

Sing a Song of Hope

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – December 16, 2012

So long as I live in a world where over 100 people can gather on a Sunday afternoon to sing Christmas carols accompanied by 48 tuba players, I have hope for humanity. That was my overriding feeling at Tuba Christmas last Sunday in Porterdale.

Wrapped around that afternoon were a Saturday night with friends playing guitar and singing Christmas songs and a Sunday evening with neighbors in a garage doing the same with a few country & western tunes thrown in for fun. Nothing completes a weekend like a few rousing rounds of “You Don’t Have to Call Me Darlin’” belted out with gusto.

This has me thinking, just maybe, singing could help fix what ails us. Harmony is in short supply in these days of division and discord. If nothing else, it’s hard to yell while you’re singing. Imagine Speaker Boehner and President Obama circling up with Senators Harry Reid and Mitch McConnell late at night in the Oval Office singing “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” or “I’ll Fly Away.” Johnny Roquemore & the Apostles of Bluegrass... Dan and Perri Walden.... Marshall McCart... Mack McKibben... You may just be the ambassadors we most need to send to broker peace in our times.

Consider the holiday classics. In the final scene of “It’s a Wonderful Life,” the people of Bedford Falls rally to rescue their friend, George Bailey, while singing “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” and “Auld Lang Syne” in the foyer of the Bailey home. Even the Sheriff and bank examiner join the chorus. After cruelly denigrating poor blockhead Charlie Brown in “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” the Peanuts gang comes together to sing a heartfelt finale in the falling snow. The Grinch’s heart grew three sizes when he heard refrains of “da hoo dorais fa hoo dorais” coming from down in Whoville on Christmas morn. In big screen renditions of “A Christmas Carol,” Ebenezer Scrooge’s Christmas morning transformation brings a playful joy that manifests itself in song, and later in dance at the home of nephew Fred.

Maybe you think singing is child’s play. Fiscal cliffs are serious business. But, all the talking in the world – if yelling even counts as talking – isn’t going to fix things until we relearn how to work together. Singing with others is collaboration with purpose. Nero’s fiddling was a solo act; I’m talking about a chorus of voices.

Perhaps you embrace the spirit of what I’m suggesting, but doubt the scalability of song to solve global problems. If Coca Cola couldn’t quite teach the world to sing, what chance do we have?

Try this. Google “virtual choir” or search for it on You Tube. Go to Ted.com and look for “Eric Whitacre” and/or “virtual choir.”

Whitacre is a young Grammy-award-winning composer and conductor inspired to create a grand experiment after receiving a video in 2009 from a young fan in Great Britain singing one of his choral compositions. Stuck by the beauty and passion of her singing, Whitacre decided to attempt a virtual choir. He recorded himself conducting his piece “Lux Aurumque” and posted the video to the World Wide Web, encouraging vocalists around the world to record themselves and submit their video.

Whitacre received 185 submissions from singers in 12 countries, which a volunteer edited into a single clip published in the fall of 2010. The result was stunning, but it was only a glimpse of what was to come. Virtual Choir 2.0 features Whitacre’s composition “Sleep” sung in unison by 2,052 voices in 58 countries. That in turn inspired 3,746 people in 73 countries to unite singing “Water Night” for Virtual Choir 3.0.

Watch any of these clips online and have your breath taken away as tears dampen your eyes. It really is that moving. The sound and visuals are stunning, but the idea that so many strangers came together to create something so beautiful just boggles the mind. You can’t help but wonder what humanity is capable of when we find shared goals to unite us.

Hope isn’t something we give to others; it’s a choice we make for ourselves. Music has always been a medium for hope, even in the darkest times. Listen closely to the words and emotions of the old Negro spirituals and consider that those songs were sung in times of bondage and oppression.

Especially at this festive time of year, don’t pass up chances to sing. At best, maybe it’s a road to greater unity. At the least, it’s great fun. And, we can all use more of that.