- December 21, 2016. Oops, I didn't finish my last entry. I'm still in Orlando, FL on vacation with my aunt, uncle, and ten year old cousin so sometimes I get drawn away from my computer. BUT I FINISHED MY FIRST DRAFT OF MOVEMENT TWO AND I AM REJOICING. I couldn't tell you how many hours and cups of coffee it took me to finish that movement... but it taught me a lot about myself and my tendencies when persevering through the tough moments and choices that come with arranging. I feel silly thinking that this would just be a project where I could just plug in notes... technically because it is an arrangement that is what I'm doing. I'm simply taking from an original. But I'm also making a lot of personal choices and I learned how to make decisions more effectively

- during that last movement. What a journey this thesis has been so far. I'm still so thankful for this opportunity and it is definitely keeping my brain active during this winter break. Every day I am more excited to start rehearsing this with the clarinet choir at MTSU... but I am also increasingly more nervous. I just want this to be an amazing performance and it is going to take a lot of work to prepare my choir.
- ➤ December 25, 2016: Merry Christmas everyone! I had a wonderful morning with my family and now I am back at it again working on my thesis. I figured today I would really summarize what I have done so far, update my timeline, and state my ideas for performance setting.
- 1. Here is the order I actually used to complete my movements: III, I, II, V, and IV. I had to resort to this order because I was not yet familiar with Finale and how the program worked, so I did the "easiest" movement and saved the more difficult and involved movements for when I was more comfortable with the program.
 - ➤ January 11, 2017: Hello again, long time no see... I did not finish the previous entry because I actually got in a horrible bike accident. I had a minor concussion and lots of bad scrapes and bruises and couldn't use my right arm for a long time. But now I am back and I only have 7 days until my first clarinet choir rehearsal! I am planning to meet with a percussionist to figure out the sound effects I plan to use in movement IV this week, probably tomorrow night. I have locked down a few percussionists to perform (Jordan Bible, Cameron Read, Daniel Del Moro, and Johnny Richeson). I am meeting with Dr. Waldecker Tuesday morning at 8:30 am to go over parts and to hopefully sketch out numbers and part assignments. I also need to map out my rehearsal plan for the semester because I only have EIGHT rehearsals until the world premiere!! I cannot believe how far this project has progressed. I'm so excited!! I'm going to update what has happened like I was trying to do in the last entry. Here is a continuation:
- 2. I am planning to make my performance a little more involved for the audience members. In movement IV, I want there to be singing, so I want to use either handbells or a marimba starting pitch and invite the audience to sing. It will be a vamp moment.
 - February 8, 2017: This whole documenting my journey is really not working as effectively as I had planned, but at least it is better than nothing. My semester has been jam-packed. Last night we had our first Wind Ensemble recording session that lasted from 7 pm to 12 am... It was supposed to end at 11 pm, but alas, it was to be expected. I feel like I've been going nonstop, constantly working on simultaneous homework assignments, lesson plans, and projects. Not to mention making time for practicing the piano, teaching private lessons, and practicing for my senior recital! I guess my best advice to anyone wanting to pursue any of the same things as me is to get a planner and leave it all in that book so your mind has a chance to rest. In fact, let me just list a few tips to survive a tough semester like mine:

- 1. Make time for yourself. Remember to breathe and to eat. Get as much sleep as possible.
- 2. Do your best to stay ahead. Take breaks, but try to accomplish just one thing a day. It will help you to sleep better at night and to keep checking things off your list so you feel better.
- 3. Ask for help! The grad student in my studio, Michaela Cundari, printed out all the parts for the movements we were going to read in clarinet choir, which meant I had time to practice instead. Thank everyone you come into contact with who offers to help you stay afloat.
- 4. There is no sense in worrying. Failing to plan is planning to fail, so if you always plan ahead and stick to it, you will never fail!

