

# THE SEAL LULLABY

ERIC WHITCRE

Generously commissioned by a consortium of high school, college, and community bands

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## Program note:

In the spring of 2004 I was lucky enough to have my show *Paradise Lost: Shadows and Wings* presented at the ASCAP Musical Theater Workshop. The workshop is the brain child of legendary composer Stephen Schwartz (*Wicked*, *Godspell*), and his insights about the creative process were profoundly helpful. He became a great mentor and friend to the show and, I am honored to say, to me personally.

Soon after the workshop I received a call from a major film studio. Stephen had recommended me to them and they wanted to know if I might be interested in writing music for an animated feature. I was incredibly excited, said yes, and took the meeting.

The creative executives with whom I met explained that the studio heads had always wanted to make an epic adventure, a classic animated film based on Kipling's *The White Seal*. I have always loved animation (the early Disney films; Looney Tunes; everything Pixar makes) and I couldn't believe that I might get a chance to work in that grand tradition on such great material.

*The White Seal* is a beautiful story, classic Kipling, dark and rich and not at all condescending to kids. Best of all, Kipling begins his tale with the mother seal singing softly to her young pup. (The opening poem is called "The Seal Lullaby").

*Oh! Hush thee, my baby, the night is behind us,  
And black are the waters that sparkled so green.  
The moon, o'er the combers, looks downward to find us,  
At rest in the hollows that rustle between.*

*Where billow meets billow, then soft be thy pillow,  
Oh weary wee flipperling, curl at thy ease!  
The storm shall not wake thee, nor shark overtake thee,  
Asleep in the arms of the slow swinging seas!*

*Rudyard Kipling, 1865-1936*

I was struck so deeply by those first beautiful words, and a simple, sweet Disney-esque song just came gushing out of me. I wrote it down as quickly as I could, had my wife record it while I accompanied her at the piano, and then dropped it off at the film studio.

I didn't hear anything from them for weeks and weeks, and I began to despair. Did they hate it? Was it too melodically complex? Did they even listen to it? Finally, I called them, begging to know the reason that they had rejected my tender little song. "Oh," said the exec, "we decided to make *Kung Fu Panda* instead."

So I didn't do anything with it, just sang it to my baby son every night to get him to go to sleep. (Success rate: less than 50%.) A few years later the Towne Singers commissioned the choral arrangement of it, and in 2011 I transcribed the piece for concert band.

I'm grateful to them for giving it a new life, and to the schools, colleges and directors listed below who have believed in this new transcription. And I'm especially grateful to Stephen Schwartz, to whom the piece is dedicated. His friendship and invaluable tutelage has meant more to me than I could ever tell him.

Foothill High School (Première Performance)  
Bethel College  
Bishop O'Byrne High School  
Creekvalley Middle School  
David W. Butler High School  
Franklin High School  
Frenship Middle School  
Lake Central High School  
Lincoln High School  
Mesa State College  
Michigan Technological University  
Mountain View High School  
Rampart High School  
Rice Middle School  
Rincon/University High School  
Sheridan High School and Middle School  
South County Secondary School  
South Huron District High School  
Stuart High School  
Tapp Middle School  
Waller High School

Travis Pardee  
Timothy Shade  
Erik Kai Jun Leung  
Jamie Weaver  
Joshua Stevenson  
David Aydelott  
June Bearden  
Chris Harmon  
Aaron Barnes  
Calvin Hofer, DMA  
Nicholas Enz  
Jason Kneebone  
Justin Carpenter  
Jason Tucker  
Brian Wolfe  
Dan Haag  
Alan Johnson  
Isaac Moore  
Doug Martin  
Erin Cole  
Cory Meals