

But for Active Music-Making...



Marcia Neel (with Yamaha lanyard) at the conclusion of Fly to Paradise at Whitacre's NAMM session, with Keith Neel (left) and Bruce Bush, Sales & Marketing Manager-Educational Music at Hal Leonard and Larry Morton, President of Hal Leonard (photo right foreground).

By Marcia Neel

Senior Director of Education Band and Orchestral Division, Yamaha Corporation of America

This past January, I was fortunate enough to attend the NAMM (National Association for Music Merchants) Show held annually in Anaheim, CA. It is at this show where over 110,000 manufacturers, publishers, and sellers of all sorts of musical goods meet with music dealers to share their latest and greatest products as well as take orders for the coming months. Conference sessions range from ideas on how dealers can use decorating tips to enhance the look of their establishment to tips for succession planning. Each Saturday, however, the NAMM Foundation sponsors the **Grand Rally for Music Education** which is all about advocating for school-based music-making.

This year's **Grand Rally** was extra special because composer Eric Whitacre was the featured presenter and as all music educators know, Whitacre is the Mozart of our time. His session was perfect – beautifully delivered and timed with the accuracy of a Swiss watch. The added sensory experiences of seeing and hearing Eric's innovative and enchanting Virtual Choir videos were magical and simply breathtaking to view live with the esteemed composer at the helm.

The 650-member audience was made up largely of music educators and music industry professionals all poised to sing two of Eric's original compositions. We started with his beautiful and impactful "Cloudburst" which was inspired, in part, by a poem penned by Octavio Paz.

The second piece was Whitacre's "Fly to Paradise," the fourth incarnation of the Virtual Choir collection which features over 5,900 voices from 101 countries. What Whitacre did not know at the time of selecting works for this program was that the NAMM Foundation had extended a very special invitation to the choral students, parents, administrators and music educators from Butte County, CA – the community which had lost everything to the disastrous fires this past year – to attend Eric's session so that the students could have the engaging experience of singing under his leadership right along with the rest of us.

As the video started, we were all captivated by the exquisite vocal solos emanating from the video. But it was when the entire audience joined with the video and live choir performing on stage that the most powerful emotions began to sweep

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through the room as we all began to realize that we were singing this most uplifting, spirited work alongside the choral students from Paradise, CA.

There wasn't a dry eye in that huge conference room – each of us singing "And all I want to do is fly, Just fly... To paradise!" over and over at the top of our lungs and crying at the same time. The students from Paradise were holding each other arm in arm while reveling in this cathartic, poignant moment of true joy and self-expression with tears rolling down their faces.

We music educators are passionate about our work because we love music and want to share this fervor with others – particularly young people like those who are here at the National Festival who are amassing impactful memories through their own life-changing experiences.

As for that scintillating morning at the NAMM Show, maybe you just had to be there and for those of us who were, it's a moment we will never forget. It's important to realize, however, that fulfilling experiences like these can only come along if we keep making music ourselves. When we give ourselves to music-making, music-making gives exhilaration back to us. Our endorphins flow, our spirits are lifted and for a moment in time, there is peace and a sense of delight that can only be experienced when the outcome of the group is greater than the collective sum of its parts.

So whether you are a mom, dad, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle or any other family member, I implore you to encourage your music-making family member to stay with it throughout life. If you are a former music-maker, bring it back into your life. If you have never been an active music-maker, there is no time like the present to get started reaping the life-changing benefits!



Composer Eric Whitacre with Marcia Neel

To enjoy "Fly to Paradise" (Virtual Choir 4), visit:
<https://bit.ly/KUDW6f>