Anyway, I have had a total of four meetings with the clarinet choir up to this point. The first week of school, I introduced the honors thesis project to the choir and we listened to the SATB version with string quartet. I spoke about my ideas and basically got everyone excited and on board with helping me through this process of still creating my arrangement. The next two rehearsals I handed out music and took it back up at the end of rehearsal to address the pencil markings they included to help me fix my arrangement in their individual parts. This was super beneficial and stress-relieving to the process. We ran through movement V the first day and it was truly incredible to hear the notes come to life for the first time! It made everything I had done up to that point seem worthwhile. The next rehearsal we looked at movement II, which helped me realize I needed to change the instrumentation slightly and to adjust some octaves to keep it from sounding so bright. I also needed more people on the melody, but I think adding percussion would really help. Professor Kennedy and Dr. Waldecker were in the room and it was slightly stressful to rehearse in front of them because they were asking me to do different things, so I asked Professor Kennedy to wait a few weeks while I worked with the choir on my own so as to not feel pressured. Today I ran through the remaining three movements pretty quickly and with little issues. This project sounds beautiful, but it will sound even better with percussion. I really need to make sure I finish those parts as soon as possible. I have to try not to get overwhelmed because that paralyzes the process, but I know I can do it and I have complete faith in my group. The goal is to give everyone a score to give them a "choral" experience, because in choral music, everyone sees each other's parts all the time. So I had a lightbulb moment at the end of my time in rehearsal and Dr. Waldecker really supported the idea. Our first performance is March 18 (!!!) and I hope to perform movements II and IV... I'm so excited!!

The following are entries found in my daily scrapbook planner:

- > January 12, 2017: Met with Daniel Del Moro, a percussionist at MTSU, to go over percussion sound effects such as bowed crotales on timpani.
- > January 14, 2017: I discovered the glass harp, perfect for my fourth movement.
- > January 17, 2017: Today was the best first day of school EVER. I showed Dr. Waldecker my thesis arrangement and he loved it!
- February 18, 2017: DAD BOUGHT ME A NEW LAPTOP!! It is amazing and my project will be so much easier to complete.
- > February 20, 2017: Met with Ruben and he taught me how to expedite my Finale process.
- February 22, 2017: Rehearsed my thesis and the clarinet choir alone today. It was the best rehearsal yet!

Final Entry

March 26, 2017: This is my final entry before handing in my thesis paper. I cannot believe this day is finally here... This project has constantly been on my mind and to be (nearly) finished with it is surreal. I have grown immensely as a musician, educator, conductor, arranger, and person through its culmination. All I have left are my four remaining rehearsals and a world premiere!

VI. References

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Five Hebrew Love Songs

for Clarinet Choir and Percussion

I. Temuná

II. Kalá kallá

III. Lárov

IV. Éyze shéleg

V. Rakút

INSTRUMENTATION

Eb Clarinet

Bb Clarinet 1

Bb Clarinet 2

Bb Clarinet 3

Bb Clarinet 4

Bb Bass Clarinet

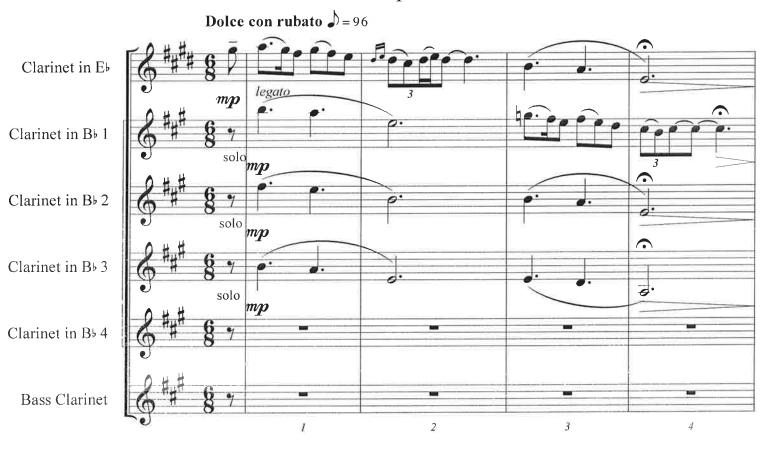
Eb Contralto Clarinet

Percussion: Tambourine, Marimba, Xylophone, Crystal Glasses, Chimes, Handbells

I. Temuná

A picture

Eric Whitacre Katiana Nicholson





2 I. Temuná





II. Kalá kallá

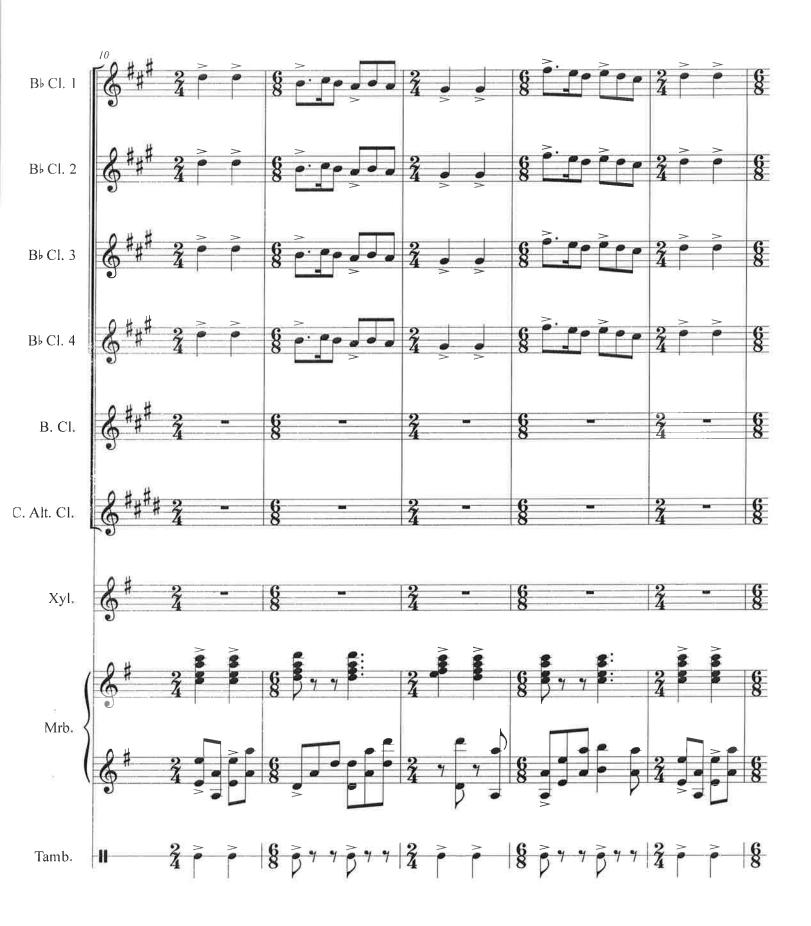
Lyrics by: Hila Plitmann

Light bride

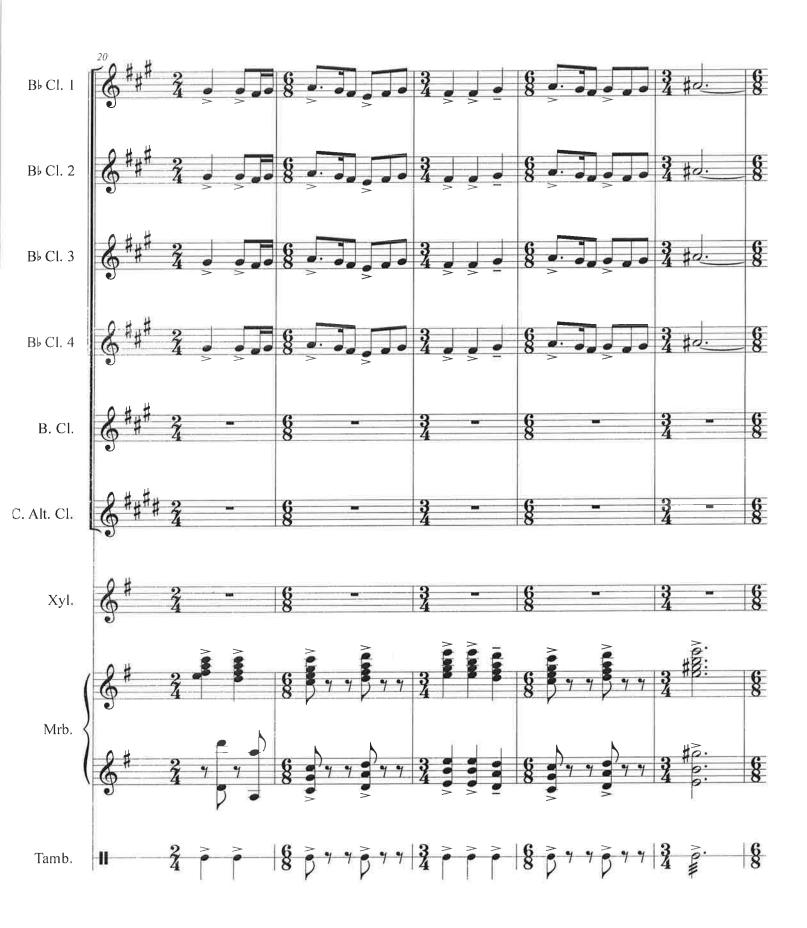
Music by: Eric Whitacre Arranged by: Katiana Nicholson



















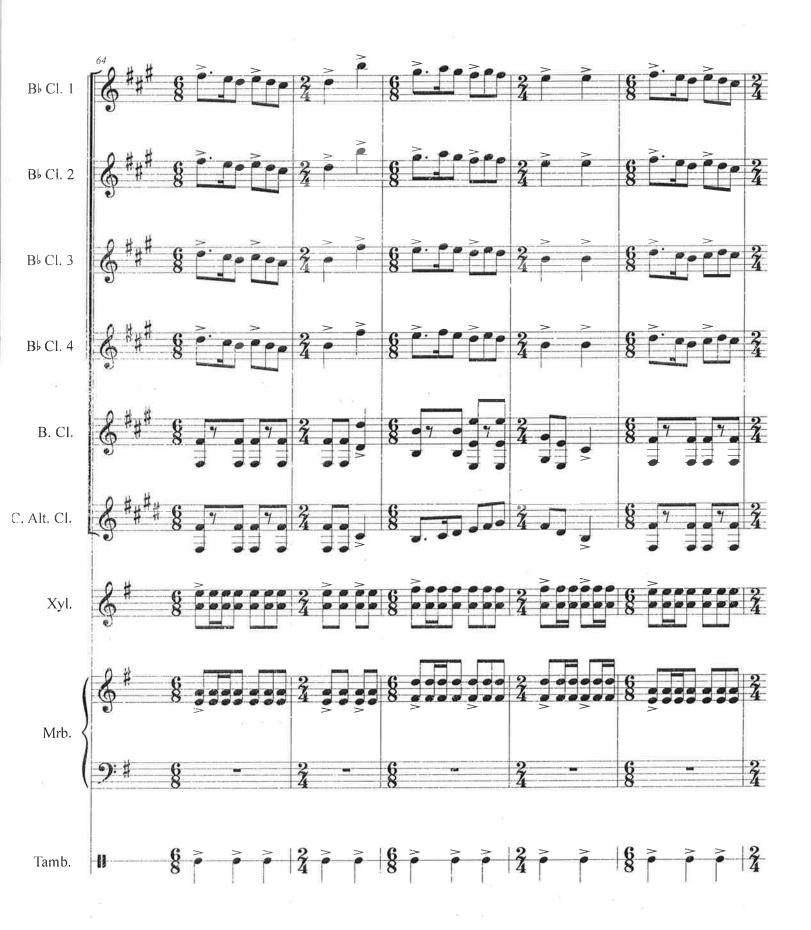


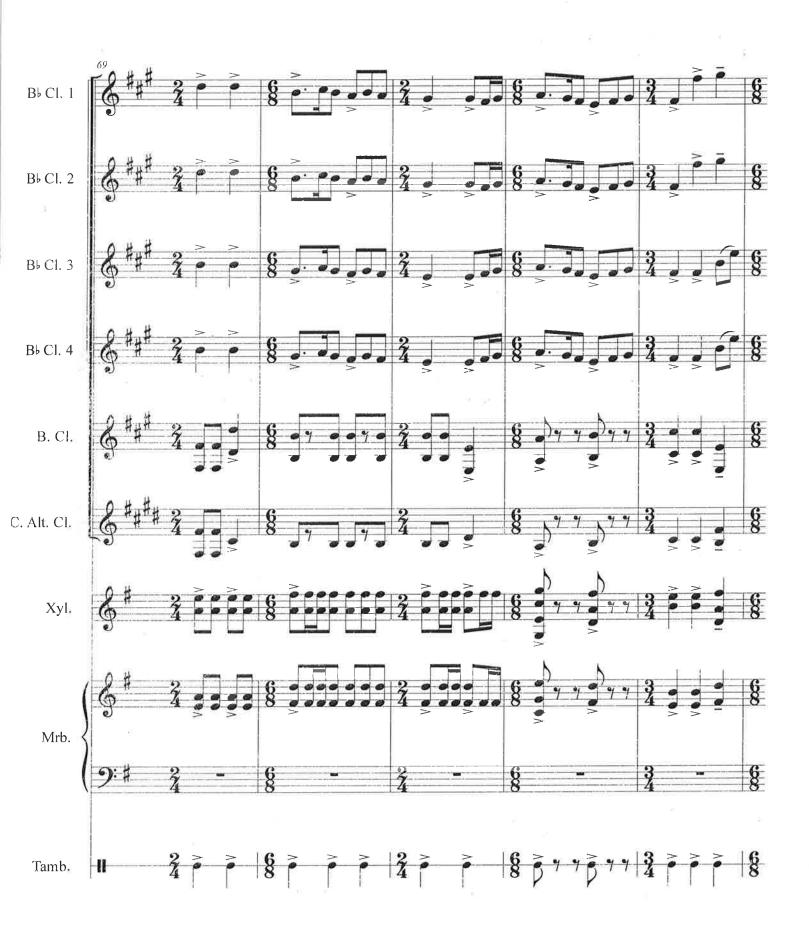


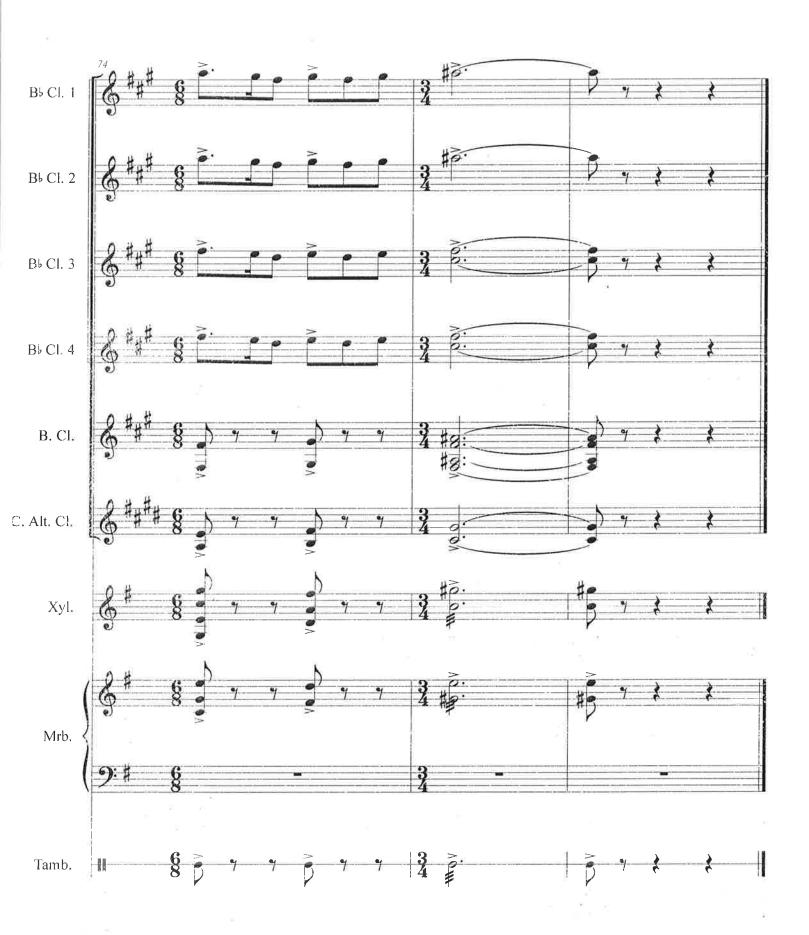
















IV. Éyze shéleg What snow!

Lyrics by: Hila Plitmann

Music by: Eric Whitacre Arranged by: Katiana Nicholson

















V. Rakút

Tenderness

Eric Whitacre Katiana Nicholson



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Arrangement Permission

September 27, 2016

Katie Nicholson 1604 E Main St, Apt C24 Murfreesboro, TN 37130

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Latiana Michaels